



«Do Good and Talk about it.»: Communication as a Key Contributor to Success in Hospital Management



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Swiss hospitals are confronted with significant challenges, many grappling with a stark struggle for survival. These challenges require not only accurate strategic decisions from management but also timely and precisely executed communication measures. Boards of directors should recognise that only hospitals which not only fulfil their responsibilities adeptly but also communicate effectively, both internally and externally, will achieve success.

The challenges facing hospital management continue to escalate. The relentless political pressure on tariffs, coupled with increasing costs, the shortage of specialists, the rapid evolution of medical technology, and numerous other factors, are rendering it increasingly difficult, if not impossible, for many hospitals to attain the necessary EBITDA margins. Inadequate infrastructure, lack of collaboration, subpar quality at high costs, and political determinations such as attempts to introduce global budgets reveal that many hospitals are struggling to survive.

1. Responsibilities of the Board of Directors

Amidst this backdrop, the significance of professional corporate communications is steadily increasing. The board of directors is responsible for shaping the overall strategy and orientation of the company, ensuring communication is in alignment with these strategic goals. Strategic communication encompasses the manner in which the company interacts with internal and external stakeholders, encompassing investors, customers, employees, suppliers, regulators, and the general public. This extends to communicating corporate objectives, values, performance, changes, and other relevant information.

The board of directors can directly or indirectly fulfil this duty by ensuring that management devises and implements appropriate communication strategies. Frequently, the board of directors establishes specialised committees, such as the communications committee, specifically addressing corporate communication matters. If the board delegates communication implementation, its role transitions to oversight, ensuring the correct trajectory is upheld.

2. Communication as a Catalyst for Success

The contribution of effective corporate communications can be pivotal to the success and continuance of individual companies in numerous aspects. This is because impactful corporate communications can yield the following outcomes:

- Strengthen the institution's public image;
- Ensure financial health by optimising patient admissions;
- Provide transparency on the quality of treatment and stay: patients increasingly develop into consumers with rising demands;
- Overcome the «war on talent» – skills shortages and challenging working conditions – by increasing recruitment success through strong employer branding;
- In terms of politics and policy decisions, it supports the political backing of performance contracts, construction projects, legislative revisions and other crucial projects.

The stakeholders and target groups for hospital communication are diverse and can be split into internal groups, such as employees across various categories (nurses, technicians, physicians, administrative staff, housekeepers, IT personnel, and others), as well as external groups, including (potential) patients, suppliers, politicians, authorities at all levels, other service providers, the media, and the (interested) public.

Effective communication plays a vital role in both preventing and resolving conflicts of interest within an organisation. A strong corporate communication strategy ensures that the organisation's interests are communicated openly and transparently. Thanks to effective communication efforts, successful hospitals have been able to complete new construction projects without objections, resulting in significant time and cost savings – a rare achievement for projects of this scale. Successful hospital communication also takes into account the conflict of interest in order to attract patients and, at the same time, avoid incurring higher healthcare costs as a result of unnecessary treatment.

3. «Do Good and Talk About It»

However, a targeted communication concept must stem from a robust corporate strategy: The adage «Do good and talk about it» holds true for a reason. If a service provider lacks effective management practices, a forward-looking strategy, or a stable organisational structure, even the most polished communication cannot mask the situation.

The objectives of successful external hospital communication are to strengthen the hospital's perception in the long term, heighten its visibility—particularly in relation to competitors—and firmly embed the brand both internally and externally, rendering it visible, palpable, and recognisable. This approach contributes to the success of bed occupancy, staff recruitment, and political endorsement.

A consistent communication strategy intertwines and unifies internal and external communications. This is done by linking the objectives and values set out in the brand strategy with specific internal and external communication endeavours.

4. Foundation: Anchored Brand Values and Stylistic Traits

Brand values and their stylistic characteristics play an incredibly significant role in corporate communications. They aid in forming and steering a company's image and perception.

- **Unified Identity:** Brand values articulate a company's ethos, guiding principles, and objectives. These values foster a harmonious and unified identity that permeates all aspects of corporate communication.
- **Differentiation:** Amidst a competitive market landscape, well-defined brand values and a distinctive style can differentiate a company from its rivals, enabling a unique market positioning.
- **Trust Building:** Consistent brand values conveyed through communication enhance the trust of customers, investors, and stakeholders. Genuine communication of values enables customers to identify more closely with the brand.

- **Long-term Relationships:** Conveying brand values establishes the foundation for enduring relationships with partners and customers. When customers share a company's values and aspirations, they are more likely to remain loyal over the long term.
- **Clear Messaging:** Stylistic characteristics reflecting brand values facilitate distinct and consistent messaging, making it simpler for customers to understand the company's intentions and connect with its vision.
- **Internal Alignment:** Brand values resonate not solely in external communication but also influence a company's internal culture. They assist employees in identifying with the company and actively participating in its success.
- **Innovation and Decision-making:** Brand values can serve as guideposts for innovation and decision-making. Companies can align their operations and output based on whether they resonate with their core values.
- **Crisis Management:** Clearly defined brand values also serve as guideposts during crises. They facilitate an appropriate and authentic response to challenges without deviating from the company's identity.

To summarise, brand values and stylistic traits contribute to fostering a robust and authentic brand identity that underpins the sustained success of a company.

5. Management's Duties

The board of directors and executive management of a hospital would do well to consistently factor in communication within their leadership endeavours. Beyond grasping the fundamentals of internal and external communication, these entities are also accountable for ensuring that adequate resources are allocated to this area. The era of relying on part-time communication managers untrained for the role has long passed.

For the board of directors, it is crucial to gain influence on an effective communication strategy with the key stakeholders: patients, health care partners, tax and insurance bill payers, politicians, and shareholders. Long-term success relies on maintaining a consistent and respectful dialogue with these vital partners. The relationship and, thus, the communication should be mutually beneficial. Infrequent communication driven by personal interests alone is unlikely to succeed.

Farsighted hospital management must encourage communication managers to explore new communication channels, professionalise internal communication platforms and channels, and continually generate communicable content. They play an integral role in shaping foundational values, emphases, and the content of corporate communication. Ultimately, successful companies do not merely communicate aspirations and intentions but rather report on what has been achieved. In other words: «Do good and talk about it.»

