

COMMUNICATING THE BIG PICTURE AT WORK

AUTHOR: YUFAN "SUNNY" QIN, JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

COMMUNICATING THE BIG PICTURE AT WORK

AUTHOR: YUFAN "SUNNY" QIN, JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY



© AdobeStock | Антон Сальников

Engaging employees in today's workplace is a challenge. This article highlights how CEO vision communication shapes the employee experience and inspires engagement at work. Based on the survey results, it shows that when leaders articulate a clear and inspiring vision, employees see greater meaning in their work, feel stronger ties to the organization, and demonstrate higher engagement. Practical recommendations are provided to help CEOs and communication professionals translate vision into everyday messages that inspire.

WHY CEO VISION COMMUNICATION MATTERS

Organizations today are dealing with change and challenge – remote and hybrid work models, technological disruption, and shifting employee expectations. In this environment, employees can easily feel disconnected. They may know their immediate tasks, but without a broader context, their work can feel repetitive or insignificant. Employees are often inundated with information about day-to-day operations, shifting strategies, and financial updates, but what many crave most is a sense of purpose (Lleo et al., 2021). They want to know why their work matters and how it contributes to the long-term success of the company.

When CEOs share the big picture, employees see meaning in their work, not just tasks.

This is where vision communication becomes essential. A strong organizational vision communicated directly by the CEO gives employees a map of where the company is headed and why their contributions matter. Rather than feeling like cogs in a machine, employees can see themselves as critical parts of a larger journey (Men et al., 2021).

This is particularly evident in the post-pandemic workplace. With hybrid and remote models, employees are dispersed across geographies and time zones. In this environment, employees may struggle to see how their work connects to the organization's future. Intentional vision communication

from CEOs helps close this gap. By reinforcing the big picture, leaders create a sense of connection that transcends physical distance. Employees in different locations and functions can rally around a shared sense of purpose, reducing feelings of isolation and fragmentation.

Moreover, younger generations in the workforce increasingly expect their employers to articulate a meaningful mission (Chillakuri, 2020). Millennials and Gen Z workers often place a high value on purpose-driven work. CEOs who effectively communicate the organization's vision are not only motivating current employees but also positioning the company as an attractive place for future talent.

VISION COMMUNICATION: MORE THAN JUST A SLOGAN

At its core, vision communication is about translating strategy into a way that people can understand. A company's strategic plan may outline revenue targets, market expansion, or technological investments, but employees connect most strongly with narratives that explain why these goals matter. For example, a financial services company may outline a strategy of adopting new digital tools. Without a clear vision communication, employees might view this as just another software upgrade. But if it is framed as part of a larger vision to make financial services more accessible and inclusive, employees can connect their daily efforts with a mission that is meaningful.

Vision is not just a slogan or a line buried in the company's annual report. Vision communication should be far more powerful when it is treated as an ongoing leadership behavior. Effective CEO vision communication means that CEOs:

- > Describe the desirable future state of the organization in a way that employees can understand and support;
- > Highlight the values that guide organizational decisions and behaviors;
- > Show the link between employees' daily work and long-term goals; and
- > Reinforce purpose during times of uncertainty, helping employees navigate challenges with confidence.

Vision communication should be treated as an ongoing leadership behavior that shows people why their work matters.

ABOUT THE STUDY

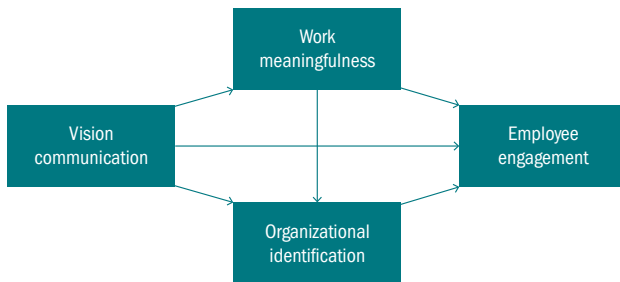
To see how CEO vision communication plays out in the workplace, we conducted an online survey study with a sample of employees in the United States. The goal was to test whether and how a CEO's vision communication influences employee engagement.

We collected data from 580 full-time employees across a wide range of industries, including technology, healthcare, finance, and others. Participants worked at companies of different sizes, from small businesses with fewer than 100 employees to large corporations with more than 500. We also included employees at all levels – non-management staff, supervisors, middle managers, and even some executives (Qin et al., 2023). This mix allowed us to capture a realistic view of how CEO communication is experienced across the organization. The survey asked employees about four main things:

- 1. How they perceive their CEO's ability to communicate a clear vision.** For example, do employees feel their CEO articulates a compelling picture of the future and sets high expectations tied to that vision?
- 2. How meaningful employees find their work.** Do they believe their daily efforts make a difference and contribute to something larger?
- 3. How strongly employees identify with their organization.** Do they feel a sense of pride and belonging – saying “we” instead of “they” when talking about their company?
- 4. How engaged they feel at work.** Are they enthusiastic, committed, and willing to put in extra effort for the organization?

HOW DOES CEO VISION COMMUNICATION INSPIRE EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT?

The conceptual model of the study



All the links are statistically significant and positive, meaning that when one increases, so does the other.

Source: Qin et al., 2023

Vision turns work into something meaningful

The study results showed that when employees perceived strong CEO vision communication, they were more likely to experience a better sense of work meaningfulness. Vision acts like a motivator: it connects everyday work with something bigger. A CEO who clearly communicates the organization's vision helps employees see why their daily responsibilities matter in the larger scheme of things. When leaders explain how an employee's project supports the company's long-term goals, that work feels more significant. Employees who view their work as meaningful are more likely to invest extra energy, show persistence in the face of challenges, feel proud of their contributions, and have lower risk of burnout or disengagement (Wang & Xu, 2019). Without this sense of purpose, employees can become disengaged and simply treat their work as a checklist.

Vision strengthens organizational identification

The results also showed that CEO vision communication inspired the sense of organizational identification – the degree to which employees feel they belong to the company. When CEOs communicate values and direction in ways that resonate with employees, they help employees

align their personal values with the organization's goals. It also strengthens the emotional bond between employees and the organization. Employees see the company as “us” instead of “them.” This identification builds loyalty and encourages employees to go the extra mile because they feel they are part of the organization's successes and challenges (Van Dick et al., 2006).

The sense of work meaningfulness and identification work together to inspire engagement

Drawing from the study results, the two factors – work meaningfulness and organizational identification – served as the underlying mechanisms explaining how CEO vision communication influences employee engagement. When employees find meaning in their work, they perceive their daily tasks as purposeful and aligned with a larger organizational mission. This sense of purpose could foster a deeper identification with the organization. At the same time, this sense of identification can motivate employees to engage deeply in their work. Together, the sense of work meaningfulness and identification create a reinforcing cycle that encourages employees to bring more energy and effort to their jobs.

Sharing vision is not just about picturing the ideal state an organization aims to achieve; it is about explaining why it matters and how employees connect to it.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR CORPORATE COMMUNICATION

Show employees how their work connects to the vision

One of the strong drivers of engagement is when employees see meaning in their daily tasks. Communicators can bridge the gap between high-level vision and everyday work. Create communication campaigns that spotlight employee stories – showing how individual roles, from frontline staff to senior managers, contribute to achieving the vision.

Use visuals and testimonials to reinforce that every job matters. Coach leaders to use “we,” “our,” and “together” in vision messages. Avoid overly formal or detached phrasing. It is also important to acknowledge employees’ contributions, making them feel part of the company’s journey. Employees are not just executing instructions – they are co-owners of the company’s future.

Employees do not engage with numbers or abstract strategy – they connect with stories about why those goals matter. Communication professionals should help CEOs translate complex strategies into relatable language that highlights purpose and human impact.

Vision communication should go beyond the CEO

While CEO communication is critical, mid-level managers and team leaders also play a role in reinforcing vision. Employees often rely on their direct supervisors to translate the CEO’s big picture into team-level relevance. Develop toolkits for managers with talking points, stories, and examples that align with the CEO’s vision. This ensures consistency and prevents gaps in understanding at different levels of the organization. This is especially important for front-line supervisors, who play a critical role in translating the vision from senior leadership to their team members, making it more tangible and connected to employees’ daily work. Corporate communication professionals should also see themselves as strategic partners in shaping vision communication. Their role is to help CEOs deliver the vision clearly, consistently, and meaningfully.

Make vision a continuous conversation

Vision cannot be a one-time speech at the annual meeting or a paragraph in the annual report. It needs to be part of ongoing communication. Employees are more

engaged when they hear the vision consistently across different channels and contexts. Build a communication calendar that integrates vision into quarterly updates, CEO videos, employee newsletters, and internal social platforms. Treat vision as a recurring theme, not a special occasion.

With dispersed teams and remote work, vision must travel across geographies and time zones. Employees who feel physically isolated are less likely to feel connected to the organization. Encourage CEOs to use video messages, virtual town halls, and interactive Q&A sessions where employees can respond directly. Supplement live communication with recorded formats so employees across time zones can engage.

OUTLOOK

Employees now want more than work instructions; they need to understand the “why” behind their work and feel that they are part of something meaningful. CEOs who make vision communication a consistent practice help create this sense of meaningfulness and connection. Vision communication, when done well, creates motivation that no policy or work guidelines can fully replace.

Looking ahead, corporate communicators need to keep adapting vision messages for a workplace that is increasingly digital, diverse, and dispersed. Employees expect more authenticity, more personalization, and more relevance. For leaders, this means shifting from delivering polished speeches to engaging in ongoing, human-centered conversations about the organization’s goal. Ultimately, vision communication is about everyday reinforcement of meaning, identity, and purpose.

REFERENCES

Chillakuri, B. (2020). Understanding Generation Z expectations for effective onboarding. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 33(7), 1277-1296.

Lleo, A., Bastons, M., Rey, C., & Ruiz-Perez, F. (2021). Purpose implementation: Conceptualization and measurement. *Sustainability*, 13(4), Article e1921.

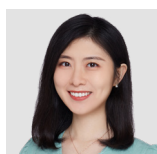
Men, L. R., Qin, Y. S., & Mitson, R. (2021). Engaging startup employees via charismatic leadership communication: The importance of communicating “vision, passion, and care.” *International Journal of Business Communication*.

Qin, Y. S., DiStaso, M. W., Fitzsimmons, A. B., & Heffron, E. (2023). Communicating the big picture with employees: The impacts of CEO vision communication on employee engagement. *International Journal of Business Communication*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/232948842311903>

Van Dick, R., Grojean, M. W., Christ, O., & Wieseke, J. (2006). Identity and the extra mile: Relationships between organizational identification and organizational citizenship behaviour. *British Journal of Management*, 17(4), 283-301.

Wang, Z., & Xu, H. (2019). When and for whom ethical leadership is more effective in eliciting work meaningfulness and positive attitudes: The moderating roles of core self-evaluation and perceived organizational support. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 156(4), 919-940.

AUTHORS



YUFAN “SUNNY” QIN is assistant professor of public relations at James Madison University, Harrisonburg, USA. Her research interest is primarily in internal communication, leadership communication, employee relationship, and corporate purpose. She is also the assistant firm director for Bluestone Communications – a student-run PR agency. Email: qin2yx@jmu.edu

MORE INFORMATION

A detailed description of this study is available in Qin et al., 2023, as listed above.