Examples of dos and don'ts in internal communication

Identify and involve all key actors

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In addition to research and product experts working with technology and production issues, NTD and NPD processes need input from different actors in the food domain. Consumers, regulators and different interest groups should be considered as possible stakeholders affecting the final acceptance of new technologies and products. These possible interest groups have to be identified case-by-case and assessed whether (and how) it would be beneficial to involve them in the NTD and NPD processes, e.g. by having an open dialogue with different interest groups. This approach will enable early detection of possible barrier and facilitators for the acceptance of new products and technologies.

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Identify and involve all key actors

Technology and product development projects are often including various actors, both those working within the companies and those contributing as outside experts from research institutes or academia, which adds to the complexity of the communication needs. The integration of food technology and consumer science in NTD/NPD appeared different among companies. According to the interviews, some companies develop technologies in their R&D departments and hand the projects to the marketing department once the technology development stage is completed. Others integrate marketing/consumer science at the beginning of the projects. Companies are often under time pressure in their decision making decisions and it would slow down the innovation process to hold regular meetings with all actors.

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Identify and involve all key actors

Different actors may be needed and become relevant at different stages during the innovation process. In the food industry, it is very common to subcontract certain stages and tasks of the innovation to external parties, including industry and academia. Thus, project descriptions and a division in work packages are commonly used to clarify tasks and thereby also support clear communication across actors. Especially when the innovation process is branched to several separate tasks, there is a need to have a clear picture of which parties are involved in different tasks and how communication flow between different subgroups is ensured.

Development of common language and shared vision across actors

'It is extremely important to align expectations. […] If this is not communicated clearly and expectations are not shared, then the hidden agendas may have a negative impact on the project.'

'Communication is most optimal if people try to listen to each other and try to implement what others are saying into their own work.'

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Development of common language and shared vision across actors

- Food experts and consumer/market experts come from different scientific backgrounds and developing a common language that both parties understand requires time and effort from both sides. The NTD/NPD processes should allow time for developing this common language as it helps to develop a shared vision and goals for the NTD/NPD processes. If the whole team works more efficiently towards common goals, the likelihood of misunderstandings at the later stages of NTD/NPD will be reduced.

- A shared vision across actors was considered a prerequisite for most interviewees. For example, it was pointed out that an initial project briefing with all key actors is required to set goals for the project. Another example suggested was the use of a facilitator in meetings to assist the communication between people from different backgrounds. This could also balance the decision-making process by reducing the political power of some people or sub-teams in the process.

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Organise cross cultural-functional teams

'*The R&D department doesn't have much time for cross-functional teams and [...] they try to include marketing people, but normally they aren't interested until later when they can see the value coming in'*

'*If the technology people want something or need something to be done a certain way and the consumer people understand really why it is, and really are involved in finding a solution, then the problem would be more understood*'

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Organise cross cultural-functional teams

Cross-functional teams containing both food and consumer experts (and other relevant expertise) enable an on-going dialogue between different specialists. This promotes knowledge exchange in recent developments in technology and market environment. In cross-functional teams, the goal setting can take into account both the technological demands and boundaries set by consumer behaviour and market conditions. By providing organisational platforms for exchange of views, cross-functional teams are likely to also encourage informal communication between experts and even enable rotation of tasks from one discipline to another.

Organise cross cultural-functional teams

Similarly to the other recommendations, the experience with and use of cross-functional teams differed between organisations. Start-ups or SMEs did usually not work with cross-functional teams due to smaller project teams. However, it was also pointed out that while they may not work on in cross-functional teams, they often work with actors coming from other organisations on their projects. In large organisations, cross-functional teams established internally were more common, but still to different degrees. While some interviewees explained cross-functional teams as 'the standard way of working', others stated that they did not have cross-functional teams because of lacking interest from both functions.

Assess the novelty of innovation and uncertainty of market condition

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The more radical innovation the new technology or product is, the more important it is to involve both consumer and product experts in the development process at early stages. The same applies to market uncertainty. Radical innovations or high market uncertainly indicate higher risk for consumer acceptance and therefore understanding the markets and being able to anticipate the market responses is crucial for the success of new technologies and products

Assess the novelty of innovation and uncertainty of market condition

'The technologists, the product developers, the people within the business, they have a much more informed knowledge about what they are trying to do, and they tend to lose sight of how the consumer will think and what will be a major issue to the consumer – often they don't even think about, because they have a very different perspective and view and understanding about what is being done and they don't take time to step back and look at the whole idea from a general consumers perspective.'

Balance between decentralization and formalization

Balance between decentralization and formalization

Decentralised teams are empowered to make decisions about how to proceed (or not) in NTD/NPD processes, but at the same time the decisions made in single teams may not be accessible to the whole organisation. Formalisation of activities will improve communication between marketing and R&D because the team members are forced to share information at scheduled face-to-face meetings or via knowledge management systems. Without these formal procedures, information sharing may happen ad hoc by specific initiative of the team members. A high level of formalisation leads to better integration between marketing and R&D due to less role ambiguity and conflict between functions, but should also allow the more informal encounters. Finding the right balance of empowering the teams to pursue their set goals and keeping up sufficient information flow from development teams to the other parts of organisation requires case-by-case assessment.

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Knowledge management systems for both explicit and implicit knowledge

'It is important to create internal expertise and share knowledge by workshops or meetings, so that the knowledge doesn't just get lost in a huge database. It's like a manual that sits in a shelf and doesn't get used properly.'

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Knowledge management systems for both explicit and implicit knowledge

Gathering information in knowledge management systems makes it available to the whole organisation, but requires set procedures, time and resources to gather and manage the information. Some knowledge is not easily transferred to data bases and systems and exchange of this implicit knowledge carried by individual employees participating in the NTD/NPD processes requires possibilities for informal face-to-face discussions. Organisations need to consider what kind of information needs to be managed on data bases and which systems and practices support the most efficient exchange of implicit knowledge.

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Top management support

'You cannot do anything related to NPD, if you don't have top management support.'

Top management support

Top management needs to support the cross-functional teams and cooperation between food and consumer experts in NTD and NPD processes. Rewarding the innovation teams on their shared performance achievement of commonly set goals is important rather than rewarding each discipline based on their individual tasks. Top management support enables the necessary organisational and procedural decisions that will promote communication among experts