

Straight to Tom/Straight to Fabrice

Straight to Tom/Straight to Fabrice: Fostering One Global Company Culture

As the leading aircraft manufacturer, Airbus is an organization with a widely dispersed workforce that has to collaborate on intricate operations, so as to create products to the highest standards of reliability and quality. In October 2009, the first company-wide employee engagement survey revealed: Airbus employees were more motivated by its products such as the A380, and less so by the organization. And they felt that they weren't always listened to when problems were being communicated. This caused a call to action by the then CEO Tom Enders: he wanted to create a new and open approach to internal communications which fostered trust in one global company culture across hierarchies and geographies. Airbus launched a large change management campaign throughout the company to foster dialogue (site tours, CEO and COO breakfasts, ...), to improve recognition (Family days, Awards, ...), to improve employee wellbeing at work (my life at Airbus), as well as to speed up decision making and reduce complexity of processes (TRUST and SHAPE). This campaign was obviously supported by a comprehensive communication plan.

In addition to an emphasis on the usual top-down, "one-to-many" channels, Airbus turned to **direktzu**® to establish a direct, moderated, Many-to-One® dialogue between all Airbus employees and their CEO. This new approach allowed for a company-wide exchange on one single platform to support 'theAirbusway' strategy. As an open and transparent feedback channel it gave life to a new communication culture. And, in parallel to other regular face to face events, top management got an additional sense of what was going on in their organization on a continuous basis.

Called ***Straight to Tom***, the **direktzu**® platform was integrated directly into the Airbus employee Portal, "Airbus|People", which provides for the requisite level of security and confidentiality to allow for honest and open internal interaction. The platform covers the main working languages at Airbus – English, French, German and Spanish. When Fabrice Brégier took over the role of CEO of Airbus in June 2012, he naturally continued the online dialogue launched by his predecessor and ***Straight to Tom*** became ***Straight to Fabrice***.

At Airbus, the platform gives employees the ability to:

- Submit feedback directly to the CEO. With a combination of technical filtering and user intelligence, the opinions are bundled.
- Sort, filter, rate and rank the relative value of the feedbacks, which impacts the order in which the CEO addresses the feedback. Generally, the CEO addresses the top post per week.



Screenshots of Straight to Tom and Straight to Fabrice

Fabrice Bregier, CEO: *"It can be difficult for a CEO to remain close to his employees. Straight to Fabrice is one of his tools for maintaining a continuous dialogue at a global level and nicely complements face-to-face meetings, which frequency is limited by the company's size and its worldwide presence. Zooming on a topic selected by employees every week is an interesting exercise: it naturally challenges our organisation and forces us to provide a suitable answer to each employee's question. Straight to Fabrice then becomes a powerful management tool not only for the CEO, but also for his team. It's a quick and transparent way to become aware of employees' concerns and to apprehend real problems throughout the organisation. It also enables the CEO's team (us) to react rapidly before the concern becomes an issue. But the most important benefit of Straight to Fabrice is that it nurtures Airbus' 'Speak up' culture and supports the cultural change initiated by the company."*

- Comment on posts. Because no comments are anonymous, other participants can not only address feedback before it reaches the CEO, but can also join together to address issues and work on solutions. This adds a social networking dimension to the platform.

When the CEO issues his weekly answer, all interested users are notified automatically without wastage. The CEO can also ask employees to focus on a specific strategic issue. The platform then enables the CEO:

- To offer an open, trustful and direct dialogue with employees
- To convey strategic messages and explain Airbus' strategy
- To measure the atmosphere in the company around a specific issue

Although the system is open to all employees, and is seen as a democratic tool within the enterprise, it is actively moderated in order to maintain its quality and efficiency. Posts with common themes are bundled, and inappropriate posts are filtered out.

Moreover, the high number of votes indicated considerable success at lowering barriers to participation common in more direct forms of corporate dialogue. Systems without the bundling, voting and prioritization built into this platform tend to exclude those who do not directly ask questions or make comments.

According to Rainer Ohler, former Airbus SVP Public Affairs & Communications and main sponsor of the tool when launched, **direktzu**® opened new opportunities in the way Airbus communicates. "**direktzu**®, by enabling direct communication with the CEO, participated to company-wide change management campaign to create 'theAirbusway' and help reinforce our company culture. It also supported our effort to promote more transparency within the company on the one hand, while giving us a radar where we could spot issues emerging within the population on the other. If leading a company is like flying a plane, **direktzu**® equipped us with some dials in our cockpit - measures which help us fly more effectively and responsively."

A feedback from one employee in a production site in Filton, UK presents a case in point. The employee had asked why he and his colleagues worked at parts of the military aircraft A400M but had never seen the aircraft in action and as a whole. The question gained considerable support from employees at the Filton location, and when it came to Enders, he promised to send one of the rare existing airplanes to the site. This gesture provides a tangible example of how employee motivation through two-way, Many-to-One® communication and a shared interest in the product can go hand in hand.

Stéphanie HENRION, Corporate Internal Communication Manager:

'Straight to Fabrice' has simply become one of the employees' options to express themselves at Airbus. While the number of unique visits has stabilised around 22,000 a month, the user base continuously increases as different employees come and send a post every day. I like to compare employees' participation in 'Straight to Fabrice' to an iceberg as it offers 4 alternatives to our employees. They can contribute participate either openly as active users, who directly interact with the CEO via a posts, or as indirect contributors who comment on others' posts. They can also choose to remain anonymous and be invisible contributors who influence the ranking with their votes or readers who observe without participating! In terms of numbers it reaches a crescendo! On average, each post gets 4 comments, 150 votes and 1,500 views while an answer from the CEO obtains close to 5,000 views. Finally, it has been very interesting to observe the quality of the debate evolving. When we launched the tool, close to 20% of the posts were pure complaints, today more than 90% of the posts are truly constructive contributions to the company.

Aline VUILLEQUEZ, Head of Corporate Internal Communication:

"direktzu® obviously enables direct communication with the CEO to promote trust and engagement but it is also part of the company-wide change management campaign by reinforcing our company culture as well as more transparency within Airbus. As Head of Corporate Internal Communication I also see it as a radar spotting emerging issues and bringing a valuable bottom-up view from our employees. If leading a company is like flying a plane, direktzu® equipped us with some "dials in our cockpit" that help us fly more effectively and responsively."

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