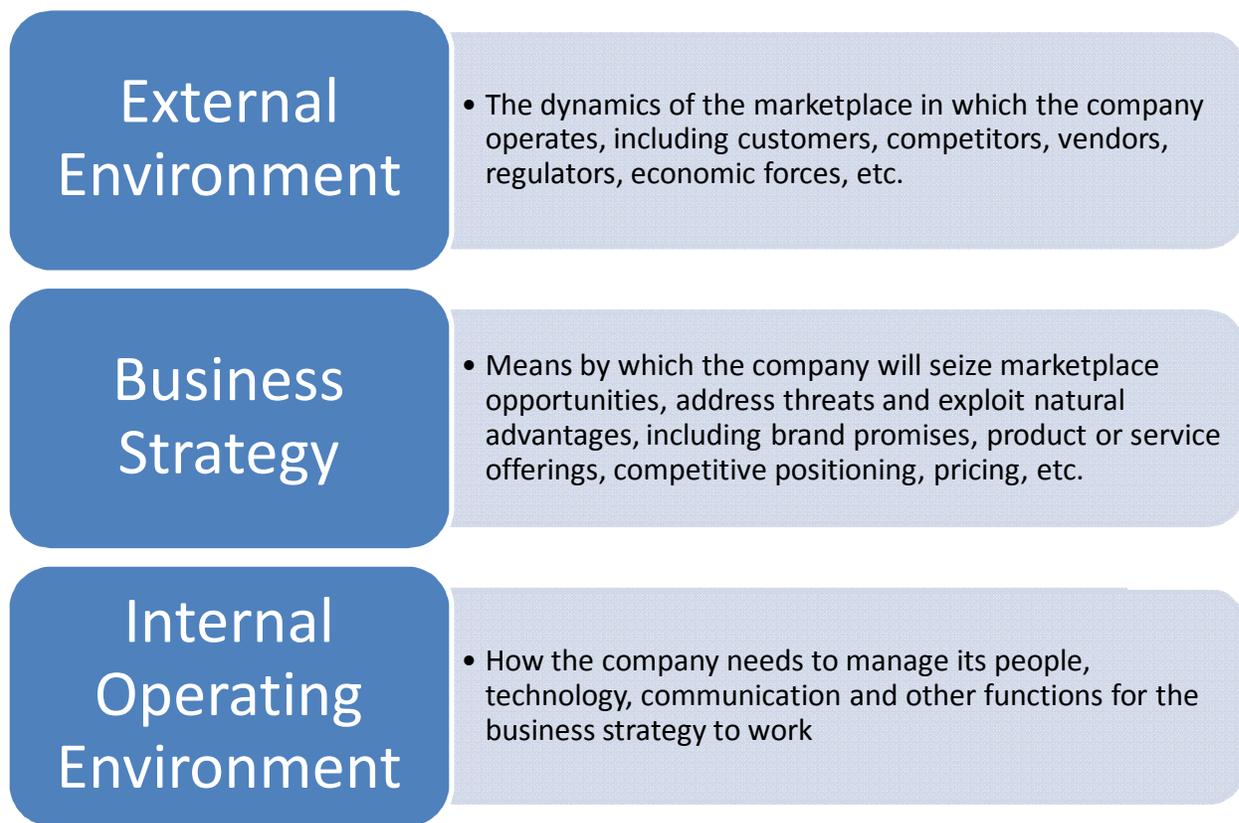


Ask the Expert

Q: What suggestions do you have for improving communication across departments in a small organisation (60 employees)? Employees have indicated that they don't feel informed about the organization and activities outside of their own department. Most are Gen Y and fairly cynical about 'corporate' communications. Only a small percentage of employees have access to email and it's difficult to bring all employees together for a group meeting.

A: Let's break the issue down into two parts: first, what do employees need to know to improve their performance and feel connected to the company? Second, what's the best way to deliver this information to employees? To address the first part – the substance of the message – I would connect the internal initiatives and business activities of various parts of the organization to an overarching company strategy. Then connect that strategy to the external business environment. Take a look at the model below.

Figure 1: Connecting internal initiatives to the company strategy



Starting at the top, think about what's creating expansion opportunities for your company? What could derail your business? What are your competitors up to? What do your customers expect?

Then consider what your company is doing to seize opportunities, protect itself from threats and exploit its natural advantages – i.e., your business strategy.

Finally, determine how your business strategy impacts your internal operating environment and the focus of various departments. Tying the company's activities together in this fashion can help employees understand the context for initiatives and decisions outside their own departments. It can also give employees greater insight into the importance of their individual roles.

As for communication vehicles, given the limitations you've described, it sounds like communication through supervisors would be your best option. Think through a strategy to gather information from supervisors on their department's activities and to equip supervisors with messages and talking points about companywide strategies and initiatives. Then, develop routines in which supervisors share this information with employees. These routines might include weekly huddle meetings – in person or by telephone – periodic offsite meetings, or whatever is most feasible in your environment.

I would also challenge you to see if it's at all possible to bring the entire company together every now and then to review results, share ideas and build camaraderie. There's no substitute for face-to-face interaction, particularly when the entire employee population is only 60 people.