

CASE STUDY · SYSTEMS AND PROCESS

The enterprise message map

A spreadsheet that became an operating model, and is still running the communications function more than a decade later.

The organization had no unified communications structure. Messaging was inconsistent across departments, audiences and timelines, and nobody had a view of the whole. Communications operated in silos rather than as a coordinated function.

THE CHALLENGE

- No centralized view of communications anywhere in the organization.
- Inconsistent messaging reaching media, customers and regulators.
- Limited coordination between the departments responsible for external communications.
- No structured planning cadence of any kind.

It began as a spreadsheet. It is still in use today, long after everyone who built it moved on.

SECTOR

Natural gas distribution

TYPE

Communications operating model

ROLE

Designer and implementer

LONGEVITY

In continuous use since implementation

WHAT I DID

Built the function and the system to support it

- Designed an annual message mapping system — initially a well-structured Excel workbook organized by month.
- Mapped key messages to audiences, timing and business priorities, creating a single source of truth.
- Integrated every major communications stakeholder: corporate communications, regulatory, customer sales and marketing, and safety and operations.
- Established a monthly cross-functional alignment meeting and an annual planning and refresh cycle.
- Introduced accountability and consistency without adding complexity anyone would resent.

WHY IT LASTED

Simplicity was the design goal

The system was deliberately lightweight. Process discipline fails when it costs more effort than the disorder it replaces, so the tool stayed simple enough that busy people in other departments kept using it voluntarily.

Governance without bureaucracy

A monthly cadence and clearly defined roles were sufficient. No new software, no new headcount, no approval layer. That is why adoption held across functions with genuinely different priorities.

OUTCOME

ADOPTION	Enterprise-wide adoption across multiple departments and functions.
SINGLE SOURCE OF TRUTH	One centralized reference for all communications planning and messaging.
CADENCE	A monthly alignment rhythm implemented and sustained across the organization.
CONSISTENCY	Materially improved message consistency across media, customer and regulatory audiences.
DURABILITY	Still in place and in use today.

WHAT THIS TRANSFERS TO

This one transfers most directly of all. It was built for an organization without a communications system, using tools it already owned, and it survived because it was simple. A utility where four people write things needs this more than one where forty do — and it is usually the first thing I build.