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# MANAGING EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATIONS

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By Lloyd M. Field, PhD, SPHR (USA), FIPD (UK)

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Nearly everything written today about employees and productivity mentions an employee's increasing need to be valued – a need to feel as though she or he belongs and that her or his efforts are appreciated.

Communication answers these needs by allowing all employees to keep in touch with what is happening in the organization. *Employees recognize communication as an indication of their relative value to the organization.* If they are directly and consistently informed about key issues, they in effect are participating in what is happening throughout the company. The payoff is that employees who feel valued are more productive, more likely to take initiative, and are frequently more willing to play a role in innovation.

Written and formal communications cannot create that sense of belonging. They are, by their very nature, impersonal. *Face-to-face communication, directly between managers and employees, must be the foundation of any communication effort.*

## Assumptions

Some key assumptions when setting internal communication goals and strategies are:

- *Communications must be planned, formalized and managed.* Economic growth and increasing demands for productivity have put the company in a position where informal, random communications, as the basic element of communication, can no longer be depended upon.
- *Improved people management results in heightened efficiency and encourages innovation and initiative.* The net result is an improved bottom line.
- *Communication is the key element in people management.* It does not function separately from management.
- *Communication must be open and honest.* The basic element of communicating an employee's stake in the business is *candour*: Candour at all levels will create a climate that highlights the importance of communication – that it is a way of life. This can happen only through a well-managed, completely integrated communication system.

- All managers must have an understanding of what is going on in order to be able to communicate information.
- *Managers' accountability for strategic communication will be indispensable to its success.* Integrating this into the daily organizational system (social, operative and administrative) will make the process viable.
- *Set the communication climate of senior management.* Communication's primary vehicle must be the first-line supervisor.

## Strategies

The organization's best strategy is to effectively use communication in order to keep goals and strategies up front. As managers constantly make decisions, their clear understanding of company and departmental goals will greatly increase the likelihood that these decisions will be the best ones for the company.

In addition, a clear understanding of key goals and priorities can have a dramatic effect on job performance and product quality at all employee levels. When goals are clearly communicated, the employee is able to grasp the needs and reasoning of the employer and will also be confident that management is indeed managing. This clarity enhances the employee's role by showing that they are part of the team; they are part of the company.

When employees sense an open communication climate, they are more willing to examine their own productivity and concern themselves with innovations.

Organizations typically look at publications as the key element of internal communication. These are certainly valuable, but, in order to be credible, publications must represent and reinforce the existing communication climate.

Communication plays a strategic role in organizational life by:

- Complementing company goals by assuring that employees have a clear understanding of these goals, and by allowing them to take action and make decisions accordingly.
  - Allowing management to keep pace with people and organizational changes so that it can make active rather than reactive problem solving a viable part of the organization's business style.
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**“To keep goals and strategies up front, the organization's best strategy is to effectively use communication.”**

- Providing a means by which information flow and access can be examined and managed.
- Allowing publications to complement and reinforce the existing communication climate.

### **Communication Model**

Managing communication enables a company to create the climate that will be most conducive to reaching its goals, and even allows for effective use of informal channels such as the grapevine. Shaping the climate through managed communications eventually results in a culture that is truly communicative – one in which clear direction, open challenge, innovation, and high productivity are ways of life.

The following communication model is, in my opinion, essential to effective departmental communications. It is applicable to all working relationships, from the company to the work force, or from the individual supervisor to his or her employees.

This model outlines a communication pattern that is integrated with social, operational and administrative organizational systems and as such can positively influence key goals. This model is also progressive in that it outlines a step-by-step process for communication.

**Step 1** is the communication of goals, objectives and targets.

**Step 2** is the communication of job responsibilities and performance standards.

**Step 3** is the communication of individual performance review (feedback).

**After completing the initial “job mastery” phase, begin the communication cycle:**

**Step 4** is recognition. This occurs when the supervisor really begins to build individual relationships by showing personal concern for the needs of the employees.

**Step 5** is creating an upward communication component that reinforces the employee's sense that she or he is valued by the company.

**Step 6** occurs when the department's role, as compared to that of other departments, is communicated.

This model presents a managed approach to dealing with communications. Its success is directly dependent upon commitment to manage communication. It is also strongly dependent upon the model's acceptance and ultimately upon some form of communication accountability and measurement.

### **Step 1: The goals of the department**

Communicate:

- department goals
- department objectives and targets
- department accomplishments
- employee questions and suggestions in regards to goals and progress
- employee job performance standards and duties
- answers to employee questions about the job

### **Step 2: Individual job responsibility and standards**

Communicate:

- employee job responsibilities
- policies and procedures affecting the job

### **Step 3: Individual performance feedback**

Communicate:

- performance appraisal (complete and on time)
- personal appreciation for effective performance (thank-you)
- areas for performance improvement
- discuss actions for performance improvement with employee

### **Step 4: Individual needs and concerns**

Communicate:

- willingness to listen to personal concerns
- willingness to listen impartially to complaints regarding discrimination
- timely feedback from supervisor about all job-related concerns, questions and suggestions
- willingness to listen to employee relations problems
- internal career opportunities
- your need for employee feedback to help you assess your managerial performance
- willingness to assist employees with resolving conflicts

### **Step 5: Information and suggestions to senior management**

Communicate:

- successes and failures regarding meeting departmental objectives
- problems with, or obstacles to, meeting objectives
- suggestions for senior management actions and policy changes
- proposals to address opportunities and efficiencies

### **Step 6: Department's place in company**

Communicate:

- how the department's goals affect the company as a whole
- major business issues affecting the department

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- basic departmental business strategies
  - role of other departments, as needed
  - all business action affecting the work unit
- If you, as a manager, want to foster employee flexibility and innovation and improve performance, you will not depend on written communication. *You will develop a managed communication system that is based on face-to-face interaction.*

When employees know their managers, they can better understand the need for

change, and will be more agreeable to the change process. When employees feel free to interact directly with their managers, the employee and manager can jointly problem solve.

In this way, the employee gains a sense of being the master of his or her own fate, and a sense of responsibility for the company's well-being – because he or she had a hand in shaping decisions and directions.