The IC Space

Communicating with confidence: a line manager's toolkit

Contents

Purpose

The purpose of this resource is to provide managers with tips and ideas to help you to develop your communication skills.

To create this guide we have spoken to lots of managers to find out what would be useful to include and how you would use it. Time is a valuable resource so we have deliberately designed this guide with the time poor manager in mind. We hope you'll find some quick strategies to address current communication challenges and that you return to dip into other resources which will help build your communication skills.

Why bother?

Investing time in communication ultimately saves time and creates a more productive, motivated and results driven team.

When managers inform and involve their teams with the activities and priorities of their organisation, not only is the organisation more productive but their employees are happier, more resilient and more

motivated too. If people feel motivated they will feel inspired to do a good job, support their team to achieve, driving up performance. A win, win for all.

A vital role

Managers play a key role in every organisation. They connect people to the purpose of their work, help them understand why their work is important and acknowledge the contribution of each individual in achieving the organisation's goals. They are also the people who find out what the problems and issues are and can help, with their teams, to design the solutions. A vital competency – becoming a confident communicator

In order to do this well, there is one competency that managers need, the ability to communicate and engage with the people they manage and work with.

Good communication and engagement does take time and investment in the beginning but delivers far more benefits in the long term. Developing teams through engaging and confident communications doesn't get in the way or your everyday work – it should help you achieve your goals more efficiently and effectively.

Contribute to this toolkit

All of us are at different levels of experience and skill as managers – and have a broad range of teams – from those focused on frontline delivery to those developing polices and strategic thinking.

Please share with us any good practice and ideas that have worked for you. There is much we can learn from each other. As this resource develops, it will become your one-stop-shop to share and find the best communications practice for managers.

If you would like to contribute to this guide please email 'Mandy Dryden, Head of Internal Communications, Department of Health'

The content of this resource has been provided by Internal Communication practitioners across government. With particular thanks to DECC, DWP, DH, Gambling Commission, HMRC, HM Passport Office, Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service and VOA.

How good am I?

1 Top five tips

1. Be prepared for some negative feedback – nobody is perfect
2. Use that feedback to really examine your own behaviour and be honest with yourself
3. Identify two or three simple things you can do to improve your communications
4. Ask your team for feedback again in six months – has it made a difference?
5. Ask your communications team for help.

Advice

It can be difficult to know whether what you've communicated has worked or not. The best way to find out is to ask your audience, in this case your team – did they get the message? Did they take any action as a result?

Gathering honest feedback on your communication skills from members of your team will help you identify areas for improving your skills.

Evaluate yourself

For a quick assessment, try the following questionnaire to find out how effective you are at managing communication in a group situation? Be honest! See how you rate yourself then pass the questionnaire to your team or colleagues and ask them to fill out the questionnaire thinking about you.

Rate yourself between 1 and 5, where 1 = rarely and 5 = always

1. I am an attentive listener
2. I keep the team informed of changes and convey relevant information
3. I impose my views on others
4. I encourage discussion and seek ideas
5. I am able to draw out contributions from quieter members of a group without threatening them
6. I feel defensive when group members challenge what I am doing
7. I deal with difficult issues and debate openly and honestly
8. I know and use a range of facilitation tools and techniques that help to generate discussion
9. I am able to manage the time in a discussion to ensure that objectives are met
10. I am able to help a group to reach a consensus

Where do you need improvement?

Based on the feedback you receive draw up an action plan for improvement. Share your plan with your team. Seeing that plan in action will let them know they have been listened to.

Other resources

[How well do I communicate](#)

Engaging People » Communication Skills » Essentials of Interpersonal Communication » How Well Do I Communicate?

[Communication Skills Analysis](#)

Engaging People » Communication Skills » Essentials of Interpersonal Communication » Communication Skills Analysis

Engaging your team

2.1 Effective Team Meetings

Top five tips

1. Purpose - be clear about why you are holding a meeting.
2. Prepare - have a plan and research your topics.
3. Listen - a meeting is about two-way communication.
4. Summarise - recap any key messages, actions, owners and deadlines at the end of the meeting.
5. Act on feedback - earn your team's trust by showing you follow through.

Advice

Face to face is the best way to communicate and engage. Meetings are the most valuable communication channel we have as managers to ensure everyone hears the same message at the same time.

The regular team meeting is something you should prioritise as a manager. It feels easy to let it slip or convince yourself you'll definitely hold it next week, but the benefits of holding it far outweigh the benefit of an extra hour or so in the diary. Getting the team together on a regular basis is great way to improve engagement levels. They allow people to immediately express any concerns, issues or seek clarification.

Because meeting time is so valuable make sure you get the most out of the time everyone is investing. Some time spent on planning the meeting will ensure they are more effective and actually save you time in the long run because people are clear about what the whole team is doing and as an individual.

Be clear about why you are holding a meeting

Nobody holds a meeting without wanting to achieve something. Tell them what that is. If everyone knows what you want to get out of the time you are investing you are more likely to reach your goal.

Have a plan

Preparation is key to ensuring you achieve your meeting purpose. If you're going to ask them to spend time listening to you, it's worth spending time getting a clear idea of what you want to cover, in what order and for how long.

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Think about the meeting space

Plan your meeting in an appropriate space that takes account of the size of your team. You could have a team meeting in a 'huddle' round a table in open plan office or you may need a private room – a safe environment for expression of views and more sensitive discussions. Think about the atmosphere you want to create when selecting a venue. And make sure you've booked it.

Know your topics

You've made a plan to ensure you cover everything. Now you need to make sure you know as much as possible about the topics. Making sure you've got an understanding of the information will give you confidence when talking. It will also help you spot potential questions or concerns people may raise and prepare answers.

You can always bring in a facilitator if you're looking to tackle team issues or develop specific skills, such as leadership, cooperation, communication, planning and time-management.

Support yourself with notes

The best speakers have notes, so why wouldn't you? Jot down the points you want to cover to keep the meeting on topic and to make sure you don't miss anything out.

Share these notes with colleagues afterwards as a reminder of what has been discussed. You can also include signposts to further information and send to those who were unable to attend – much easier than trying to write up the meeting afterwards.

Start on time

If you've given up the time to attend a meeting it means you're not doing something else. So, what can be more important than respecting the time people have given up to hear you talk?

Chairing the meeting

Whether you chair, or rotate who chairs, the role is crucial to effective meetings. The chair has responsibility for:

introducing agenda items.
clarifying how long the item has been allocated on the agenda.
encouraging quiet team members to join the conversation.
encouraging more confident team members to allow others the opportunity to speak.

summarising the discussion and re-cap of what the team have agreed.
keeping the meeting to time.

Listen

Once you've covered the point you want to make or shared the message you need to deliver, stop. Encourage people to talk about what you've said and give them time to reflect on how it relates to them and then check their understanding.

Doing this allows you to gauge how the information has been received and you can tackle any issues that might stop people from concentrating on the next topic.

Know your limitations

Providing the opportunity to ask questions is a really important part of making your meeting effective. It is a great way of ensuring everyone understands the messages.

But you're not expected you to know all the answers. If you don't know the answer, just say so. Bluffing or avoiding the question will make you appear untrustworthy. People will respect you more if you say you will find out and get back to them. Just make sure you do get the answer and keep everyone informed.

Check your body language

Body language plays a key role in how we react to what someone is saying. Open body language puts people at ease and helps them to trust the messages they are hearing. Defensive or aggressive body language can stop people from being open to what you are saying.

Wrap the meeting up

At the end of the meeting summarise what you have discussed. Recap and note down any actions, owners of those actions and agreed deadlines. This ensures everyone knows what will happen next and who will be responsible for making it happen.

Evaluate yourself

At your next team meeting ask for people's expectations. Go around the room and have each member state what he/she wants from team meetings.

Share your thoughts about where the group is at, how it is progressing, ways the group might be getting stuck and so on.

Simply ask, 'What was it like for everyone today?'.

Say, 'Does anyone have views on how the group is progressing so far and want to make any suggestions for change?'.

Invite team members to quickly describe what worked well during the meeting, and what the team could improve on in the next meeting.

Ask if there are any issues that members would like to return to or explore in the next session.

Case study/good practice

In the DECC Comms team we like to make sure our team meetings are an opportunity for everyone to have a good discussion about what's happening and to share views and ideas. We like to keep them as informal and social as possible, while, at the same time, remaining useful and informative. And the best way to do this is to have a format that helps to get everyone involved and contributing, and not just focused on one person providing 'updates'.

We meet every two weeks and we rotate responsibility for chairing the meetings. This usually just involves the Chair sending a note round with a short and simple agenda, keeping the meeting to time, helping make sure as many people as possible have a chance to contribute, and doing a very short follow-up email.

We usually follow the agenda below as it's been a great way to get people talking and sharing ideas and issues.

DECC stuff - quick update on corporate stuff happening across DECC the team needs to know about, for example IT changes, offices moves, etc (Chair leads).

Achievement - one thing you/your team has done over last couple of weeks you're particularly proud (all).

Help! - Something that's challenging and you'd like to put out there and get some advice on (all).

Share the wisdom - any training, talks, seminars, books, blogs, programmes you've been to/read/watched that you'd like to share (all).

Next big thing – what's the next big thing you're working on that it's important we all know about (all).

The chair works through each item and simply asks if anyone has got anything to contribute People are usually keen to contribute, but, if they're not, once one person says something it usually sparks others off.

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The format also helps remove the 'death by update' when everyone around the table gives an update on all the things they're currently working on. This format gets people thinking about how all our works relates to each other though their most important recent achievement and the next important piece of work for them.

We find that it's really important the chair takes five minutes to draft and send the email with the agenda and that everyone takes a couple of minutes to think what they would like to say or ask based on it. It's also important the Chair takes five minutes afterwards to send a short summary email. Not minutes (no one reads these), but a short email to thank everyone and provide any follow-up information or links to topics that were discussed.

Other resources

Team meeting planning tool (open new page to grid)

Getting the best from your team briefing

Difficult conversations

Top tips for using agendas and minutes

How to have better meetings

How to lead an effective meeting

Running effective team meetings

2.2 Getting the best from team briefings

Top five tips

1. Read it in advance and make sure you fully understand the message.
2. Try and anticipate questions your team are likely to have.
3. Don't just forward the team briefing by email.
4. Don't undermine the message by using language to distance yourself from the content.
5. Your communications team is there to help – ask them for advice about team briefings.

Advice

Team briefings are a face to face channel for delivering corporate messages. They focus on telling your team what's happening, why it's happening and what the implications are for them. In a team briefing you are the spokesperson for the senior management team.

Read the briefing thoroughly in advance so you feel you can say it in your own words. Don't just read from the brief in the meeting.

There should be no more than three or four key messages to get across. Talk about why they are important to your team and their work, using real examples.

Don't use or repeat anything that seems like jargon or is vague. Report anything like this back to the team that sent you the briefing.

Be careful not to use language that undermines the messages. For example, 'It says here…' or 'Apparently…''They say…'. As the manager for this team you must own the messages that senior management have asked you to deliver, even if you don't agree with them.

Pose a question to the team, encourage participation, feedback and questions. Be ready to respond to any concerns – look at any Q&A or think what you would ask if you were in the team. Don't worry if you don't have all the answers – stick to the key messages and reassure your team that you'll go back and try to get as many of them answered as possible.

Show you understand and acknowledge others' views. It's not a problem if you disagree with a point of view, but respond constructively. Show you can see why they would have that point of view, but then say how and why you see it differently.

Encourage people who haven't contributed to join in or simply invite anyone to contact you in person or by email after the meeting if they have any queries or concerns.

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Be clear on next steps. Follow up where there were queries or issues that were not addressed in the briefing, make sure you get back to your team as soon as possible, either by email or at your next team meeting.

Case study / good practice

Department of Energy and Climate Change (Team Talk)

'Let's Talk About...

Are you wearing the correct PPE

Case study - Huddles at Bank of America

Case study – Vodafone

Other resources

Listening skills

2.3 Communicating with remote teams

Top five tips

1. Think about what method is best for what type of communication - a quick brainstorm or a set meeting.
2. Establish a chair for any meeting - all meetings need a leader whether everyone is in a room together or some on the phone or on video conference.
3. Be clear about the purpose - so everyone is clear about what type of input is required.
4. Be inclusive - ensure that everyone in the team can join in - sometimes this means a range of technology - pre- meeting emailed agenda, phone, video and a room!
5. Get feedback - ask those who work remotely what works best for them.

Advice

It's probably even more important for a manager with team members spread across locations to hold regular team meetings. Cost and time will inevitably mean a lot of these meetings happen via conference call or video, but try to make sure you can get all your team together in person as often as budget will allow.

Team meeting by phone

Top tips

1. Keep the room quiet during conference calls.
2. Appoint a chair for the conference call to keep order.
3. Encourage people to say their name before they speak.
4. Be sure someone has finished talking before making your point.
5. Ask all callers individually if they have anything else to add before closing the call.

Conference calls are the simplest, least expensive, and most accessible way to bring a group together. They can be frustrating, but there are some things you can do to make sure they work for you and your team.

Send out the agenda before the meeting.

To keep those on the end of the line in the minds of those in the room put their picture or their name by the speakerphone.

Keep things quiet. Conference calls can be noisy enough without having lots of distracting background noises. Close the door or use a phone in a quiet area. Ask everyone in the room to avoid rustling papers, typing, or creating other noises.

Establish a chair for the call. It doesn't have to be you, all meetings need a leader, and meetings on the phone are no exception.

Encourage everyone to say their name before they speak. You may think that everyone knows what your voice sounds like, but it can be difficult to distinguish on a conference call.

On a conference call you have to specifically ask a person "Jane, what do you think of that plan?" don't just expect them to leap in.

Be patient and wait your turn. Even though you are eager to say something, you have to wait your turn and avoid the temptation to start talking. Some conference bridges or speaker phones will only allow one person to talk - if you jump in to start talking while someone else has the floor, you may unknowingly cut him or her off in mid-sentence.

Stick to the agenda. Be sure to stick to the item under discussion.

Be specific and name individuals. If you want a response to the last thing you have said, try not to say, "Any comments?" Better to ask for people to respond in sequence, for example, "Can I hear first from Bill, then from Elaine and Joe?"

Video conferencing

The advantage of video conferencing is that it is closer to the feel of face to face team meeting. However, the tips for video conferencing are not that different to a meeting by phone. Small time lags and the cues for when an individual can contribute are not easy to pick up or can be a bit delayed. Make sure all the technology is working in good time for your meeting to start.

Social media

Social media such as instant messaging or Yammer can be a more informal way to keep in touch with remote teams.

Some organisations have instant messaging whereby a group can be instant messaged together. This can be useful for a quick huddle to resolve a team issue or to impart some information quickly and get general team feedback.

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Yammer or other social media can be used to share documents, post team meeting agendas, follow-up actions, or seek feedback from your team. Your internal communications or digital team will be able to help with the best ways to use the social media facilities you have in your organisation.

Case study / good practice

Working but not always in the office

Introduction to social media

What's your social media style

Other resources

Effective emails

2.4 Improve your listening skills

Top five tips

1. Actually listen, don't just look like you are
2. Pay attention to their tone and body language – what is not being said
3. Ensure your body language and tone convey that you are listening
4. Ask questions to get clarity on the issue
5. Don't be afraid of silence

Advice

Listening skills are really important, particularly in one to ones. As a manager, your team want to know you are engaged and interested in their work and in their welfare, so they'll be looking to see how well you listen.

Notice how the speaker looks, their tone, pitch and talking speed (when appropriate mirror their body language and tone to encourage rapport).

Show you are listening. Face the speaker and maintain eye contact (if culturally appropriate), lean forward, nod, make encouraging noises.

Clarify with questions. Paraphrase and reflect back facts and feelings you hear, for example "You don't have enough information and you're frustrated?" or "So what you're saying is…"

It ensures you have understood and also reassures them you are listening to their point of view. For example, "Are you saying that there are problems with the way we are using the system because there's not enough training?"

Ask open questions (that can't be answered yes/no) to encourage further information, for example "What do you think about that idea?" instead of "Do you agree?"

Ask what prompted someone to take an action and what happened next, try not to just ask 'why' – this can make people feel defensive.

Don't be afraid of silence. It can encourage the speaker to go deeper into the subject, so don't rush to interject as soon as someone pauses.

Evaluate yourself

Am I a good listener

2.5 Effective Emails

Top five tips

1. Choose a subject line that makes it clear what the email is about.
2. Put the most important piece of information first, then expand and clarify.
3. Don't put people in the cc list if you expect them to actually do something.
4. Don't let emails replace having a conversation with a colleague especially for performance or disciplinary matters.
5. Remember emails have the same status as any other official document can be disclosed under Freedom of Information.

Advice

Email is an essential tool, providing an easy and quick way of communicating, particularly with more than one person at the same time. Email also offers a way of recording information simply and quickly. It is often appropriate to use email along with other methods for example, a conversation may be supported later by an email to record the key actions and decisions. But are your emails effective?

Content

Remember that emails shouldn't replace having a conversation with a colleague, particularly if they are based in the same building, especially when conducting complex negotiations or difficult discussions such as performance or disciplinary matters.

The subject line should be short and reflect the content of the message, which itself should be concise and clear.

Start your message with the one most important piece of information you want to convey, whether that is an action you need taken or a change that people need to know about.

Then you can go on to explain why, give background information and details. But don't forget many of your recipients will only skim read your email if it is lengthy – try to keep it short and to the point. If there is a lot of information to convey then maybe email is not the best tool to use.

Review the circulation list and make sure you are clear about what action you expect recipients to take. Explain in the body of the email why you have chosen the particular recipients and what you are expecting from them. If you do not require a response from someone put them in the CC box.

Repeat at the end of the email what action you need taken and be clear about deadlines.

Always proofread your email before sending it. It undermines your authority and the message itself if it is full of mistakes.

Email etiquette

With internal emails the sign off can simply be your name and phone number. Avoid the temptation of adding 'smileys' or other graphics.

Avoid 'reply to all' unless there is a real need to engage everyone in your response. Also avoid using the high importance marker unless it really is urgent.

Before you forward any email to your team check the email trail. It can be very embarrassing for your and for other managers if you forward an email trail that was intended for managers only.

'Text speak' email jargon or mobile phone-type texting should not be used. Do not overuse capitals, bold font, underlining, colours or backgrounds that just distract from your message.

When you are due to be away on leave or other absences, use the 'out of office' facility so that people who send you emails will know they will not get a response until your return. You can set up your out of office in advance, with different internal and external messages.

Information security

Emails are subject to FOI and Data Protection law and may have to be released for public scrutiny. The FOI Act 2000 promotes an open culture across the public sector and affects us all. This means you may be held accountable for what you write. Therefore, do not write anything that you would not be prepared to defend in public if it became necessary.

If you are sending sensitive information, you should use the secure email facility and refer to the Government security classifications guidance.

Attachments

Avoid attaching large files to an email - anything over one or two megabytes shouldn't be sent via email. Use links to shared drives or hyperlinks to your intranet/website.

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Evaluate yourself

Before you start an email, ask yourself:

Is this message suitable for email, or could I better communicate the information with a phone call or face-to-face meeting?

What is my purpose for sending this email?

Is it easy to read? Have I used correct grammar and punctuation?

Have I divided my thoughts into paragraphs?

Are important items, such as deadlines, highlighted?

Have I provided enough context for my team to easily understand or follow the thread of the message?

2.6 Promote your team

Top five tips

1. Take opportunities to let the wider business know about the successes of our team.
2. Share what you and your team have learnt with other teams.
3. Do something at least once a month that promotes the work of your team.
4. Encourage your team to contribute towards promoting your work with examples of good practice.
5. Feedback to your team when you see results from your promotional activities.

Advice

Promoting the work of your team is vital in building understanding in the wider business around what they do and why it is important. You will raise their profile with more senior management if you can communicate to the business why your team and the work they do is integral to the wider corporate strategy and the business plan. You will improve working relationships for your team. More importantly, you will help them to feel supported and endorsed by you.

Submit articles for your newsletter, intranet or the wider Civil Service site, that promote the work of your team. Use an example of good practice to tell a story about your work. Name your team members and celebrate their success.

Demonstrate how the work of your team links to the business plan and corporate strategy.

Make use of any TV screens or notice boards your organisation may have. Ask your internal communications team for advice on how to do more to promote the work of your team.

Other resources

Writing for your newsletter or intranet (CSL)

Working with your Internal Communications team

Dealing with difficult situations

3.1 Dealing with different personalities

Top five tips

1. Acknowledge all contributions.
2. Involve the whole group.
3. Observe who contributes a lot and who doesn't.
4. Avoid being defensive.
5. Encourage feedback from the group.

Advice

Dealing with individual behaviour types that are affecting your group or network can be a challenge, and there are various techniques you can use, depending on the type of personality you encounter.

The broken record: brings up the same point over and over again

Acknowledge that the point is important to the individual and demonstrate that it has been heard and recorded several times. Reassure them that it will be considered later with all the other points and ask them to move on.

The cynic: always negative

Get the whole group to agree on not evaluating ideas until an agreed point in the meeting. That way, you have the support of the whole group to correct anyone who doesn't follow the rule.

The detached: appears disinterested and rarely contributes

Try to make eye contact with them. Ask them a question directly, but don't dwell too long if an answer is not forthcoming – move on to someone else for an answer. If the behaviour continues, wait until after the session to ask them why they are not joining in. It may be an indication that they feel a topic is irrelevant, or that they are genuinely preoccupied with something else.

The know-all: uses their age, length of service or professional status to argue a point

Acknowledge their expertise but explain why the issue is being discussed as a group, for example to come up with different ideas. If they persist, you could try deferring to the group as a whole for their opinion.

The gossiper: introduces hearsay and gossip into meetings

If potentially important information is being introduced, question it straight away ('Where did you get that information, who has verified it?'), and ask the rest of the group. If the response is weak, ask 'How could we find out the answer to that question?' Defer the issue until the answer has been found.

The attacker (of others): launches personal attacks on other people in the group

If two group members are attacking each other, try to move between them physically, or interject and get them to talk to you, rather than to each other. Try to involve the whole group and to focus on ideas, rather than on individuals. Get the attacker to focus on what is being discussed.

The attacker (of you): launches personal attacks on you as the team leader

Try not to deny the charges or defend yourself. If they criticise your handling of the meeting, take a step back, collect yourself, politely thank the individual for their contribution, and then turn the issue back to the individual for positive suggestions. If the attack is in defence of other group members, ask the group members if the accusation is correct.

This is a good way to get the whole group involved in correcting the situation, but don't let the whole group attack the attacker.

In all of these instances you may need to consider feeding back to the individual, either as their line manager or to their line manager. When you do so focus on describing their behaviour and get them to think about its potential impact on others. Don't get into accusing or blame. Rather explore with them their perception of events, to clarify and work out together what could be done differently next time.

Other resources

Masterclass: Communication Skills for High Stress, High Risk Situations

My Emotional Intelligence

Top Tips for Confident Communication

Giving Feedback

Managing difficult behaviour

Group Facilitation

3.2 Communicating difficult messages

Top five tips

1. Difficult messages are best delivered face to face when possible.
2. Know your audience. Stop and think who am I talking to? And how will this affect them?
3. Be prepared. Think about what people will be upset/concerned about specifically.
4. Reduce uncertainty. Tell people what you can and gather feedback and questions to follow up. Reassure the team you will keep them informed.
5. Ask your communications team for help to make sure you are supplying consistent answers alongside other managers.

Advice

We've all experienced it; knowing we've got a message we need to deliver that might not be received positively. What you do next will greatly influence how people respond to the message and how you feel once you've delivered it.

Being aware a message you are about to deliver might not be well received is a huge step in changing the outcome. It stops you from blindly walking into a meeting broadcasting a message and then being at a loss as to why you're left dealing with confrontation or a drop in morale and subsequently performance from your team.

Know your stuff

Before you go into the meeting be clear in your mind about what you want to talk about. Ensure you know as much about the topic as possible as this will give you confidence to tackle any potential questions people might have.

Consider your audience

Think about the last time you delivered a similar message or heard someone else do it. How did the group respond? If they weren't positive what were their concerns? What questions were raised?

Learning from our experiences helps to develop us as communicators as well as improve how the message is taken on board by our colleagues. So, spend a few minutes thinking what questions or concerns the group might raise. Make a few notes to help you respond confidently in the meeting. This will also help ensure people leave feeling listened to and reduce concerns or negativity towards change.

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Don't tell people how they should or shouldn't feel, let them decide for themselves. You just need to provide reassurance and clarity about what's happening and why. To start you off here are a few potential questions and responses:

Q. What will happen to me?

A. If this question comes at the end of the meeting remember people might have been concerned or upset hearing the news and not been able to take on board the specifics. Calmly repeat the different options you've already covered including any known dates and additional information.

Q. What does it mean for our team?

A. Again people might not have been able to take in the information so a quick reminder will help ensure everyone is clear on the facts.

Q. Customer service is going to drop. What are you doing about it?

A. You've all got a huge amount of experience in your roles. How about we all have a think about how this change might impact customer service and let's make a note of all the risks. Once a list has been drawn up ask the group to come up with solutions to the issues.

This will help people feel a sense of control in the situation and more involved in the process.

Q. We haven't got the skills to do that!

A. Explain any of the planned training already being developed or scheduled. Then ask the group to discuss any of the other skills gaps they feel they have and options to fill them. As above this will help people to feel a sense of control and ownership in the changes.

Q. Why weren't our opinions sought earlier?

A. I appreciate you might have had ideas to contribute. Some of these things have already been decided but there are lots of things we can shape to meet our needs, and state what these are.

Focus on the facts

During times of change or when delivering feedback, it is really important to know the facts and stick to them. Don't be pushed into embellishing or 'filling in the blanks' people will know and then they'll start doubting everything you've said.

If you don't know the answer, say so and explain how you'll try and find out. People won't expect you to know all the answers and would rather hear that you don't know but will find out than watch you try and bluff your way through it.

Allow time for questions

Ensuring you have allowed time for people to ask questions has three benefits. Firstly if you explain there will be time for questions at the end, it will ensure you manage to explain everything clearly answering some of the questions in the course of the meeting.

Secondly, it will allow people to express their feelings and feel validated as you've listened to them and potentially answered them or explained how you will try and find out.

Finally, it will help ensure everyone has understood what you've just explained giving you a chance to stop rumours/misunderstanding before they start.

Communicating through change

4.1 Understanding change

Top five tips

1. Prepare and plan for a range of emotional responses, people respond differently to change.
2. Be honest to build trust and resilience.
3. Talk to your staff and understand what they are really thinking.
4. Repeat the information and check understanding – a once only communication may not be enough.
5. Learn from the process. Review with your team the challenges and the achievements.

Advice

What is change?

Research shows that most organisations undergo major change once every three years. However, as well as the big changes, there is also a constant churn of many smaller changes taking place. Communicating these changes is a vital part of being a manager; but remember that everyone will have a different emotional response to any change. You will need to understand, predict and plan for these emotional responses to make sure your communications have the right impact.

Organisational change

When we communicate about change across government it is often at an organisational level. You will often be asked to communicate about changes that affect the department, your team and possibly individuals. In thinking about using communications to help bring about and accept change it is helpful to consider the idea that change is not a beginning or an end point but instead is an ongoing process. It is an untidy and sometimes clumsy process but is also a natural part of how organisations evolve. This way of looking at change seems fitting for the fast moving pace of government reform. It captures the idea that for us, change is a certainty and helping your teams to come to terms with it is one of the most important tasks for managers.

Making sense of change

Our staff need to understand why change is happening and communicating early and honestly is one of the most important ways we can help teams build resilience to change and accept it. Your communications should focus on how people can help themselves and work through the changes to

understand the impact. If you can, encourage your staff to have input into the changes and the way they are put into practice. It is more motivating for your team to participate in the decision making process as then they are more likely to wholeheartedly accept and understand the change and make it happen.

Your department may have "change champions" who can support you in communicating with your team. You may find that someone in your team is interested in taking on this role themselves and contribute to finding out information and sharing it with the team.

The right balance

Effective managers will communicate in different ways based on the degree of change. Often leaders who introduce change underestimate the impact that the change will have and under-communicate, providing only the final proposal and not the reasons for the changes or with any consideration of the impact on their staff.

Occasionally managers can over-communicate and provide their teams with more information than they need. The ease of forwarding e-mails can encourage managers who fail to understand the needs of their teams. More information does not necessarily equal better communication. Think what your staff need and the best way to communicate with them.

Transparency and being open to hearing the views of colleagues is crucial to help communications about change land well. Talk to your staff to understand what they are really thinking. Listening helps our communications be relevant, credible and powerful for our people.

When communicating through change goes wrong

Being honest about change is critical if you want people to believe your communication and begin to think and feel differently. Excessive gloss will distort the issue and will begin to lose your credibility. Change by its very nature means that we need to constantly review how messages are being received, what people have understood and how they are reacting. You need to keep your finger on the pulse and use ongoing evaluation to boost communications, or even go back a stage and explain again if necessary. A once and done communication will not be sufficient to bring about change.

You will need to accept too that productivity may drop after the announcement of a major change. This is normal. People need time to absorb the announcement and understand what it means for them. The manager's skill in guiding staff through the process greatly affects the smoothness of the transition, limiting the depth and duration of productivity loss.

So what can go wrong?

Not listening to, acknowledging or responding to people's concerns.

Not involving people in your communication efforts.

Not allowing people time to let go of the past and rushing communications.

Dismissing the efforts and achievements of the past.

Not allowing people honest two way engagement.

Not communicating the timetable for change.

Not telling people the reasons for change.

Allowing inaccurate rumours to spread. Usually the more rumours the less effective is the implementation of change.

Relying on written communications and not building in enough support for face to face discussions.

Not making sure you have sufficient information to brief your teams properly.

Managers saying one thing but doing another.

Communications moving on too quickly to the next change.

Reviewing the change

Your opinion on how the change went may be different to the opinion of your staff. Hold a team meeting to review the change and encourage staff, at every grade, to openly discuss how they feel the change went from their perspective.

When going through a cycle of change it is likely that staff will come across new things and that mistakes will be made by managers and staff alike. Once the change is complete you will naturally look back and consider what you would have done differently if you knew then what you know now. This is constructive, it is part of the process and errors should not be viewed negatively. Instead they should be seen as opportunities to learn from the experience.

Use part of the team meeting to discuss the challenges you faced throughout the change process. Record what the issues were and note down how you overcame them and what you learnt as a consequence. Once complete review the results with the team.

Other resources

Managing change: Communicating Change Workbook

Managing Change: Communicating Change (Workplace Learning Activity)

4.2 Communicating uncertainty

Top five tips

1. Encourage participation.
2. Focus on the outcomes.
3. Keep people updated on timescales.
4. Bust the myths and gossip.
5. Share what you know.

Advice

Usually, the first rule of communicating effectively is to know and understand your message, before you attempt to persuade others. But what happens when an organisation is going through change, and you are dealing with uncertainties rather than certainties? What can we do to communicate change, when no-one can predict with certainty what the outcome of that change will be? What happens when people are looking for reassurance and clear answers, but final decisions are some way off?

1. Be honest with people and share the latest thinking. People are more likely to embrace change if you can put in into context and explain why change is needed at this particular time.

2. Encourage participation in the change process. If people are actively involved in discussing how to implement change in their area, they are less likely to resent change as something imposed from "the top."

3. Concentrate on the likely outcomes if there are no concrete final decisions to discuss with people, particularly at the start of the change process.

4. Keep people informed on the timescale for change and again be honest and realistic. There is nothing worse than telling people a process should take 12 weeks and then saying nothing if it slips into the 13th and 14th weeks. Tell people what will happen and when to set and manage expectations.

5. End the gossip and speculation by giving people the "full picture, warts and all." Do this from day one and keep people informed of latest changes in a planned way.

6. Avoid rushing to inform employees of every twist and turn in the change process, but be prepared to update people on the key issues at regularly planned face-to-face meetings.

7. Do not fall into the trap of giving some people "what they want to hear," when you know that this does not fit with the overall strategy.

8. Ensure that there are no "second class citizens" when it comes to sharing information in the organisation. Everyone needs to understand fully the external environment in which they are operating.

9. Acknowledge what people are thinking even if it may be uncomfortable for you personally, or for others in the short-term. In the long-term, this approach will encourage staff to engage more directly in dealing with the issues before them.

10. Where possible, emphasise that change is not going to be a sudden, extreme jolt to the system just for the sake of it. Staff will want to know that you will work with them to ensure that disruption is kept to a minimum, and that equilibrium/stability will be restored quickly.

Other resources

Three Questions to Help Communicate Change (learning esource)

Advanced Communication Skills: Presenting to Large Audiences

The Leaders Guide to Storytelling

4.3 Dealing with resistance

Top five tips

1. Own the change – no matter where in the organisation the change is coming from, it is your role to help your team to prepare, adapt and embed the change.
2. Break it down – complex change may need a step by step approach taking each milestone as it comes.
3. Know the end goal – let people know what the change is and when it needs to happen.
4. Embrace resistance – it is an opportunity to learn, hear concerns and improve team working.
5. Don't take it personally!

Resistance to change is best viewed as a natural reaction. Change provokes a range of emotions in people and these differ according to experience and circumstance of each individual. As a line manager you'll be setting the tone for change and your communications will influence how well people adapt and commit to organisational changes. You can reduce natural resistance to change by the actions you take and the way in which you involve your team.

Advice

Why people resist change

Too much uncertainty – the change isn't explained properly and so people are uncertain about next steps and are unwilling to make them.

Loss of control – top down changes are forced on people without their agreement and so they feel disenfranchised and may even be provoked into refusing to change.

The personal impact – what does it mean for me? Is my job safe?

Surprise! Surprise! – sometimes senior leaders are attracted by the big splash change makes. Decisions are sprung on people without preparation or expectation management. When this happens people are more likely to be annoyed and resistant to change.

Reducing resistance

Understand the goal of the change and the timeline involved. How manageable is the change? Complex changes are often resisted so effective managers will break down the task to make it more manageable and attainable. Communicate changes to your teams in easy to understand chunks, but make sure they understand the overall reason for the change and what the future looks and feels like.

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Don't forget that what one person finds difficult to understand and accept, another may not and may be quite happy with the proposals. Wise managers will anticipate how different teams or team members are likely to react to the changes by asking "What will it mean to them in terms of their job as well as their emotional well-being?"

Treating resistance positively

A cautionary note - resistance may be too strong a word. Concern may be more appropriate. Make sure you don't label a comment as resistance as your staff may not see it that way. They may not be resistant to change, but they may have issues they want to address first.

Evidence of resistance can be a positive sign - it is welcome because:

It indicates some shift in balance in the system - it gives new information or feedback. It offers a learning opportunity - and a place to start a dialogue.

It means you've given good and new ideas which challenge and break new ground.

It can reflect better thinking - allowing a deeper and richer dialogue.

It enables you to go deeper in the relationship - to win trust by facilitating staff through difficult times.

1 Identify the form the resistance is taking.

Trust what you see and how you heard it, more than what you hear.
Pick up cues.
Look at yourself - use your own feelings as a barometer.

> Uneasy.
> Bored.
> Irritated.

Listen for repetition and telltale phrases.

2 Acknowledge the resistance.

Tell the person your perception of the resistance.
Do it in a neutral, non-aggressive way with the win/win words: "What I think I hear you saying is...".
Tell the person how the resistance is making you feel.Use "I" statements.
Be specific, clear authentic.

3 Be quiet, listen, let the person respond.

Get him/her talking.
Encourage full expression of the concerns.
Be aware of other forms of resistance surfacing.

4 Don't take it personally.

Remember, their behaviour is not a reflection on you.
Let them air their defences without responding defensively.
Do not defend your actions - this encourages "looking for holes".
Do not counterattack head on.

5 Remember the "Two good faith responses" rule.

The majority of questions about the project are just expressions of discomfort. The third time the question is asked, respond to the question with a statement that suggests the person might be reluctant to commit to the process.

Good ways to minimise resistance

Explain why.
Identify the benefits.
Invite and answer questions.
Solicit participation, and, if possible, early involvement ("first-draft / strawmodel" reviews, membership in planning / implementation teams, etc.).
Avoid surprises.
Set standards and clear targets.
Inform / involve informal leaders.
Recognise and reward efforts.
Over-communicate.
Provide appropriate training in new skills and coaching in new values and behaviours.
Encourage self-management.
Give more feedback than usual to ensure people always know where they stand.
Allow for resistance. Help people let go of the "old".
Measure results, step back and take a look at what is going on. Keep asking, "Is the change working the way we want it to?".
Encourage people to think and act creatively.
Look for an "opportunity" created by the change.
Allow for withdrawal and return of people who are temporarily resistant.

What not to do

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Fight the resistance.
Go into more data collection.
Reengineer in the attempt to get a better intervention.
Avoid the individual.
Work more with your "allies".
Give more than two good faith responses to questions.
Give lots of reasons.
Expect approval, encouragement, support and / or affection.
Get hooked into the details.
Lose your confidence.
Expect to have all the answers.
Collude with the individual.
Avoid giving "bad news".
Use aggressive language.
Delay / wait one more day.

Other resources

Giving Feedback

Managing Change: Communicating Change Workbook

Managing Change: Communicating Change (Workplace Learning Activity)

Managing Change: Role and Responsibilities of a Senior Manager (Workplace Learning Activity)

Three Questions to Help Communicate Change (learning resource)

Managing upwards

Top five tips

1. Put yourself in your manager's shoes.
2. Recognise if they are under pressure.
3. Understand and anticipate your manager's expectations.
4. Pay attention, listen and create a rapport.
5. Keep your manager adequately updated.

Advice

How you manage your boss matters to your team. The relationship you have with your own manager is as important as the one you have with your team and your peers. People's opinion of you as a team leader will not only be formed by how you manage people, but how you lead and represent your team to your senior management.

Tune in and establish effective communication with your manager using methods that you've noticed they prefer. Pay attention, listen and create a rapport – managers just like team members like to be listened to. Allocate quality time to develop the relationship, but be sensitive – don't overstay your welcome.

Develop a good track record of delivery (on both important and less important tasks) to build your credibility and your opportunities for influence. Understand and anticipate your manager's expectations and work towards them.

Put yourself in your manager's shoes. Understand their objectives and deliver to them; think 'big picture' and long term. Recognise if they are under pressure, and how this might affect their reaction to your approach.

Keep your manager adequately updated. They may not want or need to know every twist and turn, but few like to be surprised.

Be prepared to step up. If your manager is away they need to have confidence that activities will run smoothly under your management so ensure you have a basic understanding of their own objectives and deliverables.

Learn from any mistakes, and sometimes you can earn credit by how well you 'pick up the pieces'.

The IC Space

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Evaluate yourself

How well do I manage my boss

Other resources

Managing upwards: pocket book

Working with your internal comms team

6.1 The role of internal communications

Top five tips

1. Understand the role of your internal communications (IC) team and how they can help you.
2. Know what you want to achieve.
3. Think about who you are communicating to – what would be the best way.
4. Measure how well you have communicated so you know how to improve.
5. Consider how your IC team may be able to help.

Advice

What does an IC team do?

The exact detail of what an internal communications (IC) team does will vary in each organisation. The content in this chapter explains the basics of internal communications and how you can work with your organisation's IC team. In general terms, an IC team will:

Develop and deliver internal communication strategies and campaigns – the IC team is likely to have a remit for delivering news and message on a wide range of projects and initiatives across the organisation.

Develop and manage internal communication channels – the IC team will be responsible for managing communication channels such as an intranet, staff publications, internal events etc.(See Ways to Communicate).

Assist managers to develop communication objectives – talk to your IC team at the earliest opportunity and let them help you develop your project objectives and associated communication objectives.

Be an extension of your team – consider the IC team as an extension of your own departmental or organisational team and include them in your planning discussions. Consider how you can use the skills of the IC team to support your existing resources.

Help you tell your story – the IC team can help you develop the narrative of your communication (i.e. the story that you want to tell) and the best way to tell it.

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Advise on the best methods – the IC team can advise on the best channels and opportunities to use when developing your communication plan.

Working with your IC team

Get your IC team involved at the earliest opportunity – Don't think that the role of internal communications is just to broadcast news about your project or initiative. Involving the IC team at an early stage can assist with development of the project itself.

Be clear on your objectives – what do you want your communication to achieve? Do you want staff to do something, change something, stop doing something or simply be aware of something new? Giving consideration to these questions will help you to develop your initiative and also focus the communications strategy.

Be clear who your audience is – think about who it is you are trying to reach with your communication. This will influence how, where, and when you communicate them.

Remember that communication is 2-way – don't just think about communication as an outgoing message. Consider how you can use two-way communication to engage staff, gather feedback and use this to develop the initiative further.

Learn from the past – when planning your communication, learn the lessons from previous campaigns and activities on what worked and what didn't work and use this as part of your planning.

Make evaluation part of your planning process – build your communication evaluation in at the start to make sure you can measure how successful your activity has been or where changes need to be made.

Consider internal communication when developing external campaigns – don't let staff stumble across news about key decisions or new initiatives from the newspapers or via their social media accounts. Make sure that for every external campaign, there is an internal communications plan to keep staff informed and engaged with what's going on.

Other resources

The IC Space

The IC Space

Communicating with confidence: a line manager's toolkit

6.2 Ways to communicate with your team

Top five tips

1. Face to face is always most effective for difficult/complex messages.
2. Use more than one way to get across your message.
3. Talk to your communications team about the different ways you can do this.
4. Change your message style to be consistent with the way you're communicating.
5. Ask your communications team how to reach different people and the different ways people receive information.

Advice

Are you using the best methods to communicate with your team? Weigh up the pros and cons for each method based on your specific message and what you want to achieve.

The table below, taken from the very helpful 'Developing a Communication Toolkit for Managers' by Melcrum (insert link), gives you all you need to both make sure you've covered all possible communication methods and weighed up the pros and cons for each based on your needs.

Communication	At its best	Potential downsides	Consider
Team meeting	Personal and relevant. Opportunity for discussion and ideas. Can be lively and interactive. Help build understanding.	Success depends on manager/leader skills. Time commitment for all. Beware of content overload.	Use a text message to alert remote workers to the voicemail. Training. Agenda and structure. Keep them regular.
Email	Can reach mass audience fast. Cheap and simple. Consistent and controlled. Reaches people	Not everyone may have access. Impersonal. Open to interpretation. Can lead to information	Controlling access to mass distribution lists. Use the subject box – make it clear if urgent, for action, etc. Keep it short and

	directly. Good for information, awareness and instruction.	overload. Can't tell if message has been read. Doesn't prioritise. No discussion.	simple. Assume people will only read the first paragraph. Use bullets and headings.
Intranet	Fast and consistent. Visually engaging. Good information store. Can be good for online. Discussion. Web stats show page views.	Not everyone may have access. Relies on people seeking out info and using it. People may not have time to read it.	Include hooks to draw people in – use images and interesting stories. Focus on people rather than systems.
Video	Creative, entertaining. Show real people talking. Makes people and places accessible. People take in more information visually.	Not everyone has access. Can be expensive. Can see as 'glossy'. Talking heads alone are rarely engaging.	Use to support briefing session. Use 'real people' to talk about their experiences.
Notice boards	Visible and may catch people's eye when too busy. Good for instructions and information.	May not be read. Usually no owner and out of date. Lose their impact.	Put a display until date on posters. Put them in places where there is 'dwell time' – lifts, coffee machine. Use to support comms through other channels,

			e.g. email, intranet.
Texts	Good for reaching remote workers. Good for crisis communications. Can be used to direct people to further information. Can update managers on news when not in the office.	Could annoy people if overused. People need mobile phones.	Make sure you have mobile contact details for your management team in case of crisis.
Events	Opportunity to reach mass audience face-to-face. Opportunity to see and hear from senior team. Flexible. Can include Q&A and break-out sessions. Can build team spirit.	Can be one way 'tell' or 'broadcast' sessions. Agenda set by centre, not audience. Expensive. Time consuming.	Involve staff in setting the agenda. Involve staff in event, as hosts or facilitators. Use interactive voting technology.
Open forum	Gives opportunity to raise and discuss real issues. Open, two-way, face-to-face dialogue. Helps leaders understand how things really are. Helps people feel heard.	Dismissive response to questions can close down dialogue Line managers feel disempowered. Managers can feel they don't have all the answers.	Use a text message to alert remote workers to the voicemail. Ask people to think of questions in advance to help ensure real debate.

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Site visits	Shows leaders are listening and want to see the real issues. Keeps leaders in touch. Promotes dialogue.	Can become 'royal visits' so leaders don't see real issues. Time-consuming.	Include work shadowing/call listening. Include a staff forum/Q&A session. Give leaders a good brief before the visit
Voicemail	Good for remote workers. Opportunity to hear from senior leaders. Good for announcements.	People will hang up if the message is too long or not relevant.	Use a text message to alert remote workers to the voicemail.

Evaluate yourself

Have you made use of these channels to communicate with your team?

Talk to your communications team to find out how you can make better use of these channels.

Other resources

The IC Space

6.3 Doing a communications plan

Top five tips

1. Know what motivates the people you want to reach.
2. Be clear about what you want to achieve.
3. Put in place mechanisms to measure your communication efforts.
4. Don't underestimate the need for preparation and planning.
5. Scope out who needs to know about your project and how much they need to get involved

Advice

Insight - Understanding your audience

Understanding behaviour is the key to really effective communications - knowing what drives people to do what they do, or what factors motivate them and influence the way they think. This is the difference between churning out news, updates and calls to action; and appealing to your audience on a level that causes them to change the way they behave or think as a result, either consciously or otherwise.

There may be one or several factors that affect an individual's or a group's behaviour at any one time. But the trick is in making the connection between these factors and the messages you are planning to communicate.

By thinking about your audience needs as you prepare to engage them, you not only put their requirements first, but you increase the chance that your key message will be understood and accepted.

Learn about the internal and external factors that can affect the project. There are some excellent strategic planning methods that you can use to analyse all these factors such as SWOT analysis and PEST analysis (see templates 1,2 and 3).

Objective Setting

Every communications plan should have clear objectives to set out what is to be achieved and to provide a measure the level of success.

Important questions to ask are;

How can our communications help ensure successful implementation of this project?
What are we hoping to achieve with these communications (attitude, awareness, behaviour)?

The acronym SMART refers to Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely - elements that when employed give meaning to objective setting.

Stating desired outcomes from the outset keeps the focus on what you are trying to achieve. Like objectives, outcomes need to be SMART within the scope of Communications and this means promising only those things that can be delivered.

Although realistic outcomes do not necessarily achieve goals outright, they may help reach objectives that promote the goal. SMART outcomes are most meaningful if baseline measurements already exist or can be obtained. See Template 4.

Planning

This is the opportunity to consider the details about how your communications should be delivered; by whom, when and how. These details are the foundations of a successful communications campaign.

Planning plays an integral role in keeping a campaign or project on task and it should alter to accommodate real time changes, new issues, opportunities and delays. Communication planning sets the standards for how and when actions take place, enables those involved in delivery to know what is expected of whom and when, and establishes a consistency of tone and message across the life of the campaign.

When working with your internal communications team they may offer you a template to help you think about the stages of your communications plan and what you want the outcomes to be. Take a look at templates 4, 5 & 7.

Evaluate yourself

Timings

Timings will change constantly once you come to plan and implement your communications campaign, but you will want to make a note of those key dates which (at this point at least) are important and immovable — like the launch of a new scheme or a particular event:

Stakeholders

Stakeholder management is critical to the success of every project or campaign. By engaging the right people in the right way in your communications campaign, you can make a big difference to its success.

The common definition of a stakeholder is any person or group with an interest in your project/campaign or could potentially be affected by its delivery or its outputs.

Once you begin to communicate with them, these stakeholders become your audience.

The IC Space

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Consider your audience and consider how your communication needs to be structured to accommodate the specific needs of different audience groups. Think about their power and influence. Template 8, the power/influence grid may help and then use Template 9 to plan in your stakeholder communications.

The benefits of using a stakeholder based approach are that:

By communicating with stakeholders early and frequently, you can ensure that they fully understand the benefits of what you are doing and can support you actively when necessary.

You can potentially use the opinions of the most powerful stakeholders to shape your project. Not only does this make it more likely that they will support you, their input can also improve the quality of your project.

You can anticipate what people's reaction to your project may be, and build into your plan the actions that will win people's support.

Case study/good practice

Template 1: SWOT analysis
Template 2: PEST analysis
Template 3: Combined SWOT and PEST
Template 4: Internal communications brief
Template 5: Change escalator
Template 6: Communications escalator
Template 7: Preparation checklist
Template 8: Stakeholder mapping power/influence grid
Template 9: Stakeholder communications plan

6.4 Crafting the message

Top five tips

1. Think about what you want people to think, believe or do.
2. Look at examples of good writing or messages for ideas.
3. Speak it! Read out loud what you've written to test clarity and flow of content.
4. Check for errors and that your writing fits the organisation's style guide.
5. Try communicating another way. Use a story to illustrate your point.

Advice

It can often be difficult to construct a new communication entirely from scratch even with a good brief and communications plan at hand.

A common mistake can be to start jotting down the first words that pop into your head when faced with a blank page to fill.

Don't assume that your audience is as knowledgeable about the subject as you are.

A good communication in any format will be clear, concise, timely and relevant to the audience. It will tell them what they need to know, what they need to do and where they can find further help or information. It will be easy to read and/or understand.

A common way to plan most types of communication is to use the "5W" approach. This refers to five interrogative words – Who, What, Why, When and Where. For example:

Who is it about?

What happened?

When did it take place?

Where did it take place?

Why did it happen?

Although the information can be covered by one or more of the 5W words, sometimes a sixth word is included – How – as in, "How did it happen?"

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A good structure will help you to express yourself more clearly; whether the end result is an online article, a magazine feature, an email or a report. The following checklist may help you to structure your writing:

The blank page

Don't write to a blank page – do some planning and preparation first. Most artists don't start painting their masterpieces without first thinking about what they want the final result to look like, and first creating some sketches.

Write by example

There is nothing wrong with 'borrowing' ideas. For example, if you have to write a press release, look at previous examples for inspiration.

Review effective emails you have received from others and model your communication to theirs.

Speak before, during and after you write

Speak out loud what it is you want to say. Ask a colleague to listen to you read what you have written, or tell them what you are trying to get across. Did the text flow well as you read it? Did your colleague understand what you were trying to explain? Write your text as if you were reading it out to an audience using the same conversational tone.

Write in a conversational tone

The most powerful and effective form of writing is written in a conversational tone. When engaging with staff, it's often preferable to use an informal tone. It's as though a friend is telling you about something and automatically, that can put you on a higher level of trust and authority with your readers.

Be precise with details

Be specific in your communications. Write exactly what you intend or want to convey. For example, if you were talking to a friend on the phone to ask them to attend an event with you, you would provide all the details that they needed to make a decision to join you.

Write it and leave it

Complete an initial draft of whatever you're creating and then take a break. When you come back to the work you will be amazed at the parts that jump out immediately that require fixing.

Spellcheck and editing tips

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Don't forget your most basic yet necessary tool, the spellchecker. There are two quick editing techniques that work. First, print out your document and place a ruler or paper underneath each line as you read down the page to catch errors more easily. Next, turn the page upside down to view. Editing and formatting errors can jump right out at you by looking at your writing in this unique way.

Also check to see if your organisation has style guide – there may be specific ways that your organisation writes titles, words, numbers etc.

Be aware of different formats

Face-to-Face - Story Telling: A first person illustration

Generally clarity and brevity fit most communication channels but you might want to ask for guidance of length of copy for the channel for example digital channels – the intranet and social media. See Ways of Communicating.

Story telling may initially seem like an odd concept to introduce into a hints and tips dedicated to internal communications, but story telling is something we do all the time; whether it's a quick catch-up about the weekend at the tea point on a Monday morning, a sandwich and a gossip during a working lunch, or even a cathartic outpouring over a drink after work.

These moments have the power to engage us as an audience, and because of this, more and more communicators are finding that storytelling is a powerful tool to have in a communications toolkit.

You can apply the story telling method in all manner of communications, but it is most powerful when narrated in person, whether that's in a small meeting or presenting to a larger audience on a stage.

Story telling may initially seem like an odd concept to introduce into a hints and tips dedicated to internal communications, but story telling is something we do all the time; whether it's a quick catch-up about the weekend at the tea point on a Monday morning, a sandwich and a gossip during a working lunch, or even a cathartic outpouring over a drink after work.

These moments have the power to engage us as an audience, and because of this, more and more communicators are finding that storytelling is a powerful tool to have in a communications toolkit.

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Other resources

The IC Space