



Leadership Essentials

Communicating

A collaborative leader recognises the importance of formal and informal communication



Communicating with someone means sharing or exchanging information, for example by speaking, writing, or using technology.

Effective communication means being aware of the communication process which consists of the five elements shown in the figure below:



The sender has a message to convey and needs to decide how to 'transmit' it: oral communication via telephone, face to face, team briefing or written communication via email, text, document. The **encoding** of a message is the production of the message and the **decoding** is how the receiver is able to understand and interpret the message. Only when the receiver gives a response does the communication become two way.

Face-to-face communication is enhanced by body language (non-verbal communication), tone of voice and the words used. Being clear about why you are communicating will help you to give the right amount of detail and build trust and commitment. If you give very complex or too much information, you could cause confusion. However, providing too little information or being insensitive can lead to mistrust or lack of commitment.

12 Cs of Effective Communication

Be clear - Focus on your purpose. Simple sentences. No jargon.

Be colleague/customer focused - What's in it for them? Be clear about purpose. Be clear on who needs to receive the message.

Be concise - Say what you mean. Minimum words.

Be concrete - Justify with evidence.

Be confidential - Respect privacy. Don't gossip.

Be careful - Make sure the message is error free. Will others understand your meaning?

Be correct - Let people know your information is accurate. Use house style.

Be current - Always as up to date as possible.

Be compelling - Do not bore the receiver, attempt to attract their interest.

Be complete - Make sure the other person knows how to act or respond.

Check - Quality of writing. Grammar and spell-check.

Clarify - Ensure the other person's understanding of your message.

Formal Communication

Formal communication follows set rules, regulations and formalities, as defined in organisational procedures. Formal communication can flow vertically and/or horizontally throughout the organisational structure, depending on the rules in place regarding the chain of command and hierarchy. The use of formal communication in your organisation could encompass internal communication, where these formalities are followed, as well as communication with those external to the organisation, such as customers, stakeholders or members of the community.

Informal Communication

Informal communication allows employees in your organisation to share information in a more relaxed way. Unlike formal communication channels, it has no set format but can help your team members build working relationships and reduce stress levels. Much of the informal communication that takes place may be unrelated to the work of the organisation and colleagues are likely to discuss their personal lives and exchange jokes and anecdotes. However, employees will also engage in informal discussions about work matters and this may be passed on to other colleagues.

Some leaders decide to ignore informal communication, but this could lead to isolation from your team members. Participating in informal discussions, to the extent you feel is useful and appropriate to your role as leader, can allow you to:

- find out honestly what employees think about issues in the organisation;
- use informal communication to back up or add to information shared formally;
- increase your self-awareness and understand how team members perceive your leadership;
- take opportunities informally to praise team members, when appropriate;
- build a sense of belonging amongst team members.

Managing Risks with informal communication

It is important to understand the disadvantages associated with any form of informal communication.

Spread of false information

Provide your employees with regular and sufficient information through formal or informal channels to minimise this risk, especially at times of change or challenge in the organisation (for example during periods of restructuring and review of staffing levels).

Exclusion, malicious gossip and breaches of confidentiality

Make your employees aware that the policies which apply to formal communication, such as equality and diversity and information that must remain confidential, also apply to informal communication which takes place in the organisation.

Listening skills

Actively listening is a key ingredient to effective two-way communication and when responding to colleagues and customers. It helps to **build trust, respect and influence**. Active listening involves not only absorbing verbal information, but being aware of other behaviours such as **body language** and **tone of voice**. Look out for hidden messages and then confirm understanding.

Your body language as the **listener** is also important; do you **look** as though you are listening: Are you smiling, frowning, nodding, shaking your head as the other person speaks?

Presentation Skills

The ability to present timely and accurate information in a clear and effective way is a key skill if you wish to get your message or point of view across, and good presentation skills are required at almost every level in all organisations.

Presentation Skills Top Tips

Keep it simple, focus on your core message	Avoid using too many PowerPoint slides or transitions, they will detract from your message
Smile and make eye contact with your audience	Put statistics and charts into context to make their meaning clear
Check any equipment beforehand, have a contingency plan ready	Use PowerPoint fonts no smaller than 18 pt to ensure your slides can be read at a distance
Keep practising, presentations improve with practice	Use graphics sparingly, do not overwhelm your audience
Keep your flipchart or PowerPoint text simple, try to just use bullet points for cues	Do not be afraid to summarise your key points

References

- Brooks, I (2008). *Organisational Behaviour, Individuals, Groups and Organisations* 4th Ed. Pearson Education Ltd
- Catanzaro, M (2012). *Motivating through formal and informal communication* Executive Housekeeping Today
- Guirdham, M (2011). *Communicating Across Cultures at Work* 3rd Ed. Macmillan
- Hasson, G (2012). *Brilliant Communication Skills: What the best communicators know, do and say* Pearson Education Ltd
- The Business Communication (2017). *Advantage and disadvantage of grapevine or informal communication* www.thebusinesscommunication.com/advantage-and-disadvantage-of-grapevine-or-informal-communication
- The Business Communication (2017). *What is formal communication?* www.thebusinesscommunication.com/what-is-formal-communication



Dimensions of Leadership

The Institute of Leadership & Management's Dimensions of Leadership offer, often elusive, insights into great leadership. This is not a static representation but an evolving description of the complex nature of leadership activity.

Find out more at www.InstituteLM.com/learning/dimensions-of-leadership.html

