

Management & Communication Skills

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We regret that the author(s) is/are unable to enter into any correspondence relating to, or arising from, this guide. Correspondence should be addressed to the module leader, via the WWLC.

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Management & Communication Skills

Welcome to the course

This course is concerned with the theory and practice of effective communication within organisations. The main purpose is to improve the communication of potential managers through a variety of practical activities. Tutorial sessions are devoted to such issues as report writing, meetings, interviewing, negotiating and making a presentation, and the development of leadership, team and inter-personal skills.

Introduction

Look at the great leaders, the great generals, the great entrepreneurs, the great managers – the one thing they have in common is that they are all also great communicators.

With so many new ways to communicate – both as individuals and organisations – communication has probably never been more bewildering or challenging. Make no mistake; this is probably the most important skill of the 21st century.

So take this course seriously. You may think you know how to communicate. After all, when did you learn to talk, read and write? But that's often the greatest danger. We've been doing it for so long we forget that it is a management skill and not just something we do. More managers are let down by their communication skills than their technical skills of the job. If you become an accountant you will probably study for years and qualify, but the only people who study communication in the same way are those in narrow fields like acting or public relations.

So in this course we hope to give you some vital theory and skills in the art of communication. We are not going in to marketing communications or the media, but instead focusing on the communication skills that any manager will need. So the topics we focus on include how we communicate 'live', both face-to-face with individuals, with groups and at a distance by phone. We also look at the need to stand up and present ourselves and our ideas to larger audiences. But we can't always communicate verbally and there has been a revolution in written communication with the advent of email. So we will look closely at how to make the written word as powerful as the spoken – whether it be an email, a letter or a report. The detailed study guide is complemented by a textbook.

By the end of the course, you will know some key theory, have some practical tools to use and hopefully plan your communications so that you feel more confident. But it is vital to practise and be rigorously self-critical. It is actually easy to change but it is easier to change back.

About the author

David White

David White is a director of Fast Training, a recruitment and training consultancy based in the UK and Luxembourg. In addition to his commercial work he has been a visiting senior lecturer with the University of London since the mid-1990s.

His commercial background is in sales and marketing management, both areas where communications are the key to success. He honed his communication skills working in a diverse variety of sectors including automotive, telecoms, food, retail and financial services. He has contributed to award-winning campaigns for products as diverse as insurance and cars.

In the 1990s he became involved with education, firstly with the Institute of Direct Marketing and then Royal Holloway University of London. For JPMorgan Fleming, he developed a unique global MBA programme involving delegates and teaching events as far afield as Tokyo and New York.

His commercial work is focused on management development programmes, which range from one-day programmes through outdoor development to ongoing coaching and consultancy.

David's breadth of practical experience ensures that this course is anchored



Note

Audio Welcome

For an audio welcome message from the author, please go online and enter the course through the WWLC

in the reality of organisational life.

Formative assessment

Essay titles

During the course you are encouraged to write one essay of around 1500–2000 words. Once you have written it you can submit it. It will be marked and will be returned to you with feedback from a tutor. While the mark you will be given on the essay will not count towards your final degree grade, it will give you a good indication of the progress you are making on the course and the areas you will need to focus on.

For the submission deadline please check the course calendar.

Please choose one title from the three below:

1. 'Face-to-face meetings are a waste of time in the age of video-conferencing; Internet chat groups and global business.' Consider the merits of this assertion in the light of interpersonal communication theory. Illustrate your answers with examples wherever possible.
2. To what extent can style overwhelm content in the art of giving a presentation or the presentation of written information? You should refer to practical examples from the media to support your argument. Use relevant theory as criteria for the assessment of your examples.
3. 'The world's best managers and leaders are the world's best communicators.' Is this true? Use examples of notable business or political leaders to substantiate your views. Back up your assessment using relevant theory.

Reading & References

-  Rouse, M.J. & Rouse, S., *Business Communications – A Cultural and Strategic Approach*. Stamford, CT: Thomson Learning.



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Topic 1

The Role of Communication

Aims

The purpose of this topic is to:

- provide an overview of this module.
- clarify the role of communications in an organisation.
- highlight the challenges of communication in the modern working environment.

Objectives

By the end of this topic you should be able to:

- define the strategic importance of communication skills;
- list the goals of management communication;
- assess the extent to which information is lost in the communication process inside organisations;
- define the directions in which communication travels within an organisation;
- list ways in which managers can improve organisational communication.

Introduction

Email, vmail, 3G mobile phones, text messages, intranet, Internet, extranet, CNN, digital radio, RDS, DVD, the list of communication challenges grows by the day ...

Managers are more confused than ever with the range of communication channels they have at their command. This course on Management Communication Skills is designed with a practical approach in mind. Yes, you will need to know (a little) theory. But the key is to practise skills and develop real confidence in your ability to communicate with others in a work context. And some of the issues may just turn out to be useful life skills too.

Defining communication

Communication literally means 'Making common'. It is about sharing. It can also be defined as any actions that create messages or displays or that interpret messages or displays.

Organisational communication can be defined as a:

culturally dependent process of sharing information and creating relationships in environments designed for manageable, goal-oriented behaviour.

Let's look at communication in a bit more detail.

Internal and external communication

Internal communication is about the way people and groups interact within the organisation.

External communication concerns the way the organisation interacts with the external environment – customers, rivals, governments, etc.

For the purposes of this course, we will focus on the former issues. The latter concerns are certainly of interest to us but are a better fit to the scope of a marketing course.

In either case, good communication is vital to the health and well-being of any organisation.

Communication and the manager

Communication has never been easier – and never been harder.

In theory it is possible to communicate instantly with anyone in the world who has access to a telephone or computer. In practice, we find it harder than ever to match our communication style to the message and audience.

The ease with which we can broadcast our messages to a wider world via email and the web has created a communications overload. It is not unusual for people working in modern organisations to receive over 50 emails per day, and they will often arrive back in the office to find voicemails to add to their sense of bewilderment.

Communication and the organisation

As the most complex animal on the planet, we tend to create complex organisations in order to achieve our goals. Whether it be to govern our society, look after our health, or make the food we need to eat, we create organisations rather than try to operate on our own. For any organisation to function, it needs to communicate effectively – both internally and with the world at large.

Quick summary

Defining communication

- Communication can be defined as a culturally dependent process of sharing information and creating relationships in environments designed for manageable, goal-oriented behaviour.
- Internal communication is about the way people and groups interact within the organisation.
- External communication concerns the way the organisation interacts with the external environment - customers, rivals, governments, etc.
- The ease with which we can broadcast our messages to a wider world via email and the web has created a communications overload.
- For any organisation to function, it needs to communicate effectively - both internally and with the world at large.

Key areas of communication

Interpersonal communication

- How we communicate
- The organisational context
- Non-verbal communication
- Cultural issues

Formal communication

- Written communication
- Writing reports
- Giving presentations
- Interviewing

As Rouse & Rouse comment in the core textbook, *Business Communications – A Cultural and Strategic Approach*:

Organisational goals need to be communicated not only within the organisation, but also outside the organisation in order to attract investors, employees, suppliers and managers and customers.

Within the organisation, communication takes place both vertically and horizontally.

Katz & Kahn, in *The Social Psychology of Organisations* (New York, Wiley, 1966), identified five key categories for downward communication:

- Goals and mission
- Why tasks need to be done
- How to complete tasks
- Policies and procedures
- Performance feedback

The success of downward communication is a key management responsibility. Sadly, many managers for whom 'knowledge is power' may actually choose to withhold useful information rather than share it with their staff. In addition to intention, there are other reasons why communication may be difficult:

- Span of control (i.e. too many staff)
- Geography (i.e. staff are distributed around a variety of locations and countries)
- Bureaucracy (the sheer volume of communication shrouds key messages)
- Number of management layers

Research has shown that information losses are of the magnitude shown below:

Board understands	100%
Senior managers	63%
Middle managers	56%
Line supervisors	30%
Line workers	20%

Improving vertical communication

But vertical communication can be improved. Typical techniques include:

- MBWA (Hewlett-Packard's Managing by walking about)
- Notice boards containing relevant and topical information
- Newsletters
- Business presentations at frequent enough intervals ('the town hall meeting')
- Team briefings and meetings (at least monthly intervals)
- Building trust through shared decision-making
- Quality circles
- Surveys (staff satisfaction surveys are a useful barometer of organisational climate)
- Suggestion schemes
- Empowered culture (maximising responsibility at lowest levels)

	Workers say about supervisors	Supervisors say about themselves	Supervisors say about managers	Managers say about themselves
Always gets subordinates' ideas	16%	73%	52%	70%
Subordinates can feel free to discuss important issues	51%	85%	67%	90%
Understands subordinates' problems well	34%	95%	51%	90%

Fig 1.1 Accuracy of upward communication

The key concerns of the course

From the above introduction, we can identify a number of key areas of communication:

Interpersonal communication

- How we communicate
- The organisational context
- Non-verbal communication
- Cultural issues

Formal communication

- Written communication
- Writing reports
- Giving presentations
- Interviewing

The structure of the course is designed to get you into the practical issues immediately. The theory comes later.

Conclusions

Communication is one of our most vital life skills. We learned to communicate from the moment we were born. But that doesn't mean we already know it all. Whether it be learning a new language, or learning to use a new medium of communication, there are always opportunities to develop our skills.



Remember: A manager who is not communicating is not managing.

In this session we have set out a background to the subject. Communication has been defined both in general terms and in regard to organisations. We have seen that it is important both inside the organisation and in regard to

the relationships organisations have with the outside world. Communication has been explored as a key management skill. We have identified the reasons why management communication frequently fails and some of the key steps managers can take to improve communications.