



Effective communication is vital for a successful business and must be a two way process. When it isn't, there is considerable scope for confusion and misunderstanding which can lead to recriminations and worsening of the communication process. Standard procedures will help to ensure that internal communication is effective.

Problems arise:

- Within departments
- Between departments
- Between staff and management
- Between offices or floors within office

Within departments

- Try to avoid the 'silo mentality' where departments operate as self-contained units, almost like firms within firms. If it makes sense for other departments to be involved, remove any barriers (actual or perceived) to the process
- Ensure that the communication process works equally well for procedural changes and client related matters
- It can be very difficult to keep track of ad hoc memos. Posting changes on an intranet site is likely to be more efficient
- Changes implemented during a person's absence (particularly a long absence such as maternity leave) may be overlooked when they return. How do you ensure that such changes are communicated to that person on their return?
- Hold regular departmental meetings to open channels of communication, upwards as well as downwards
- Even if it is not appropriate to involve support staff in all meetings, consider involving them at some stages in the process

Encourage a culture in which staff:

- Discuss their problem files
- Share knowledge and information (for example, on new legislation, regulations or guidance notes)
- Identify working practices or procedures which could be improved

Between departments

- Problems can arise when files are transferred between departments
- Cost or other pressures can prevent or delay the transfer, to the detriment of the client
- Problems can also arise when surveyors in different departments or with different expertise are working on the same matter

In these situations, it can be helpful to use standard form instructions which specify:

- The files and documents being transferred
- Other relevant files or documents and where they may be found (in paper or electronic form)
- Background information on the client
- Background information on the matter
- What needs to be done and within what timescale
- Key action dates
- The contact person for obtaining instructions and reporting
- Who is ultimately in charge of the matter
- Confirmation that the client has been advised of the instructions

In addition, it is important to notify interested parties (e.g. accounts, line managers) that the file has been transferred or that a subfile has been created.

Maintain communication between departments after the transfer and liaise where necessary to ensure objectives are met and that the matter is successfully concluded.



COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE FIRM

Teamwork

Where a team is working on a matter, ensure:

- There is an effective team leader whose function is to provide the necessary motivation, direction, coordination and supervision of work
- Individual team members know what teamwork involves – recognising the importance of each other's contribution and accepting responsibility for ensuring the team has the right facts and is focusing on the right issues
- Team specialists are not so immersed in their speciality that they fail to see where expert consultation outside their own area is needed
- Team members exercise, when dealing with one another, the same tact and interpersonal skills as they do when communicating face-to-face with clients

Between staff and management

- Ensure there are good lines of communication between staff and management
- Staff should be encouraged to report ineffective working practices, new or emerging risks and existing risks that need to be addressed by the firm
- Staff should feel able to report complaints and claims at the earliest possible opportunity without fear of recrimination as this is in the best interests of the firm
- Such reports should be handled sympathetically if the firm expects a similar approach in the future. Conversely, attempts to conceal a problem should not receive anything other than a severe response

Encourage staff to discuss personal problems which may impact on their ability to do their work efficiently. Health, domestic, financial, or other personal problems need to be identified and addressed as soon as possible. Failure to do this increases the firm's exposure to the risk of a professional indemnity claim from clients.

Between offices or floors

Ensure that all offices or floors are involved in the communication process. Excluding an office or floor from the communication process may generate actual or perceived feelings of isolation. This in turn can result in the office becoming 'a firm within a firm', operating to its own agenda and adopting its own working practices.

This situation often arises in the case of smaller branch offices. The head office may have good internal lines of communication, but these are not always extended to the branch offices. This can leave the smaller office unaware of new working practices or procedures.