The Importance of Communication in the Workplace

A significant change in modern workplaces is the evolution of communication methods due to the increased use of ICT. Improvements in ICT mean that messages can be sent faster, cheaper & to more recipients more often. Ideally this should result in more effective communication but in reality it has led to over-communication & ineffective communication. There are more ways of avoiding messages & no way to guarantee people receive the information.

**Formal communication** used by organisations on a daily basis when operating in a professional manner with people inside & outside the organisation.

**Informal communication** generally used when people know each other well. Used in a professional setting, it can lead to misunderstandings, embarrassment, cross-cultural insensitivity, discrimination in the workplace.

Effective Communication in the Workplace

Good workplace communication can lead to real improvements in employee motivation, productivity & profitability.Communication is something we do reflexively -- like breathing; we don’t really give much thought to it. While it might seem easy, communicating effectively actually takes quite a bit of finesse. Choosing the right words, listening with our minds instead of just our ears, and getting our message across are skills that we all need to work on.

At home and in social settings, miscommunication can lead to arguments. In the workplace, the repercussions can be far more serious. Poor productivity, unmotivated employees -- even lawsuits -- can result from communication breakdowns at the office. To improve communication within your team and throughout your entire company, you need to implement a few easy but important changes to your corporate philosophy and practice[[1]](#footnote-1).

**10 Tips for effective communication[[2]](#footnote-2):**

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| 1. Make work fun
 | 1. Don’t just hear – listen
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| 1. Take your emotions out of the equation
 | 1. Make employees feel like owners
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| 1. Trust your people
 | 1. Give employees what they want
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| 1. Give good feedback
 | 1. Respect cultural differences
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| 1. Revive the great lost art of conversation
 | 1. Handle conflicts with diplomacy
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Using appropriate communication techniques

Communicating across cultures is challenging. Each culture has set rules that its members take for granted. Few of us are aware of our own cultural biases because cultural imprinting is begun at a very early age. And while some of a culture's knowledge, rules, beliefs, values, phobias, and anxieties are taught explicitly, most of the information is absorbed subconsciously.

The challenge for multinational communication has never been greater. Worldwide business organizations have discovered that intercultural communication is a subject of importance—not just because of increased globalization, but also because their domestic workforce is growing more and more diverse, ethnically and culturally[[3]](#footnote-3).

“We are all individuals, and no two people belonging to the same culture are guaranteed to respond in exactly the same way.”

Communication Techniques for difference – cultural sensitivities, values & practices

Beliefs and attitudes are extremely important and personal. Values are formed and absorbed by people as they develop through childhood. Customary ways of behaving and responding to situations can vary considerably from one society to another. Understanding reasons behind how people behave is key. An effective team environment takes into consideration the cultural practices of each member, their values and beliefs. In doing so, communications become more effective as misunderstandings are avoided.

**Good practice:**

* Actively seek information about the correct protocols for interaction and communication, i.e., workshops, web search, ask people.
* Be respectful of cultural practices, attitudes and beliefs, e.g. removing shoes before entering a home
* Show consideration, e.g. think of the needs of others from their point of view
* Be polite, e.g. use the preferred title and the appropriate tone of voice, listen to others address each other
* Moderate your language and topics of discussion; swearing and risqué topics may be highly offensive to others.
* Show genuine interest.

**Considerations** when communicating with people of different cultures:

* Different ways of speaking or titles that may be preferred
* Male and female roles clearly defined along cultural boundaries
* Different speech patterns / language
* Codes of behaviour
* Clothing
* Non-verbal communication and body language, e.g. eye contact, use of touching, etc
* Use of physical space.

**Activity:** Complete quizzes 3, 17 and 18 <http://www.funtrivia.com/quizzes/world/cultures/culture_mixes.html>



**Activity:** Investigate the nuances of communication and how misunderstandings may occur if you don’t understand cultural implications. In small groups, research the culture you are assigned by creating notes on each of the points listed, then, highlight how an Australian workplace could implement a communication strategy to prevent cultural misunderstandings.

* Body language
* Eye contact
* Type of language/phrasing
* Proximity
* Gestures
* Slang
* Values & beliefs
1. http://money.howstuffworks.com/business/starting-a-job/10-tips-for-effective-workplace-communication.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://money.howstuffworks.com/business/starting-a-job/10-tips-for-effective-workplace-communication.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. www.asme.org [↑](#footnote-ref-3)