Improving team communication

In most companies, good teamwork is considered essential. Teams are often formed for a particular project or to achieve a specific goal, and the team members can come from different departments in the company. But one of the biggest problems that teams face is lack of communication, or miscommunication.

If you are heading a team, these tips will help you develop strategies to communicate well with all members, so that you can monitor progress of the project, get feedback, and make sure that everyone feels involved..

Tailor what you say to your team members

Different types of people like information presented in different ways. Some like to know the answer to ?why? questions (Why is this project important?); while others want the answer to ?how? questions (How can we increase sales by 5% in a recession?); to ?what? questions (What is this project about / What is the deadline?); or to ?What if? questions (What if we only concentrated on the European market?)

One way to involve all your team members - and to make sure that they all listen to you - is by tailoring what you say to answer these four types of questions beginning ?Why??, ?What??, ?How?? and ?What if??

Use different communication styles to reach everyone

As well as respecting different reasons for listening (as above), try to also respect different generations within your team, as different age groups also have preferred communication styles.

For example, older team members tend to prefer formal organisation structures and planned meetings, but they may not use up-to-date communication methods. People in their 30s or 40s are more likely to have a direct, informal communication style. Younger team members prefer working together and want regular feedback. They are also much more likely to demand a fun working environment, and have career (rather than company) loyalty. Having grown up in the internet age, they are also used to a variety of communication styles, such as email, messaging, blogs and so on.

Using the right style for different team members will help you ensure that all members feel included and valued.

Use different communication forms

A combination of different communication forms helps you to be both ?human? and clear. Use verbal communication for informal situations, but back it up with a written confirmation if the message is important, or likely to be misinterpreted. Written communication provides a permanent record of what was agreed or said, and is particularly useful in avoiding situations where individuals have remembered things differently from one another. Bear in mind, too, that if you appear positive and enthusiastic in your body language, you will be able to reinforce your spoken message.

You might choose to use some or all of these following methods of communication:

Team meetings / one-to-one meetings / Performance appraisal meetings (Often annual, these are formal opportunities to report on individual performance)

Minutes (which are either emailed or printed out, or more informal verbal follow-up from meetings)

Telephone conversations (follow up if necessary by written communication)

Instant messaging / chat (also useful for informal, regular feedback)

Video presentations / conferencing

Presentations (give summaries and handouts at the end)

Training sessions / courses

Memos (particularly useful for formal communication to all staff)

Progress reports (consider also sending these company-wide or to other work teams)

Newsletters (Weekly, bi-weekly and monthly newsletters can also be useful to report on progress)

Emails (limit to brief messages and use attachments for longer messages)

Web pages / blogs / microblogs such as Twitter to keep people informed of your whereabouts / texting

Five strategies for good communication

1. Structure what you say or write so it is clear, logical and concise

2. Only hold meetings if they are essential. Make sure you have clear meeting objectives, and then start and end the meeting on time. Summarise at the end of the meeting and clarify any points.

3. Be open and honest. Make sure your team knows what your vision and goals are. Also, realise that as a team leader you might need to make ? and communicate ? difficult decisions.

4. Listen to team members, and give and get feedback from your team members on progress.

5. Be available and flexible. Let your team members know when and how they can communicate with you. This means you might need to get up to speed on different communication forms and styles.