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1824

The University
of Manchester

INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS REVIEW TOOLKIT

"Leaders and managers do not have a choice whether to communicate or not. They only have a choice about how much to manage what they communicate."
Ed Schein, Professor, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Sloan School of Management

As soon as you set foot into your workplace you begin communicating - the way you talk, move your body, listen and interact with your colleagues. As a manager it's vital that you think carefully about the way you communicate with your team.

This toolkit has been designed specifically for managers - to help you take positive action to improve communications with your teams and colleagues.

It will show you the best way to put together an internal communications strategy and action plan and gives helpful advice on a range of communications channels which you can use here at the University.

Advice and support

Please don't feel that you're on your own through this process. If at any stage you would like to discuss your plans and ideas with the Internal Communications team, then contact:

- Tel: 61682
- Email: rachael.s.mcgraw@manchester.ac.uk

Benefits of good internal communications

Internal communications is vital because it:

- Improves operational efficiency. Staff will know what their role is and the part they play in the team. Managers will feel more empowered to make decisions themselves because they have the right knowledge and tools to make decisions.
- Drives forward change. Well informed staff may be less resistant to change. This is because they will know where they are, where they are going and how they are expected to get there.
- Builds community. Teams are more likely to work together in a supportive way, because they will understand what the combined aims and ambitions of the team are.
- Creates ambassadors. Happy and satisfied staff help to spread positive messages to other parts of the University and externally.
- Retains talent. A happy workforce is more likely to stay where it is – giving security to the team as a whole.

Audit of existing practices

The first step in putting together an internal communication strategy is to take a good look at your area of work and how communication works at the moment.

At the beginning of the audit process you need to ask yourself some important questions. These include:

- What is your team's mission and goals? How do these relate to the University's 2015 agenda?
- How is your workplace structured? What does your management team look like? What kind of staff do you have? Where do they work? What sort of jobs do they do?
- What kind of people work in your team? What motivates them? How do they feel about working in your team? What environment does your team work in?

In-depth auditing tools

There are also more in-depth auditing tools which can be used if you want to take an even closer look at your starting position.

One of these is called 'HELIX' and has been developed specifically for the higher education sector by HEFCE and a group of HE institutions.

HELIX is an evaluation and benchmarking tool which uses 35 best practice indicators to help you measure the views of your staff with regards to internal communications.

If you would like more information about HELIX, contact Rachael McGraw, Internal Communications Manager, on:

- Tel: 61682
- Email: rachael.s.mcgraw@manchester.ac.uk

Communications culture

Once you've got some answers to these questions you can move on to think about the things that characterise your team's communication culture. This is not always easy to quantify, but answering these questions will help get you off to a good start:

- Where does information come from in the first place – is the source reliable? Do managers/staff know how to access important news/decisions?
- How are decisions made? Do staff have the autonomy to make their own decisions?
- How is information shared between staff – what are the main communication channels?
- How formal is communication – do staff interact on a social level?
- What are your current and future internal communications needs?

Consultation

It's important that you consult the people who really matter in all of this – the people who work for and with you.

If your team has key customers throughout the University, or externally, it's also worth seeking their opinions – you'll be surprised by how the way your team communications can impact on the levels of service they provide.

Focus groups

Focus groups are a good way of gathering qualitative evidence which will help to inform your strategy. They involve bringing together groups of people who work for you and encouraging them to take part in a discussion around the key things you want to find out.

The University's Market Research Officer, Janice Ellis, can help you to organise and carry out focus groups.

- Tel: 275 58251
- Email: janice.ellis@manchester.ac.uk

Developing your strategy

The next stage is to use the information you've gathered to create your strategy.

- **Determine your goal**

  Your strategy needs a goal and your goal should answer the question 'What do you want your team to look like in the future?' Here's an example of a goal:

  "To ensure that everyone within the team has the right level of information to enable them to do their jobs effectively and efficiently."

- **Define your objectives**

  Your objectives will differ from your goal because they will be more specific and measurable. Your objectives should pay attention to the shortcomings you identified in your auditing stage. Here's an example of an objective:

  "To ensure that every member of staff within the team has a face-to-face meeting with their line manager at least once a month."

- **Define your audience**

  This is really important when it comes to deciding which tools and channels you are going to use. Knowing whether your staff are full or part-time, based on site or off, office based or mobile, will really help you.

- **Identify your key messages**

  Messages do not need to be complicated. Here's an example of a key message:

  "Staff's views are valued and feedback is encouraged."

  This message does not need to be explicitly stated in communications with staff - rather the communication should encourage staff to send back their comments and concerns.

- **Identify tools and tactics**

  Take a close look at how you're actually going to communicate with your staff – which channels you're going to use.

Creating an action plan

This is where you can start to plan out what you are going to do, when you're going to do it and whose responsibility it's going to be to carry out the actions.

An action plan can take the form of a simple table outlining your objectives, tools and tactics. It's vital that you make sure that someone is made responsible for carrying out the work – and that they are fully aware of what is expected. You also need to attach a timescale to each action – this will help you to figure out what needs to be done first before other actions can take place.

Finally you need to consider how you are going to measure the activity which you are planning. It's a good idea to attached key performance indicators (KPIs) to each action – this gives you something concrete to measure against when you come to your evaluation stage. Make sure that your KPIs are realistic and potentially achievable.

If you'd like to take a look at some of the action plans which have been put together in other parts of the University then contact Rachael McGraw, Internal Communications Manager, on:

- Tel: 61682
- Email: rachael.s.mcgraw@manchester.ac.uk

Finalise your strategy

Share your strategy and plan with some of your management colleagues and listen to their feedback. Set a deadline for when people need to get back to you and make sure that you take account of people's thoughts and ideas.

Monitoring and evaluating

Now it's time to put your action plan into practice – and review it on a regular basis. You should be open to the fact that you might have to make adjustments to your action plan if things aren't working.

There are a number of ways you can evaluate your action plan:

- Look and listen - Chat to your staff about how things are going. General observations and informal conversations with staff will give you a good impression as to whether communications has improved or not. You can also seek views during Personal Development Reviews.
- Survey - If you'd like to take a more formal approach you could carry out a staff survey. There's not much point doing this too early in the process however, as it does take time for actions to be put into place – and for people's perceptions to change.
- Focus groups - Carry out more focus groups – like you did at the beginning of the process. This is a good way for staff to air their views in a structured way.

Communication channels

Once you've got your strategy and action plan in place you can now consider some of the communications channels which may need to be created.

In broad terms communication is carried out either face-to-face or at a distance – usually through email, intranets or printed documents. Both means have their advantages and disadvantages.

You need to think carefully about which channel you use, when and why. You also need to think about regularly using a combination of channels to communicate the same message – don't assume that because you've sent an email to your team about something that a) they will all have read it; b) that they will all understand it and c) they will know what they're expected to do with the information. Think about using a mix of channels – face to face and written – to really get your message across.

Knowing which channel to use at what time will become easier the more communicating you do. The diagram below gives you a good idea of which channels can be most effective and in which circumstances:

	Email	**Meeting**	**Team Briefing**	**Presentation**	**Intranet**	**Newsletter**	**Noticeboard**
Simple change in policy					*	*	*
Complex change in policy		*		*	*		
Update a section on key issues	*		*	*		*	*
Planned change in working practices for small number of people	*	*	*				
Planned change in working practices for large number of people				*	*	*	
Highlight best practice			*	*	*	*	
Provide staff with information about their work			*	*	*	*	
Praise good work	*		*		*	*	
Information requiring urgent action		*	*				
Allocate work to deliver a project or policy	*	*					

Before we look at the channels available you need to consider the points below.

- ***What do you want to say?***
  Decide what your key message is and stick to it. Try to summarise the information in three or four key points.
- ***Who do you want to say it to?***
  Choose your audience carefully. Address too few people and not enough of your team will have the information they need to do their job properly. Address too many and you message may be disregarded as 'junk mail' because it is not relevant to a large proportion of people.
- ***What do you want people to do?***
  What is your reason for communicating? Are you trying to create awareness about an issue, improve understanding, build better working relationships, change somebody's attitude or get someone to do something? Make it clear in any communication what you are asking someone to do – then the recipient will know what is expected of them.

Face-to-face communication

The key to successful face-to-face communication is planning. If you're calling staff together to listen to you, then you need to think about what you're going to say. You should also think about any questions staff may raise as a result of what you're going to say and have some responses ready in advance.

Face-to-face communication, whether one-to-one or one-to-many, also provides good opportunities for two-way exchanges of thoughts, opinions, feelings and ideas. It's therefore the ideal tool to use when holding discussions on important issues and getting feedback from your audience. Remember to take a note of the feedback you receive and to either act on it or reply to it. Or pass it up the management chain if it's out of your control.

It's also the best tool to use if you're delivering difficult information. This might be hard for you to do, but your staff will respect you more if you do it. Finding out that your area of work might be restructured by email might seem like the easy way out, but it's not going to do you any favours in the long run as staff will feel disengaged from the process.
Face-to-face communication needs to form a central part of your communications strategy so here is an outline of some of the forms of face-to-face communication you can employ:

Operational meetings

Mainly deal with the day to day work and running of the team.

Team briefing

The University's Professional Support Services has its own team briefing system already in place. Team briefing is essentially a cascade of information which works its way down the management structure. For more information, read the Team Brief Guidelines at:

- (link to team brief guidelines)

Open meetings

These are usually led by a senior manager and focus on a particular topic. These sessions are useful for gathering feedback from staff– however bear in mind that some staff will not feel comfortable raising an issue in such a mass participation event.

School Boards

Each School is obliged under the statutes of the University to hold regular School Board meetings. The School Board should be made up of a core of staff and their role (according to the statutes) is to "discuss and transmit opinions on any matter impinging on the work of the School."

Team away day

Away days can be a very useful form of face to face communication. They are particularly helpful if you're trying to break down barriers between different parts of your team.

Walking the job

Managers can learn a lot about their staff by spending time with them as they carry out their day to day work. This is called 'walking the job' and can be a very effective communication tool because it shows commitment to really understanding the issues and concerns of your team.

Work shadowing

If you decide to commit to walking the job it's also a good idea to encourage staff to shadow their colleagues for a period of time. This gives staff a chance to appreciate the work that their colleagues do - this is especially useful in breaking down barriers between teams.

WEB-BASED COMMUNICATION

There are many different kinds of web-based communication tools you can use within your School/Division.

Email

There's no doubt that email has revolutionised the way that we communicate with each other - both at work and in our personal lives. The major downside to email communication is that it is in some ways too easy – and the temptation is there to inundate people with emails unnecessarily.

If this is the case staff can feel they are suffering from 'information overload' and will simply start to delete email without reading it first.

If you're going to use email to communicate with your team then it's a good idea to take a look at the email best practice guidelines which the University has put together. These can be found at:

- Email best practice

These guidelines give you really practical and useful advice on how to write emails and what to think about when using email as an effective communications tool. It's also worth discussing these guidelines with your staff so that they know what is expected of them.

Intranets

An intranet is a private computer network which is used to securely share any part of the organisations information or operational systems with its employees.

Here at the University, we have an extensive intranet system called StaffNet. Schools also have their own intranet sites. Some of these intranets are public and so can be viewed by anyone in the world. Others are password protected which offers some semblance of privacy to University staff.

The key to a successful intranet site is content – this must be kept current and relevant for staff as it needs to really engage staff.

You'll need to think about who maintains your intranet site as it's vital that content is added on a regular basis, otherwise staff will stop looking at the site if the same information is there all the time and never updated.

Benefits of intranets

Workforce productivity
Intranets can help users to locate and view information faster and use applications relevant to their role. This helps to increase the efficiency of your team.

Time
Intranets can make information available to employees as and when they need it, without them having to trawl through lots of information to find what they need.

Communication
They are good for conveying information quickly to large numbers of staff. They can also encourage two way communication through the use of email and blogs.

Easy to maintain
Intranets are great at enabling cumbersome corporate information to be updated in real time. Employee manuals, staff handbooks and company policies can all be put on an intranet site and be updated as and when they need to be.

Business operations
Think about the processes you might be involved in and whether they can be put onto your intranet, eg forms, information management, etc.

Cost effective
Instead of printing hundreds or thousands of copies of documents like staff handbooks – you could simply put the information on the intranet and then update the information as and when.

Webcasts and podcasts
The term 'webcast' refers to the broadcasting of either pictures or sound over the internet. This means that you can reach many members of staff with a single piece of communication.

A 'podcast' is a series of digital computer files, usually either digital audio or video, which are released periodically and made available for download on the web.

Blogs

A blog is a type of website usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events or other material such as graphics or video.

Many blogs provide commentary or news on a particular subject and the ability for readers to leave comments in an interactive format is an important part of many blogs. The term blog is a contraction of the term 'weblog'.

PRINT COMMUNICATION

Newsletters

Even in this multi-media age, there is still a place for printed materials when it comes to communicating with your colleagues.

A printed newsletter can be a useful tool, however it should never be your only means of communication. Printed publications should always be supplemented by a range of other communications channels like face-to-face, email and intranet.

This is mainly because, by their very nature, newsletters cannot easily communicate urgent or sensitive news. What they are good at is reinforcing – or expanding upon – messages which have already been conveyed by some other means.

Things to consider before deciding to produce a newsletter

- *Newsletters take time to produce*

You would need to set up an editorial process to collect, write and edit copy. Someone would also need to manage the design, print and distribution process.

- *Cost*
  Design and print cost money, so you would need to budget accordingly.

- *Regularity*
  Newsletters need to be produced on a regular basis. Whatever the schedule, deadlines need to be met as staff will be expecting newsletters to be issued on time.

- *Green issues*
  Do you need to produce multiple paper copies if the majority of your staff have email/internet access?

Before you start

- Think about what you want your newsletter to do – who is it for, what do you want it to say, how do you want it to look?
- Carry out some market research – do staff want it? If so, what do they want?
- Appoint an editor and put together an editorial group
- Think about who is going to design and print the newsletter – the University has an in-house design studio and a list of approved print suppliers
- How are you going to distribute it?
- Cost the project

Administrator is the StaffNet Team | Contact us about this page | Edit this page

Editorial

You need to think carefully about what kind of stories you want to appear in your newsletter. A mix of corporate messages and some social material usually works well.

The best way to collect editorial is to appoint an editor and an editorial group to gather together copy and ideas for stories. At the start of the production process the editorial group and editor should meet to decide the contents before going away to collect together the information.

Here are some things to think about when writing copy for newsletters:

- Length - 250 words for a news story, 500 words for a one-page feature, 700 words for a double-page feature, 50 - 100 words for news in brief
- Adopt a simple, straightforward and inclusive style (i.e. refer to staff as "we", "us" and "you", rather than "employees" and "colleagues")
- Tone – try to think about your audience when writing your stories. Try to be as open and straightforward as you can – don't be tempted to adopt 'management speak'
- Human interest – this simply means trying to bring the story alive for the reader. For example, if you want to promote a flexible working policy, find someone who works flexibly within your School and make them the centre of the feature.

Once the copy has been created it's a good idea to get the overall editor to cast an eye over it to make sure it's appropriate, well written and hits the right tone.

Further information

For further information, contact the Internal Communications Office on:

- Tel: 52112
- Email: uninews@manchester.ac.uk

Photography

A good newsletter should include some interesting and relevant photography. If you've got the budget you can commission a professional freelance photographer to take pictures for your magazine. The University uses a selection of photographers and can suggest one to suit your requirements and budget.

For details of freelance photographers and their rates contact the Division of Communications, Media and Public Relations on:

- Tel: 52112

If you've not got the budget for professional photography, then you can always take your own photos with a digital camera. Here are a few guidelines to bear in mind if you do this:

- Avoid the same people appearing in lots of different photos
- Try to keep the number of people in photos down to two or three rather than large groups
- Composition - think creatively about the image you are trying to convey. Avoid clichéd shots, such as line-ups of lots of people (restrict group photos to two or three people), handshakes and certificate/cheque presentations, people sat round desks
- Backdrop - try to make it interesting and relevant to the story.

Design

Once you've collected all the copy and a selection of photographs, you need to put together a page plan. This will help the designer to lay out the stories on each page.

Each page should ideally have a 'lead' story – this is the most important story on the page. The designer will lay the page out to give this story prominence. Your most important story should be the lead story on the front page.

Research shows that right hand side pages are best read in newsletters and magazines so any other important stories should ideally be placed on right hand side pages.

You should also try to make sure that each page includes at least one photo to break up the text and make it more interesting for the reader.

Once you've agreed your page plan you're ready to hand over to the designer.

The designer will take the editorial and photos you have provided and lay them out. They will produce 'proofs' for you to look at. You can check these proofs for spelling mistakes and other inaccuracies. At this stage it's useful for someone else to check the proofs too.

Once you're happy you can sign off the proofs and the newsletter will then be sent to the printer.

Further information

For further information contact the Design Studio on:

- Tel: 52448

Distribution

There are several options when it comes to distributing newsletters:

- Personal copies put in staff pigeonholes
- Copies left in communal staff area
- Newstands around the School building/s
- Email as a pdf – this means you don’t need to produce multiple paper copies

If most of your staff are office based then you could consider producing a pdf of the newsletter and emailing it to colleagues. If you choose this option you may need to print off some paper copies for staff in your School who are not office based and may not access their email on a regular basis.