

Tips on effective communication in the workplace



Covid-19 forced businesses to think differently about the way employees work, moving away from the conventional 8-5 desk jobs and implementing working-from-home policies.

The proverbial “business as usual” obviously no longer applies as we have been forced to consider new ways of working.

This required the implementation of technology to be fast-tracked in order to digitise the workforce. As a result, this also had an impact on the effectiveness of communication in the workplace.

In this blog, we aim to shed some light on the importance of effective communication in the workplace and reiterate the significance of quality over quantity.

The relevance of communication in business

Effective communication is the cornerstone of every relationship, including the relationship between employer and employee. It forms an essential part of any business's success, improving relationships between managers and their teams and the customer, which in turn leads to greater trust, efficiency and productivity. When the pandemic hit a year ago, companies which had always been reluctant to adopt working-from-home policies had but one choice: adapt (and fast). The challenge at that point was to avoid losing the human touch while the entire world went digital. We referred to the importance of regular contact with employees in our *Guidelines To Managing Employees Working From Home* article, pointing out that managers should play a facilitating role in regular check-ins between relevant team members.

Maintaining communication with employees working from home became a key focus point for most managers at the time. What is evident today is that the prevalence of online meetings and constant reminders to communicate have left employees feeling demotivated and overwhelmed instead of informed and *motivated while working from home*.

Understanding the importance of quality vs quantity workplace communication

Communication, when used without thought or purpose, can often lead to confusion and misunderstanding. The true key to communication therefore lies in its efficacy.

To keep teams connected, a strategy used by many was to “keep regular contact”, which largely resulted in recurring scheduled daily, weekly or monthly virtual meetings. The consensus was that these rigid appointments negatively affect team morale and do not align with the new normal; that we have been moving further away from the conventional “9 to 5” and are no longer strictly office bound. Our work schedules have been adapted to suit our needs; therefore, our approach to effective communication should serve our adapted work life.

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Improving communication culture has never been more important. Here are some points worth considering:

- **Methods of Communication** - Choose your communication method to suit the situation. In the ever-evolving world of technology, it is important to consider your options when it comes to choosing your communication method. Finding and using the correct tool for the job is half the battle. If the information needed is but a phone call away – make the call. Consider the recipient and decide on the preferred method: text message, email, phone call, virtual meeting or, if needed, meeting in person.
- **Communications Platform** - Choose a platform that everyone included in the conversation is familiar with and has access to. *It is also important for an employer to ensure protection of virtual meetings by using secure platforms.* It is worth spending some time to research available platforms such as Skype, MS Teams, Zoom, WhatsApp, Messenger, Trello – to name a few and to select the one or two that suit your employees best. It is also advisable to provide training on the use of these platforms to ensure smooth operation within the organisation.
- **Forum for Discussion** - Create MS Teams or WhatsApp groups as an informal forum for your team to share thoughts and ask questions throughout the day. This keeps your team members in the loop without disruption and promotes collaboration. It also assists in addressing possible challenges proactively or as the need arises. Be sure to set boundaries when using social messaging applications.
- **Availability** - Within the role of facilitator, managers will also be responsible for ensuring that they and their team members are available to assist when called on. Kindling a culture of open lines of communication relies on a network of employees who are eager and at the ready to support their team.
- **Limit Attendees** - There will be circumstances where group discussions are necessary. On these occasions it would be wise to limit the number of attendees to an absolute minimum without compromising the information or knowledge share. This will also focus your scrum sessions on the topic at hand rather than opening the floor for any and all discussion.

The question, a year ago, may have been “How do we keep our distance without becoming distant?” In an effort to retain a personal connection, overcorrection took place in the form of enforcing an excessive number of formal meetings. We now know that the answer is not to overwhelm employees with time-consuming meetings that only end up being counter-productive and demotivating. The key lies in clear, concise, effective communication.

Let it be said, in the conversation on communication: less is more.

For businesses to prepare themselves for this changing working environment, **SERR Synergy** has developed training courses in innovation and communication efficiency. *Our unique training product focuses on 4IR skills whereby businesses can benefit from various skills development programmes.* We have combined online and conventional classroom mandatory training and accredited and non-accredited training courses into one comprehensive product that is available on an affordable monthly retainer basis. *Our labour team also assist with the drafting of remote working policies (working-from-home policy) to safeguard the client in the event of labour disputes.*

About the author: Antonette du Plessis joined SERR Synergy in May 2019. She has a background in Education with majors in Guidance and Counselling but changed her focus to the corporate world in 2012. Since joining the team, she has had the opportunity to follow her passion for improvement and employee wellbeing as Assistant to both HR and Operations managers.

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