

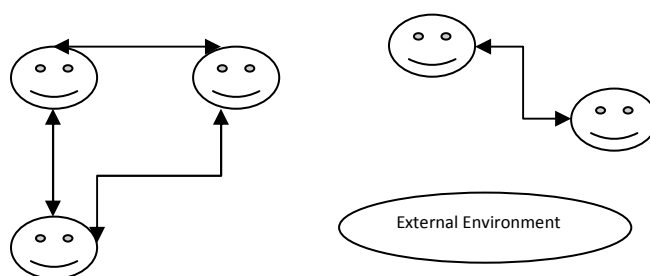
Improving operational effectiveness

The key to success in your team is effective communication. As important as it is for people to ask questions and to listen, it is more important that communication be effective. What does this mean? For your team to be effective it needs to achieve its strategic outcomes. For this to occur every activity undertaken by every member of your team must directly contribute towards achieving those outcomes.

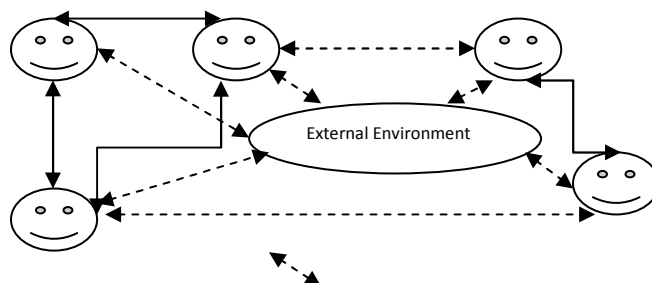
The single activity that is undertaken by every member of your team is communication. The problem with communication is that we do not view it as an activity; instead we see it as something that just occurs naturally, and it does. Because communication occurs naturally doesn't mean it will be effective. For communication to be effective the process of communicating needs to be managed.

What is the single most important management activity you must do? You must remove barriers to effective communication. Information is power – to fully empower your team, to ensure they have the knowledge to enable them to achieve, you must eliminate the barriers that prevent information being shared. Your team will perform more effectively when they share information and knowledge; collectively they will be able to work together in a collaborative manner to achieve desired outcomes.

How do you go about doing this? Firstly you need to be able to identify the communication channels in your team. Were you to achieve your team outcomes? Who needs to be communicating with whom? Is this happening? Can you identify the communication loops in your team? See the illustration below.



As the illustration shows, within your team there will exist a number of different communication channels. The illustration shows a potential problem. The two groups operate independent of each other – yet all five people in the two groups contribute jointly towards achieving outcomes. Worst still, there is little, if any intelligence feedback from the external environment. Unless the communication channels collaborate and share information their effectiveness will be impaired. The dotted lines show how communication and effectiveness can be improved.



Clearly this diagram is a simplified illustration. When groups of people collaborate and share information with each other they are working together for a common goal. When these same groups share the information they have on the emerging external environment they are able to be proactive about implementing change or new ideas. Take some time to map out the communication channels as you see them. Then ask yourself, what communication channels need to be in place to ensure we are as effective as we need to be? You have now identified the current situation and the desired situation. The difference is the gap that needs to be closed.

The gap can be closed by creating an environment designed to facilitate the sharing of information between groups. As the dotted lines show in the illustration, create common channels for sharing information and knowledge. This can be achieved through bringing groups together, creating common repositories of information, channelling all information to a common server, creating situations where groups need to collaborate and work together, sharing results, outcomes, issues and solutions.

One of the emerging barriers to communication is the attitude of managers towards online space. Currently our management ranks are occupied by aging baby boomers, many of them sharing a consistent lack of understanding of online communication channels. The likes of blogs, Facebook, Skype and Twitter may have started out as social collaboration tools; they, in fact, have the potential to become significant channels for distributing and sharing knowledge in our organisations. Ignoring their potential due to age, stubbornness or a lack of desire to learn something new is poor management and a poor use of available resources. Most organisations haven't, as yet, learned how to utilise an intranet effectively and they have been around for a decade!

This management tip has been brought to you compliments of John Coxon & Associates. We work with management teams and managers in the health sector and not for profit sector in Australia and New Zealand to help develop leadership capacity and management competencies. We achieve this through consulting, management coaching and professional development opportunities. Telephone Australia (03)5561 2228 or NZ (0272) 583232.

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