

### Effective communication

There are several factors that will determine what the best or most appropriate method of communication:

- ▶ Content of the message (e.g. is it confidential or lengthy)
- ▶ Speed required
- ▶ Amount of feedback wanted
- ▶ Type of feedback required – e.g. is a decision required from the person to whom the communication is sent
- ▶ Cost

The advancement of **information technology** has altered the way that many businesses communicate. For example, fax was a popular form of communication for businesses in the 1980's. Whilst it still has its uses, people now largely use e-mail instead. The internet is a key tool for many firms now to communicate with many different groups, such as advertising to customers and finding suppliers. Investing in the new technology is costly however and potentially it can become outdated within a few years. There is also the need to train many staff on how to use the technology effectively and even then some employees may be reluctant to change from their traditional methods.

**Formal communication** occurs when channels of communication are used which have been established by the firm. This may be when workers communicate with managers via works councils or trade union representatives. **Informal communication** is often known as communication through the grapevine and it can be useful for a manager as they can hear some useful and interesting information which they would not from official channels. This can often be akin to gossiping and it can transmit information quickly but not always accurately (just think how rumours and gossip spread through a school!).

Businesses need to have in place appropriate structures or technology in order to aid communication (e.g. e-mail facilities for all employees) but on an every day level it is down to individual managers and employees to ensure that they communicate their messages or information effectively. Not all managers for instance will naturally have good communication skills and there is an obvious need for training in this case to ensure they are able to choose the most appropriate communication method to get their message across clearly.

To be effective the message must be clearly understood by the receivers and also the receivers should be able to supply some **feedback**. When feedback occurs it is known as **two-way communication** and is seen as the most effective form of communication. The best example of this is direct face-to-face communication as the sender can get an immediate reaction in terms of the oral reply and also importantly from the receivers body language.

**One-way communication** occurs when there is no feedback given on a message, for example putting a notice on a notice board. This is suitable in some circumstances, if for instance someone is announcing a change of time for a meeting and little feedback is required, but generally employees should try to maximise methods that encourage two-way communication and feedback.

**Two-way feedback** is becoming relevant in firms for two main reasons.

- ▶ Many firms are introducing new techniques and initiatives, such as kaizen or total quality management, which rely on employee participation and feedback. In addition two-way communication is a pre-requisite for a democratic management style, which is becoming increasingly popular in businesses.

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- ▶ For many firms one of their main objectives is to grow in size (gaining market share or entering new markets) as this is seen as the way to boost profits. As a firm expands one of the major problems they will face will be to continue to communicate effectively with their increasing workforce and so maintain motivation levels

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