**UNIT 5: EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATION**

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**What is employee communication?**

It is the communication/exchange and transmission of messages or information between and among employees, and between employers and employees.

**Some objectives of employee communication**

* To help the employee understand his/her job and his/her company.
* To help the employee realize that his/her personal success is inseparable from the company’s success
* To help the employee realize that his/her job is important.

How to achieve the objectives

* Direct personal contact between employee and supervisor
* Inform employee about products, policies and procedures
* Encourage spirit of teamwork

Some principles of employee communication

* Be genuinely willing to share information with employees.
* Be transparent – be honest with employees. Dishonesty is worse than no communication at all. Communication should not be deliberately distorted or misleading, but factual and accurate.
* Be consistent – communication should not be a once in a while activity. Communicate regularly.
* Information should be timely. As much as possible don’t let employees hear from outside. They should not be surprised by a media report!
* Be visible – create situations where you can interact face-to-face with employees.
* Understand your employees – you may need to communicate differently with different audiences.
* Use many methods/tools – electronically, in writing, face-to-face, meetings, etc. Your message should be consistent.
* Match actions with words – if you say you will address a situation in a particular way – do it.
* Be forthcoming and continuous – always communicate both good news and bad news.
* Create an organizational habit for communication – share information about your organization, your objectives, how you are performing, your plans and prospects, etc.
* Facilitate conversations through meetings, question and answer sessions, etc.
* Be objective.

**Employees’ right to information**

There is growing recognition throughout the world of the moral right of individual employees to receive financial and other information about the organization they work for. Some countries even have legislation relating to disclosure of certain information to employees.

**Formal and informal communication networks in organizations**

Communication can be through formal structure of the organization (vertical, horizontal, etc) or through informal structure (the grapevine).

Information in groups or organizations flows in patterns called networks. By network we mean channels or pathways. Networks consist of members and links between members. These may be formally established by managers, or informally set up to meet the communication requirement of the group.

There are various types of network which can be categorized into:

Centralised networks - Here all information is passed through a central person. Examples are the chain, the Y, and the wheel

Decentralised networks – Here members of the group can communicate directly with each other without passing through the team leader. Examples are the circle and the all channel.

The choice of which communication network to use depends on:

* The nature of the group’s task
* The extent to which the group members need to communicate with each other to achieve group goals.

The function of communication networks include:

* Providing the means for coordinating the activities of individuals, groups, and other subunits within the organization
* Facilitating the exchange of information within the organisation

In planning employee communication you need to conduct a survey to determine what employees know and do not know about policies and other relevant information that needs to be communicated. A questionnaire would be the most useful.

**Methods/tools used for employee communication**

There are many methods or tools that can be used in employee communication. Selection of which method to use will depend on the subject that needs to be communicated to employees. The following are some of the methods/tools:

* Induction programmes/orientation programmes
* Printed and graphic communication – journals, newsletters, house journals, employee handbooks and manuals, etc.
* Annual report
* Management letters to employees and notices
* Product exhibits
* Payroll envelop inserts
* Reading racks
* Public address systems

**Other methods to enhance employee relations**

* Open days for employees and family
* Visits by senior executives to departments
* Meetings of management and employees
* Service awards (e,g. employee of the month)

**Employee feedback schemes**

Good communication is a two-way process so it is important to have employee feedback. Employee feedback systems include:

* Direct feedback – oral response to question or query
* Speak up schemes – A speak up is a voluntary effort to raise an issue or concern to those in positions of higher authority
* Suggestion boxes
* Exit interviews
* Group meetings/discussions targeting specific issues.