Develop personal performance and maintain working relationships

Note: This section is in two parts

Establish and maintain working relationships with others

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PART 2

Establish and maintain working relationships with others

Introduction

Establishing and maintaining working relationships with others is about working effectively with other people. This includes communicating clearly, co-operating with others, and helping to improve working practices. You may work closely within a team, or spend a significant amount of time working alone.
Working relationships

Good working relationships with others in the workplace are important, as they will help to:

- Ensure a smooth working environment ensuring good work output from staff.
- Promote a culture of trust between employer and employee.
- Improve employee motivation and job satisfaction.
- Enable work tasks to be achieved within time constraints.
- Promote a safer working environment.
- Encourage greater decision making both by the employer and employee.

The main methods of ensuring that good working relationships are maintained are as follows:

- good communication.
- good teamwork.
- honouring commitments made to colleagues.

Working relationships with your line manager

A good working relationship with your immediate line manager is important to ensure that work is carried out efficiently and effectively. For example, if you need to seek help from your line manager to improve your performance or understand how a work task is carried out; if there is an emergency; if you have difficulty with your work colleagues and when dealing with difficult clients or customers. Good working relations are built on mutual trust, good communications and good teamwork. You can seek assistance from your line manager by meeting formally as in a staff appraisal, meeting informally on a daily basis to obtain work details, in writing using letters, memos, email or reports and with face-to-face one to one verbal communication.

Any information discussed with your line manager should be correct, clear and timely. This will ensure that the information will be used to promote a culture of trust between you and your line manager, that the information will not mislead anybody and the timing will ensure a quick response so that appropriate action is taken.

Working relationships with your colleagues

A good working relationship with your colleagues is important to ensure that work is carried out effectively and safely, that good teamwork is promoted to ensure a smooth working environment and good work output from staff. Colleagues will need to know if there are any health and safety issues, problems that may have occurred with a particular job, be updated on work that has been carried out recently, have information about future plans/work and details of aspects of the job that have worked well. All information exchanged with colleagues should be correct, clear and timely. You must ensure that you honour commitments made to colleagues and prioritise work to ensure this happens. Some methods of working effectively with colleagues include:

- working as part of the team.
- compromising on disagreements.
- communicating information clearly and in good time.
- offering help when required, etc.
Working relationships with customers and clients

A good working relationship with your customers and clients is essential to ensure the success of your organisation. Good communication is vital if customer service is to be of the highest quality. As an employee you should always treat customers and clients with respect and courtesy.

Some of the most important considerations from a customer’s point of view include:
- Speedy response to queries.
- Not having to wait endlessly on a telephone.
- Speaking directly to someone who can help with their query/problem.
- Being informed about further developments.
- Feeling they can trust and feel confident in getting an appropriate response.

Dealing with complaints when things go badly wrong is a definite case for having a clear plan of communication. A simple plan that works extremely well is as follows:

Step 1: Find out what has happened.
Step 2: Decide on the priority.
Step 3: Decide on most appropriate action.
Step 4: Keep the customer informed.

Good communication with the customer will seek to find out the following:
- Customer requirements.
- If the customer’s needs are changing.
- If the service you provide should be altered in any way.
- How employees feel about current customer care.
- If your firm is sufficiently customer orientated.
- If staff are focused on customers needs.
- If customers are being lost to other businesses, and why.

Working relationships with others

A good working relationship with other people such as contractors, volunteers, members of the public, etc., is essential. You should always portray a professional and courteous image to others. Whilst at work you are representing your organisation, and other people you work with or meet in the course of your work are potential customers. They could also be in a position to recommend your organisation to other potential customers. Good communication is vital if customer service is to be of the highest quality. Volunteers need to be treated with respect as they are giving up their valuable time to help you and your organisation.
Dealing with disagreements in the workplace

If disagreements occur in the workplace these will need to be resolved, either through your line manager, a third party such as another colleague to arbitrate and/or by mutual agreement. Good working relationships should promote the solving of disagreements quickly and fairly as possible. The method/s for dealing with disagreements within your workplace may vary from an informal procedure to a formal grievance procedure. All organisations should have a written grievance procedure. A grievance is a real or imagined cause for complaint. It usually involves issues of comparative justice particularly if employees feel that they have been treated less well than others or less well than their entitlement.

A simple procedure may be as follows:

- **Stage 1** – The aggrieved employee approaches his/her immediate boss and may choose to be accompanied by a colleague or union representative. The boss should give a decision within a specified time, usually 10 working days from receiving the complaint. The grievance should be raised orally in the first instance, although the complainant may be asked to put it in writing.

- **Stage 2** – If the grievance has not been resolved at Stage 1, the complainant may refer the grievance to the next level of management, again accompanied by a colleague or union representative. The referral must be made in writing and will be dealt with quickly. The line manager will communicate his/her decision to the complainant in writing within 10 working days after the referral is made.

- **Stage 3** – If the grievance has not been resolved at Stage 2, the complainant must provide full written details of the complaint and should address it to the group personnel manager, a director, or an outside body as defined in the procedure.

Levels of responsibility in dealing with disagreement

If a member of the public makes a verbal complaint or has a disagreement with you during the course of your work, you should not get involved on an individual basis, as this could compromise you later or make the situation worse. However, this of course will depend upon the nature of the complaint and the way in which it is put to you by the individual complaining. If you are not sure, you should seek guidance from your line manager or senior member of the team. You must be courteous at all times when dealing with complaints and disagreements raised by the public, and be clear that you take complaints seriously and will discuss the issues with your line manager. You should also state that once a decision has been made somebody will communicate that with them in due course. You should not make decisions without first clearing them with your line manager or more experienced colleagues.

In terms of a disagreement with your colleagues, you should try and resolve these directly with them. However, if the situation were hot-tempered it would be far wiser to refer this to a senior member of the team or the supervisor. They will take an objective view and should make a decision that is in the best interests of the company and in resolving the disagreement.
Changes in working practices

Businesses need to undergo constant updating and improving of work to ensure the most efficient and cost-effective work practices are being used. This will also ensure the company operates effectively and remains competitive. When such changes occur it is important that employers communicate clearly with their employees, the reasons for the change. This will ensure that employees are fully aware of the implications and reasons why the changes are necessary.

Change in any part of an organisation is likely to have an impact on all parts of the organisation. Employees react differently to change. Ultimately, it is people that make a change process stop or go.

There are five basic types of reaction to change. These types of reaction can be explained further as follows:

- **Champions**
  Are usually few in number. They are the ones who are prepared to stick their neck out, run with an idea and own what happens.

- **Chaser (aka early adopters)**
  Follow champions because they wish to emulate them and/or because they rapidly see the advantages/benefits of the change.

- **Converts**
  Can fall either way. They are not particularly vocal but are likely to require solid evidence in favour or against the change.

- **Challengers**
  Only resist or challenge change because they care and/or have a strong stake in the outcome. If these people can be convinced that the change is necessary and valuable, it will succeed.

- **Changeophobics**
  No matter how irrational their fears are, these people will not be convinced. They are generally few in number and are only important in so far as they can stop change coming about, e.g. by influencing others.
Communication in the workplace

Communication is the passing on of ideas and information from one person to another, resulting in a clear understanding and response in the form of action. Clear communications are essential when carrying out all work activities, and in work it is essential to have good clear channels of communication in order to get help or the cooperation of others, to successfully complete jobs. The different kinds of people you may need to communicate with in the course of your work include: workmates, supervisors, clients, members of the public, including children and golf club members, and other businesses or places. Communication can be in a number of forms, including: speaking, writing, listening, data communication, actions and gestures (body language).

Some methods of effective communication include:

- ability to listen to others.
- volume and clarity of voice.
- use of body language.
- use of eye contact.
- adapting speech to suit the listener.

Communication takes up a significant proportion of workers’ time, and the building and developing of communication skills must be viewed as a vital requirement of your job. You must be able to communicate effectively both in spoken and written forms and should not try to blame other people for their lack of understanding.

Communication with your workmates

You may talk informally about work, your hobbies, sport and your social life to your workmates. You will communicate with workmates on a one-to-one basis and in groups.

Communication with your supervisor, customers and clients

You may communicate on a more formal basis and be more polite when communicating with your supervisor or customers and clients. This will be on a one-to-one basis and in groups. Often you will have to remember what they have said in order to remember the details of a job they want you to do. You may also have to report back to your supervisor, and what you say must be relevant and accurate. For example, they might ask you how a particular piece of work is going. You should always speak politely and courteously to customers and clients, as these are the people that keep your company in business, you will communicate with them one-to-one and in groups. Listening carefully to customers and clients is essential so that you can respond to their needs.

Communication with members of the public

You may often need to communicate with the public in the course of your work. You will not speak to adults in the same way that you speak to children. You will tend to be less formal with children. It is important that you are respectful and courteous when communicating with the public, as you are representing your company, and any member of the public may be a customer or client in the future.
Successful communication

Effective communication requires not only the development of the basic skills of speaking, listening, reading, writing and use of information technology, but also awareness and an understanding of your job, the audience and your environment. For communication to be successful not only must information be passed on, it must also be fully received and understood. Listening and reading skills are just as important as speaking and writing skills.

The passage of information can be seen as a flow from the sender to the receiver in the diagram below:

Diagram to show information flow

Reasons for effective and clear communications

The following diagram indicates possible reasons for effective and clear communications:
Communication will be successful only when it achieves the intended result. This effectiveness depends on the choice of destination, the clarity of the message, the choice of communication medium, and finally the right method of delivery. Successful communication in the workplace will also help develop better working relations between workmates, supervisors, customers, clients and members of the public.

**The choice of communication method**

The main methods of communication used in many workplaces are written (or printed), spoken, visual and/or electronic. In practice there is considerable overlap.

**Written communication**

Written (and printed) communications are used to pass on information and ideas to others within an organisation. They may also be used to confirm important verbal messages.

**Memorandum (Memos)**

One of the most frequently used forms of internal communication is the memorandum. They are used to communicate information, instructions and enquiries and are the internal equivalent of a letter. Memos should be kept as short as possible and should ideally deal with only one matter. They will frequently be distributed to more than one person. Many organisations provide their employees with pads of headed message forms.

The table below indicates the layout of a typical memorandum:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Organisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MEMO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From: ..........................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To: ..........................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copies: .................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date: .................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject: .................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message written here:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>..................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>..................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>..................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>..................................................</td>
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<tr>
<td>..................................................</td>
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<tr>
<td>..................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>..................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>..................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name and title of sender of the memo: ..................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TELEPHONE: ..................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOBILE: ..................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAX: ..................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMAIL: ..................................</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reports

A report is a written communication from someone who has collected and studied some facts or issues, sent to a person who has asked for the report for a particular purpose. The report will often form the basis for a decision that needs to be taken.

A well-written report will be concise and not contain anything the reader does not need to know. It should be clear and arranged logically. Reports may be informal or formal (set out according to a particular pattern). A typical structure for a long formal report will be:

- title page (name of organisation, name and post of writer, subject).
- table of contents/index.
- terms of reference (explaining the research for the report).
- procedure (how the task was completed).
- findings.
- conclusion (summary of findings).
- recommendations.
- signature of writer and date.

In preparing a report, it will be necessary to consider aspects such as language style, circulation list, presentation of cover and binding, and confidentiality.

Agendas and minutes

An agenda is a formal outline of the issues to be raised at a meeting. It consists of a number of headings, and must contain the date, time and place of the meeting. Ideally an agenda should be sent in advance to all those invited to the meeting so that they have an opportunity to prepare their contributions.

The table below shows the typical format for an agenda:

```
Meeting Title: ..................................................  
Venue: ............................................................  
Date: ...............................................................  
Time: ...............................................................  
Agenda
    1. Present
    2. Apologies
    3. Minutes of the last meeting
    4. Matters arising
    5. Items for inclusion/discussion
    6. Any other business (AOB)
    7. Date of next meeting (DONM)
```
Minutes are a written record of what was discussed at a meeting, and who was there. In an organisation, minutes of meetings that involve a wider audience are often placed on a notice board or sent to key people by e-mail to inform them of decisions that have taken place. Minutes must be presented in a clear and unambiguous way, and they require concise sentence construction. They usually include timescales for appropriate action to be taken.

The table below shows the typical set of minutes from a meeting:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meeting Title:</th>
<th>Greenkeeper Team meeting – Pleasant Valley Golf Club</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Venue:</td>
<td>Head Greenkeeper’s Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date:</td>
<td>07/07/03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time:</td>
<td>14:30 hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Minutes:

1. Present: ASW; DF; CAB; GG
2. Apologies: DNC
3. Minutes of the last meeting
   3.1 Agreed as an accurate record.
4. Matters arising
   4.1 ASW has now been able to secure new first aid kits for the machinery workshop.
   4.2 A training session with the machinery manufacturer has been arranged for 25/07/03. All staff should attend.
5. Update on resources
   5.1 The Committee has approved a new member of staff and an advert is currently being drawn up. This will be placed in the local papers and the national trade press by the end of next week.
   5.2 New machinery is being tried out on the course and a decision will be made on the most suitable fairway mower once the range has been put through its paces.
6. Future course developments
   6.1 ASW explained the alterations that had been proposed for the construction works that are due to commence after the autumn maintenance programme has finished.
   6.2 A plan is currently being drawn up and will be displayed on the main notice board. CAB will be devising work schedules and circulate these in due course.
7. Any other business (AOB)
   7.1 Date for staff appraisals need to be confirmed.
8. Date of next meeting (DONM)
   8.1 1430 hours on 06/08/03 in Head Greenkeeper’s office.

Action:

| ASW |
| ASW / Secretary |
| All staff/CAB |
| ASW |
| CAB |
| ASW |
| All |

Business letters

Business letters are still one of the most widely used forms of external communication from an organisation. They provide a written record and can be used to send almost any type of information. A well-written letter conveys a favourable impression of an organisation. Business letters are usually typed or printed on headed A4 paper. A letter that is laid out to fit right across the page is the most common form of display (see example in the table below). Letters should be written in a
logical sequence and in a style that lacks ambiguity. They should be concise and yet not leave out any relevant information. A typical business letter will contain the following features:
- heading or letterhead reference, enabling the letter to be filed and traced later.
- date.
- address of the recipient.
- salutation (“Dear . . ,”).
- subject heading.
- body of the letter.
- complimentary close (“Yours faithfully/sincerely . .”).

There is a convention about the pairings of salutation and complementary close, “Dear Sir/Madam” should be paired with “Yours faithfully” and “Dear Mr/Mrs X” should be paired with “Yours sincerely”.

The diagram below indicates the layout of a typical business letter:
Facsimile (Fax) and e-mail

A form of printed external communication that underwent massive expansion over recent years was the facsimile or ‘fax’. A fax machine sends information electronically over a telephone line. Faxes are still sent in large numbers, but they have now been overtaken by another alternative to writing letters, that is, the use of electronic mail (e-mail). The ‘mail-box’ is a computer terminal linked to the telephone network. It can put messages into the system and store messages that have been sent through the system. A message can be sent to several mailboxes at once, so the system can also be used for internal memos in a company with several branches. The message will be stored in a terminal’s memory until the mailbox is ‘opened’. There are now a number of subscriber internet-based electronic mail services. To use such a system, a subscriber sends a message using the telephone line. The main advantage over ordinary mail is speed and the ability to exchange large quantities of data in an electronic format.

The diagram below indicates the layout of a typical e-mail memorandum

--- File information ---
File: PQR Construction.doc
Date: 9 June 2003, 13:57
Size: 22016 bytes
Type: Unknown

Use of the telephone

The use of the telephone is an integral part of our work activities. It is important to appreciate how long is spent using this immediate form of communication. It has been estimated that the average office-based employee using the telephone spends up to 35 days per year; that equates to about 5% of every working day. If this time is to be spent in efficient communication, certain procedures should be adopted. The need to be always prepared with the content of what you are going to say and getting straight to the point is basic common sense.
The table below shows some advantages and disadvantages of using the telephone as a method of business communication:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• If used efficiently it can be an excellent method of communication.</td>
<td>• When taking a call you may not be prepared.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interpersonal voice skills can be used to advantage.</td>
<td>• Lack of non-verbal feedback (expression of face) – unless videophone is used.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Instant feedback.</td>
<td>• Can become a major distraction or annoyance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cost saving if managed wisely.</td>
<td>• If not managed wisely can be expensive in time and money (calling to mobile phones can significantly increase expense).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Voicemail reduces missed opportunities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hints on using the telephone

What you say and how you say it could reflect positively or negatively on you, your company and employer. If you give the wrong impression there could be adverse effects on the business due to the customer’s perception of this. It is important to consider the following tips when using the telephone for business communication:

- Answer the telephone within three to five rings.
- Before using the telephone you should be fully prepared. All information that is needed must be at hand. If the call is a complaint you need to consider what strategy/tactic will be used? Being prepared will allow you to be more confident and assertive.
- Good clear communication is essential. Speak with clear pronunciation into the mouthpiece.
- Concentrate on what you are saying and what is being said.
- Always be prepared for an answering service. Have your message scripted and remember to leave your name, time of call and a contact number. Ensure that you do not speak too fast when giving these details out.
- When answering a call, have a greeting. This should always identify your location and company. A salutation such as “How can I help you?” could follow this.
- Give the caller ample opportunity to talk without interruptions. Vary your voice tone, pitch and inflection. This will give added meaning to what you are saying.
- Smiling when using the telephone will be reflected in your voice.
- Notes should be made on each point covered during a telephone conversation.
- Do not carry out other activities such as typing on the computer keyboard whilst on the telephone. This will cause a loss of concentration and can be easily sensed by the caller.
Verbal (speaking) communication and behavioural (non-verbal) communication

Verbal communication involves the transmission of information by word of mouth, either directly or on the telephone. Much of the time it involves face-to-face exchanges for the purpose of relaying messages, providing advice, personal discussion, analysis, giving instructions and guidance, etc. Face-to-face contact creates a less formal relationship, enables individuals to get to know each other and allows for instantaneous feedback. The main disadvantage of face-to-face contact, however, is that it can be a time-consuming exercise, which usually provides no permanent record of the discussion. It can also lack precision and create misunderstandings. Verbal communication is important in meetings, which are held to deal with many issues and areas of concern. They provide an opportunity for staff to pool their experiences and knowledge.

Effective body language is a key part of effective communication. The important thing is to take an open and honest posture when dealing with other people.

- Do not stand over people and talk down to them.
- Do not make aggressive gestures such as pointing your finger in a menacing way or raising your arm.
- Also be wary of crossing your arms. This is a very defensive position, which tends to indicate that you are uncomfortable with the situation and are trying to defend yourself.
- Do not hang your head in a submissive way, as this tends to show weakness.
- Try to look alert, and nod your head in agreement when listening. Look interested, and lean forward into a discussion rather than back and away from it. If you adopt a confident posture you will feel more confident.
- The use of ‘eye contact’ is very important. Try to look someone honestly in the eye (without staring). There is nothing quite so disturbing as someone who keeps looking away or jerking his or her head during a conversation.

Listening

Listening is a very important skill to use in the workplace. You should always try and look alert and interested when listening to colleague or your line manager. Nod your head in agreement when listening and lean forward into the discussion rather than back and away from it. It is important when listening on the telephone to ask for clarification and to take brief notes, for reference purposes later.

Other forms of communication in the workplace

Proactive communication

This is communication that has been pre-planned. You use this form of communication when you take the initiative and begin a course of action rather than react to events or the initiative of others. It may include speaking, listening, writing and behaving. An example of proactive communication would be when you undertake a disciplinary interview, telephone a customer to ask directly for an appointment, or when you ask a colleague for assistance. Other examples of proactive communication include:

- you ask your boss for time off.
- you offer help to a workmate.
- you instruct a workmate on the safety aspects of a mowing machine.
you ask children to climb down off a fence. In all these cases, you are taking the initiative and making something happen.

Reactive communication

Reactive or responsive communication is generated through initial proactive communication. You respond instead of taking the initiative. This may be as a result of your supervisor questioning you about an incident or during emergency situations. Other examples of reactive communication include:

- you give directions as requested by a member of the public.
- someone asks the time and you respond.
- your supervisor asks you to help, and you agree.
- you agree to a client’s request.
- you thank a workmate for helping you with a particular task.

Here you are responding to the situation and not taking the initiative.

Information communication technology (ICT)

A number of factors have contributed to the importance of information communication technology in modern organisational life:

- The scale of many large organisations makes it impossible for every individual to meet face-to-face.
- Many organisations are geographically spread out, but require communication links between interrelated offices and locations.
- Modern business decision-making frequently requires up-to-date information drawn from a variety of business functions. For example, the marketing department may need sales figures from sales, costings from accounts, etc.
- Competition between firms is fierce. It is almost impossible for a company to find a market area that is not extremely competitive.
- The rate of change of industrial development has increased. Firms must therefore be quicker in responding to factors such as technological change, market forces and better competition.

Communication problems

These are known collectively as NOISE and may lead to a message not being communicated adequately to be fully understood by the receiver. Problems can arise for a number of reasons including:

- The language used may not be properly understood. It may be too technical or the receiver comes from a different background than that of the sender.
- The person receiving the message may not want to listen to the content of the message. In this situation the message has to be redesigned to appeal to the receiver.
- The message may be far too complicated, and may not be properly understood.
- The message may be set out badly or be ambiguous.
- The working environment may generate interference from other activities, particularly if the workplace is noisy and the message is long or complicated and requires concentration by the receiver.
The sender may be using a poor method of communication. Effective communication will be hampered if the means of passing the message is poor.

Cultural differences may influence how the message is interpreted.

Methods of overcoming communication problems

Poor communication can be overcome by:

- Using appropriate language at the right level suitable for the audience. Only use technical jargon if the receiver is able to understand it.
- Choose an appropriate method to communicate. For example, use a plan of a site to show how to construct a landscape feature, rather than a written document explaining how to construct it.
- Break complicated messages down into bite size chunks of information.
- Reduce noise levels in the workplace and select appropriate venues for meetings.
- Ensure that you make yourself aware of any cultural differences and disabilities that people may have which could affect the communication. The receiver may have a hearing problem and/or be visually impaired.