

Using effective communications

Introduction



Although they might not know it, when people are at work they engage in the process of communication all the time. For example, they may be contacting others by sending an e-mail or talking to a colleague by a photocopier machine. They might be answering a phone or putting forward ideas and thoughts at a meeting.

In other settings they could be receiving communications. They might be reading an e-mail, listening to a staff briefing or looking at a document sent by someone else.

Why is effective communication so important?

Communications are at the very heart of all business activity. So it is essential that people in a company assess such practices to ensure they are working well.

Effective communications help to create a direction and basis for everyone's activities.

According to the communication theorist Wilbur Schramm (1955), communication 'is the process of establishing a commonness or oneness of thought between a sender and a receiver'. In other words, it helps employees to work towards the same goals, giving them a similar direction and purpose. In doing so, effective communications help to create a direction and basis for everyone's activities.

What does UNISON do?

UNISON has 1.3 million members, a headquarters in London and 12 regional offices including one in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It has 1,200 staff and 1,300 branches. There are conferences to sort out and members to represent and support across a range of issues. So it needs good communications.

This case study looks at the communication activities of UNISON, Britain's biggest trade union. It shows how it uses a range of methods to help its members deal with the many issues they face within their workplaces, through the Head Office, regions and local branches.

Each branch has a branch secretary who is elected by his or her colleagues. These people need the data and the skills of others in UNISON to help them act as best as they can.

UNISON acts for its members from the public services and utilities across a wide range of jobs. These can be in local authorities, the NHS, police, electricity, gas, water, colleges and schools, transport and the voluntary sector.