

## Using effective communications

### Using effective communications to create direction

#### Introduction

UNISON is Britain's biggest trade union. It has 1.3 million members. Its members are workers in public services. These include local councils, health, schools and the police. It also includes utilities such as power or water. UNISON needs good communication. But what does this mean in practice? One model is called the Shannon-Weaver model. This follows the journey of a message.

1. The message is 'encoded'. This means it is put into a certain form. This could be, for example, in writing or a picture.
2. A way to send the message is chosen. This is called the medium. This could be, for instance, a letter, or email, or a poster.
3. When the message is received it is 'decoded'. This means that the person has to work out what the message means. The whole process can be clouded by what is known as 'noise'. For instance, the wrong medium could be used or unclear language.

#### Internal and external communication

Communication can be internal - within a body, or external - to an outside body. Internally, UNISON uses:

- \* project groups, meetings and briefings
- \* posters and other printed material. These include its in-house magazine, *InsideOut*
- \* the intranet and email. Externally, UNISON makes use of its website. It also uses print and new methods such as DVDs. One DVD is called '10 good reasons to join UNISON'. This is used by branches to help recruit members.

#### Formal and informal communications

Formal communications take place within set channels. They follow set routes. For instance, any policy change comes from members. This follows a set route upwards. Informal routes do not have set rules. Sometimes these can have more power than formal routes.

#### Benefits

Everyone in the country is touched by public services. So it is vital that any dispute is solved quickly. Good communication helps this. Groups in dispute need to understand each other. This leads to disputes being solved quickly. UNISON uses a number of types of communication to help bring problems into the public eye. For instance, it ran an NHS day of action in order to try to change government thinking. This used a number of methods such as the press and the website. It also asked members to lobby MPs. There were also public meetings and a number of promotional items. As a result, the day was a success.

#### Overcoming barriers

Communication is weaker if there are factors blocking it. These are called barriers. For instance, some members may not have access to email. Others may not have English as a first language. UNISON tries to counter such factors at branch level. It provides the means for all members to access messages. Lone workers may also be hard to contact. These are people who work alone. To counter this, UNISON may target individuals.

**Conclusion**

Good communication helps to make UNISON effective. It helps it to sort out issues and disputes and control campaigns. This also helps policies put forward by members to be discussed at the Annual Conference. UNISON may then adopt them.