Communication & Diversity in the Workplace

by Ruth Mayhew, Demand Media
http://smallbusiness.chron.com/communication-diversity-workplace-11389.html

Business communication is essential in the workplace -- it underlies productivity and the quality of workplace relationships and it forges organizational success. Yet diversity in your workplace may make business and employee communication a challenge. Depending on the type of workforce diversity, it could be necessary to re-evaluate how you can improve the effectiveness of your communication efforts.

Types of Communication

Formal communication in the workplace mostly includes business and interoffice memoranda, company inserts or fliers in customer invoices, and annual reports. It also includes employee handbooks, performance appraisals, disciplinary and corrective action materials and information packets about group health insurance coverage and retirement savings options. Informal business communication consists of verbal warnings that supervisors give employees about performance missteps, emails, memoranda and handwritten notes; information exchanged during supervisors' pre-shift meetings; manager comments about employee performance and dozens of other verbal and written communication pieces that are far less critical to business operations.

Diversity in the Workplace

During the advent of civil rights and affirmative action in the 1960s and 1970s, the term diversity usually meant employee differences based on race, sex, color, national origin and religion. Over the course of 40 to 50 years, additional employee characteristics became part of the definition of diversity. Generational diversity, in particular, is a topic that refers to the mix of values, work styles, ages and skill sets that employees of four to five distinct generations bring to the work force. The generations are traditionalists, baby boomers, Generation X, Generation Y and members of the Millennials generation. Diversity in the workplace also includes workers with physical limitations or developmental disabilities and employees who represent various cultures and backgrounds. The demographics of the workplace make diversity a term with an ever-changing definition.

Related Reading: Causes & Effects of Diversity in the Workplace

Communication for a Diverse Workforce

Communication for a diverse workforce requires understanding how diverse employee populations perceive business communication. Some employees believe constant memoranda and employee meetings are time wasters and, as such, might simply tune out both the message and the messenger. Other employees want to be informed of every company move, and if they believe transparency is missing from communication with employees, they begin to feel undervalued and unappreciated. Employee communication is critical to maintaining the employer-employee relationship. It's difficult to modify the communication method in a workplace of several different communication preferences. Nevertheless, employers should consider preparing their business communication in a variety of formats to suit employee preferences. For example, give employees the option of attending a face-to-face meeting on the state of the company or signing up for a webinar broadcast of the company president's message. Another option is to release the meeting transcript, complete with attendees' questions and answers.

Communication from a Diverse Workforce

Likewise, employers who improve their communication styles and increase the media they use should also be flexible in receiving communication from employees. Some workers find one-on-one meetings more productive, while others are satisfied with a brief email exchange. Effective communication generally is defined as the method that clearly accurately conveys the intended message. Managing communication for a diverse workforce calls for knowledge of differences and flexibility in conveying and receiving information.