5 Basic Ways to Improve Interdepartmental Communications

Interdepartmental communications can be a vital organizational need but often overlooked in the process of managing the individual needs of each department. Some departments require more direct interdepartmental communications and others far less; QA, engineering, sales may need to communicate more whereas marketing, production and customer services may need to communicate a little less. However, any organization that does not have appropriate lines of communication between departments is in danger of making costly mistakes and missing important opportunities.

Innovation and problem mitigation and solving is often a result of input from an unlikely source who sees what insiders failed to see. Regardless of the size of your organization if you have employees in different departments interdepartmental communications arrangements should be on your agenda.

Here are 5 steps you can implement to help facilitate interdepartmental communications:

1. **Clarify what information needs to be shared:** This is an obvious item yet one of the biggest failures. Keep updates brief and include only the key information not all the extras. Ask employees to consider bullet point, highlight sharing, including dates, key people, project or item name and actions taken/required/underway/completed, needs and deadlines, resources available or used, staffing changes, key staff contacts/roles and even problems/challenges. Understanding the challenges of the other department can encourage support and the provision of timely and needed information

2. **Build Interdepartmental communication into the process:** Include a website, wiki or social network where information is posted for both departments to access. Of course this information can become cluttered and include information that is relevant only to one department. Creating a highlights section and/or assigning a communications expert to monitor or manage the content can smooth the process and deliver the information when it is needed. Clarify the process for sharing and with whom to share, identify information mavens/sources (tied to role not person) and assign that person(s) the job of parsing out information appropriately and regularly.

3. **Raise the Visibility of Department Managers Relationship:** If team members feel the department heads are sharing information they may feel both more comfortable and more inclined to share. Of course, a contentious relationship between different managers will not help, if this is the case then you may need to bring

in a 3rd party facilitator to improve that relationship before communications between teams or departments will open up. Remember to reward your managers who encourage and facilitate their staff to make interdepartmental communication a priority.

4. **Share Staff:** Rotate staff, share a support person, hire from other departments and/or arrange a secondment. People who work with one another are more inclined to know what information is useful, know whom to share with and when and how to share.

5. **Conduct joint department meetings:** Throughout the year departments may participate in joint events such as a team building, fun picnics, even personal milestones such as birthdays, retirements and showers but these special events rarely engender relationship building. Rotating weekly 30-minute update meeting once per week where several department representatives attend can facilitate understanding and information sharing. These meetings need not be in person, they can include a virtual component.

Remind everyone that it is in the best interest of the organization that information be shared to time, resources and money can be saved and everyone can contribute to the success of the entire organization.