

# COMMUNICATION PROTOCOLS

Effective workplace communication is critical for building relationships, providing services, and delivering outcomes. The implementation of communication protocols in the workplace assists to set expectations and prioritises open and frequent communication between all staff. Communication protocols also represent commitment to organisational values such as teamwork. Good communication improves the productivity of staff and has a demonstrable effect on creating a good workplace culture.

## PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Effective communication is based on a connection between two or more people that allows for the exchange of thoughts, feelings, and ideas.

**There are four primary principles of communication:**

1. The message that is sent (what is said) is not necessarily the message that is received (what is heard)
2. All actions communicate certain messages
3. All messages have content and feeling
4. Non-verbal cues are paramount

To be an effective communicator people need to be cognisant of their audience and any internal factors that may affect that person's interpretation of the communication. The process of feedback enables better communication by reiterating the message and checking the accuracy of the information repeated back. Verbal communication is only a small part of the larger communication process, with body language, facial expressions, tone and volume all playing a role in how communication is received.

If there is a discrepancy between content and feeling in a message, the receiver can become confused. There is heightened risk for written communication to be misunderstood because the content is not supplemented by non-verbal cues. Where there is a discrepancy between content and feeling, it is likely the receiver of information will rely more heavily on feeling. For this reason, it is important to align content and feeling as much as possible to reduce the likelihood of confusion.

## BENEFITS OF COMMUNICATION PROTOCOLS

- Establishes expectations for all staff
- Ensures accountability
- Builds consistency in messaging
- Creates alignment between staff at all levels
- Fosters connection in the workplace

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It is important to humanise interactions between staff in the workplace, especially in instances where there is a reporting hierarchy. The following additional principles can help to create two-way relationships that are conducive to effective communication.

- 1. Start with safety** – all communication, especially confidential communication, should occur in an environment that is conducive to safety for all parties. This is especially important for conversations that involve negative feedback.
- 2. Build trust** – in the absence of trust, communication is likely to be misconstrued and create tension in the workplace. Where there is trust between parties there is a higher likelihood that the conversation will be productive and effective.
- 3. Listen to understand** – it is imperative that two-way conversations have a goal to listen to understand how the other person feels and to understand their point of view.
- 4. Align the verbal and non-verbal parts of your message** – if non-verbal cues do not mirror the content of the message the receiver is likely to become confused and make their own inferences about the true purpose of the conversation. When faced with a mismatch between verbal and non-verbal cues the receiver of information will believe the non-verbal as the true message.
- 5. Stay low on the ladder of inference** – in all communication both parties absorb information and make inferences based on both content, feeling, and their own experiences and biases. This leads to beliefs and assumptions about people, topics, or situations that may not be grounded in fact.