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# Introduction

Successful businesses have powerful, efficient and trustworthy systems that rely on effective and accurate methods of communication, controlled and run by well-trained, informed and motivated people.

This book informs candidates of Business and Communication GCSE about effective communication systems and the roles and responsibilities of the people who design, operate and update them. The book seeks to explain the importance of accurate and efficient systems in the success or failure of a business's response to the customer and the stakeholder of the business. It will provide opportunities for the candidate to apply their knowledge of systems in a variety of different contexts and to practise and develop skills in the different software applications.

The emphasis is on the development of a clear understanding of the importance of communication. As well as discovering the functions of different businesses and their wider context within industry, the text will analyse the kinds of barriers and constraints that exist to deny some businesses success.

This book is structured to take you step by step through your Business and Communication Systems qualification. It has followed the headings in your specification and you will find information about every aspect of your course in these pages.



# Workplace organisation

## IN THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL INVESTIGATE ...

- The working environment
- New working practices
- Health and safety
- Data preparation, storage and retrieval
- Security of data
- Effective use of resources

## THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT

There are as many different working environments as there are businesses. Each type of workplace organisation has to be designed so that the work can be done safely, accurately and efficiently. Although each environment will be organised differently, there are certain aspects of the workplace that will be the same.

It is not very easy to work at a computer without a desk and a chair. There needs to be space to lay out plans or books and charts if the business activity demands this. A business involved in cutting out cloth or rolling metal will need to have the space and the equipment set up efficiently in order that the activity can take place satisfactorily and safely.

Some business activity requires a quiet place to work, whilst other activities require that people work together in groups or teams. In some businesses there is a need for both **interactive** spaces and quiet spaces. In the **Marketing** Department a team may work together to come up with an idea to **promote** a new product. The team may need to be working in the same room so that ideas can be discussed, drawings and plans drafted and redrafted. A sales person may need to work in a quiet space, talking to customers on the telephone to find out their needs and successfully sell the product or service on offer without being disturbed or distracted by background noise.



### KEY TERMS

**Interactive** To act and respond to each other

**Marketing** The process of offering the right products or services at the right place, at the right time and at the right price

**Promote** Making a product known to customers by using the media to advertise it



## The open plan office environment

[Fig 2.1]

Many businesses have chosen, or have been forced, to design their office space so that people work in what is known as an open environment. This means that the business has probably decided to make the best use of the space that they have available and to reduce the number of individual offices.

There are definite advantages of working in this way, including the following:

- It promotes team working and gives employees and managers the opportunity to discuss work issues immediately without having to find someone in another office. Work can be moved freely from one person to another without the need to walk from office to office.
- Employees feel less alone than if they were confined to a separate office.
- Equipment can be shared, for example individuals can share telephone handsets, faxes, printers and other office equipment.
- It can help individuals to understand the work done by others within the business.
- Managers may be more accessible to their team.
- There can be more immediate communication across different **functional** areas of the business.
- It is often a light and airy atmosphere whereas partitioned offices might be dark and small.
- Managers can see clearly the work that is taking place.
- It is cheaper than a series of smaller rooms from the point of view of lighting, heating and cleaning.



### KEY TERMS

**Functional** The different job roles or duties within a business organisation, for example the role of different departments

**Think about it!**

**F**ind a definition of the word 'confidentiality'. Find some examples of when a business would need to make sure there was somewhere for confidential activity to take place.

However, there are disadvantages to an open plan office, including the following:

- It can be noisy and distract those who need to concentrate, particularly if there are several other employees moving around the office.
- There may be nowhere to go if privacy is needed or the work being undertaken is confidential.
- An employee might think that he or she is being watched and this might make him/her feel uncomfortable.
- Individuals can be possessive about their own space and feel annoyed if it is invaded by other workers.
- It is easier to lose or mislay important documents if more than one person has access to the same space.
- There is an increased possibility of theft, both of equipment and of information. Certainly it is worth considering that some individuals may be able to access information when they are not entitled to do so.
- Infection can spread more easily in this type of office environment, particularly colds, therefore employees might be absent from work more often.
- There could be problems regarding the amount of heating or lighting that individuals prefer, as one person's taste and preference is not the same as another's.
- The office may feel as if it does not really belong to anyone and this could make it an impersonal place to work.

**Action Points**

- 1** Visit local branches of banks and building societies and observe the way they operate. Many have moved to a more open plan environment. Observe the activities taking place. There may be people waiting to pay money into the bank or to draw money out, people with queries or enquiries about loans, savings or mortgages, etc.
- 2** How do the different organisations deal with issues such as privacy and confidentiality?
- 3** Is the environment neat and organised?



- 4 Are the customers well served?
- 5 Write an account of your observations of one of the places you have visited.
- 6 In your opinion, how might the environment be improved for the following:
  - Staff?
  - Customers?

## The cellular office

[Fig 2.2]

Putting one person or a few people into small offices is a much more traditional approach to workplace organisation. This more traditional space is referred to as the cellular office, although even in open plan environments it is likely that some of the more senior members of the business will have their own private office or working space.

Advantages of the cellular office environment might include:

- A quiet and more private environment which would enable the employee to work with the minimum amount of disturbance.
- It offers privacy both to the occupant of the office and to other employees who visit.
- Meetings can be held privately, particularly with customers of the business.

- The work and associated papers and equipment are contained and belong only to the person or persons working in the office. However, noisy equipment could be situated outside the office itself in order to reduce disturbance.
- It offers the individual the opportunity to make the office more personal. This can help the employee feel more comfortable in their work environment.
- Security is improved because the individual offices are often lockable. This is as important for access to information as it is for access to equipment. Confidential information can be kept secure and valuable equipment is safe when the office is not occupied.

However, there are also some disadvantages to the cellular office and these might be:

- The employee or group of employees within the office is not constantly supervised by a manager so there could be times when they are not working to their full potential.
- Equipment will be needed for each office and it could be that it is only used infrequently. This means that from the business's point of view it is not always **cost effective**.
- An individual can be very possessive of their own office space.
- The individual employee could feel isolated and out of touch with the rest of the business.



## KEY TERMS

**Cost effective** Something is said to be cost effective if it does not cost too much to do and has benefits to the business that equal the cost of putting the process or equipment in place



## KEY TERMS

**Chartered accountant** A person who has achieved a recognised accountancy qualification



## Think about it!

**M**ike had worked for many years for Des who was a **chartered accountant**. Mike was not really trained as an accountant, but he had picked up how to balance the books and put the information into the correct order. He worked in a small office next to Des. There was a receptionist, but she worked in the reception office and did not really have very much to say. Mike worked methodically. He was quite happy until Des decided to sell his practice to a larger, much more modern, firm. Mike was to be part of the deal. He was OK about this until he started work at the new firm. He was working in a large open plan office with lots of other accounts clerks. Telephones rang and people shouted. Mike became conscious of the fact that he was used to working in a mess and was constantly told to tidy up his area. He was also unhappy about the fact that people in the office used his pens and his paper.

What do you think Mike should do about his situation?



## Workplace policies and practices

Regardless of the type of office environment used in an organisation, the business will have a number of set procedures or policies in place to ensure that the working environment is safe and pleasant for its employees. Safety, as we will see later in this chapter, is something that an organisation has to be very aware of by law. So, too, is the health and comfort of the employees. The organisation will have set procedures in place to cover the following aspects of the working environment:

- The health and safety of employees. This is a legal requirement which we will look at in some detail below.
- The safety of machinery and equipment being used by employees. The business will not want accidents to occur because they have not been thorough in their instructions regarding the use of machinery and equipment. Employees who use machinery and equipment on a regular basis as part of their job have to be well trained in its use. The business also needs to ensure that the machinery or equipment is regularly serviced or maintained by a qualified person.
- There may be a no smoking policy within the organisation. This will be in place in order to make the working environment more comfortable for non-smokers and also to reduce the risk of fire.
- There may be a no eating or drinking at desk policy in place. This will reduce the risk of the spillage of liquids near expensive equipment, such as computers, and will also reduce the risk of food being left around the office. Obviously if food is left in a waste basket overnight there is a chance that mice will be attracted to the premises and this could be a health risk to employees.
- Policies will also be in place regarding alcohol and drugs. Obviously the business will not want to be associated with the use of either on the premises, but there will be procedures for dealing with employees who arrived for work in an unfit state because they had used these substances.
- As we will discuss later, emergency procedures are required by law. The business should ensure that all employees are fully aware of what to do in the case of an emergency at the organisation. These procedures will cover emergency situations such as fire, flood, leaks of dangerous substances and security alerts.
- Personal presentation and dress code is one area where an organisation may enforce stringent rules. This means that



employees have to ensure that they dress for work and behave in an appropriate manner at work. This is important in order to make a good impression on customers. For those employees who regularly come into contact with customers, the business may make an allowance of money for their clothing or supply them with a uniform. This ensures that the employees are well presented and the customer forms a good impression of the business.

## Planning for working

Businesses will want their employees to give them value for the money they are paying them and will do all they can to ensure that daily tasks are done in the shortest possible time. In order to help their employees, the business will have a number of policies in place to reduce the amount of time spent on different tasks.

It is in the employees' interests, as well as the interests of the business, that efficient and effective office systems are used. It is worth remembering, however, that all offices have their own work loads and demands and no one office is the same as another. However, all offices would want to ensure that:

- Employees know how work is planned and by whom.
- Employees know how work is organised and scheduled.
- Each employee knows how his or her own work area is organised.
- Each employee knows where other employees are situated within the business.
- Employees know how machinery and equipment is taken care of, by whom and why.
- Employees know about the Government laws regarding health and safety.

Being organised is very important for everyone who has a job, whatever it involves. These organisational skills, as they are known, can include any of the following:

- Being neat and tidy in your own desk area.
- Keeping a diary up to date, particularly if the job involves several meetings. This could be a normal desk diary or it could be an electronic one. Some offices also use wall planners, wall charts and planner boards to keep their employees informed on forthcoming meetings or key dates.
- Storing materials and paperwork in an efficient way to ensure that they can always be found when needed. This also applies to the way in which files are stored on a computer system.



- Managing time efficiently and being aware of the need to make the best use of the time spent at work and not wasting too much time.

### Team working

Communication between departments and individuals within an organisation is vital if a business is to succeed. Employees working in an organisation rarely work alone and more often than not teams are created to carry out certain tasks. A team is a group of individuals working together towards a single common objective. When working as a member of a team, people need to know which members of the team have the power and authority. In other words, who is actually in charge of the efforts of the team? It is common to find a supervisor fulfilling this role. Businesses have recognised the advantages of building teams and many pay for their employees to attend training programmes to encourage a particular way of working.

Teams communicate in several different ways and members of a team require many different communication skills. We discuss this in some detail in Chapter 4 of this book, but basically, to be a successful team member, the following skills are required:

- The ability to communicate.
- An understanding of the objective of the task.
- The ability to carry out a variety of tasks within the team.

Teams are encouraged within the organisation for the following reasons:

- Teams give employees a sense of belonging.
- Individual employees can help one another by sharing goals and objectives.
- Individual employees can share common interests and ideas.
- Teams often get noticed by management, whereas individuals can often go unnoticed.

## NEW WORKING PRACTICES

Although, traditionally, work meant going off to the office or factory every day, in more recent years this has changed. Nowadays many people consider work to be quite different from this traditional view and businesses have had to adapt in order to attract new employees and keep their existing ones. The working environment has changed in the following ways.

## Hot desking

In hot desking (which is also sometimes called 'location independent working', 'virtual office' or 'hotelling') the employees do not have their own desks but are given work space to use according to the needs of the task that they are working on. They keep their own belongings in a filing cabinet or locker, but share office furniture and equipment with other employees. This system of working is most commonly used by businesses whose employees spend a lot of time out of the office, possibly visiting their customers or working from home. By not giving them a permanent desk space or telephone the business can reduce **costs** and use the space they would have taken up.



### KEY TERMS

**Costs** A business's financial commitments arising out of its operations

## Working from home and teleworking

[Fig 2.3]

There is a definite shift in working practices taking place in some organisations and we need to consider this carefully. It is likely that as time goes by the nature of work and the relationship between home and work will change dramatically. Generations of workers have been used to leaving home in the morning to do a day's work, returning home in the evening leaving work firmly behind them. This is changing and many people work from home at least some of the time. This is particularly true of those people that work with computers. The ability to use email and the internet has provided the opportunity for information to be sent at the touch of a button all over the world. Individuals can keep in touch with people at the office and with their customers and suppliers. Mobile telephones mean that people can communicate when they are anywhere – on the train, walking the dog, even when they are in the bath.



There are distinct advantages to working from home as opposed to attending a workplace every day, including:

- Travelling time for the employee is reduced or eliminated and this saves money and time and reduces the effect on the environment.
- There may be less distraction and fewer demands on the employee.
- There is time to concentrate on specific projects or reports.
- The employee has less need for formal work-style clothes.
- Work can be combined with other aspects of life such as family commitments.

However, talk to anyone who does work from home and there are definitely disadvantages:

- It can be very lonely and the employee might find it difficult to become **motivated**.
- There are many distractions that allow the individual to put off starting to work.
- It is easy to lose touch with important events happening in the workplace.
- There is less of a distinction between home time and work time, so it is difficult to know when to work and when to 'be at home'.
- Other people will telephone or visit during work hours because you are at home.



### KEY TERMS

**Motivated** An individual who enjoys work and wishes to do a good job



### Think about it!

**W**hen Steve was given the opportunity to work from home three days a week he was delighted. The pressure of travelling for two hours a day in rush-hour traffic and the constant interruptions once he arrived at the office had been getting him down. He had a demanding job as a design technician that required a lot of concentration and he needed time and peace to work. So working from home for part of the week would be ideal.

He set up his computer with the **CAD** software he needed as well as more basic office software for day-to-day administration, he had a small telephone system installed, and bought a fax machine and a small photocopying and scanning system. He was all set up.

For the first week or two Steve worked pretty well. He worked at home on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday and went into the office on Monday and Friday. He would begin at 9.30am and find himself still



### KEY TERMS

**CAD** Computer Aided Design; computer software that allows users to create designs and edit them