Chapter 1:

Improving Workplace Communication

¶1-100 The Importance of Communication

Perhaps one of the least understood aspects of social interaction is the ability of people to communicate, that is, their ability to send and receive information. The process of communication, however, involves not just the transmission of basic information, but information which contains concepts, ideas (both abstract and concrete), plans, directions, intentions and emotions. It is also affected by people's expectations, perceptions, attitudes, background experience and many other social and cultural factors. Combined with this is the ability to process, store and remember extensive amounts of information — whether past, present, or relating to the future. Our capabilities in this area have been enhanced by the increased availability of modern, automated types of information processing and storage equipment.

The main problem experienced by organisations occurs not in this area, however, but in the area of *interpersonal* communication. Many misunderstandings, disputes, accidents, errors, delays or other problems at the workplace are attributed to "communication barriers and breakdowns".

Obviously, communication, as an exchange of ideas between people, underlies all the aspects a company's operations. Major examples include the recruitment interview, the induction process, training, safety instructions, performance appraisal, counselling employees and the various issues which affect productivity. Better knowledge and understanding of communication skills and human behaviour can improve the effectiveness of all these functions.

The communication process is dynamic. Changes in organisation structure and function should be examined to assess their effect on both the formal and informal existing communication networks, and to find what adjustments are required to keep the right people informed in the right way.

Methods of Communication

¶1-120 Components of the process

Communication has two components: a *sending* component (such as speaking, writing) and a *receiving* component (such as listening, reading). It is desirable to both understand and be able to use effectively the various tools available which can improve both sending and receiving skills. These skills are discussed further below.

Feedback

Communication is not complete without some form of response or feedback to ensure that the message has been received and interpreted correctly. The receiver now becomes the source of communication, and intentionally or unintentionally sends back a response or message to the original sender, which will help the original sender in assessing whether or not the message was received accurately, and whether any modification or follow-up is required. The feedback or reply may be intentional or unintentional — the receiver may deliberately reply, or may unintentionally reply by looking confused, appearing not to understand, etc. In assessing feedback, non-verbal behaviour can be of particular importance. Feedback can be encoded:

1. *in words* — the receiver may ask questions of the sender, repeat the message, or simply state that the message has been received and understood.
2. *in gestures* or facial expression — a nod of the head or a smile is often sufficient to indicate understanding.
3. *in action* — if the receiver follows up by carrying out the instructions or by other actions which indicate the message has been received and understood.

Note that various other things may affect the accuracy of communication by interfering with any part of the process. The effect is similar to static affecting radio reception. The sender can create noise if unable to understand or describe adequately the information being sent, the channel or medium may contain static or other problems that prevent the message from being transferred accurately, the receiver may decode the message incorrectly, or may attach the wrong meaning to it. Several items competing for attention (eg on a notice board) may create noise in the transmission of each other's messages, so that none are effective.

¶1-130 Methods used

Verbal

This is the more obvious type and may be either expressive, such as speaking, writing or sending e-mail, or receptive, such as listening, reading, films, pictures, etc.

Non-verbal

These are indications of communication and frequently convey the emotional content of the message, which is often the most important aspect. Common examples appear below.

- *Actions.* We can communicate "yes" or "no" by shaking our heads in different ways. Placing our head in our hands can indicate that we feel tired or sick, or perhaps we are thinking. A slap can communicate displeasure and anger, or affection.
- *Posture.* An upright posture communicates alertness and perhaps discipline. A slumped posture can indicate tiredness, ill health or possibly indifference.
- *Gesture.* Many people "talk with their hands". People who are deaf and dumb communicate with their hands. We wave a hand as a greeting or to say goodbye, we shake hands as a sign of friendship. While we are talking we often move our hands to emphasise points, or because we are nervous. Head movement may also be revealing.
- *Facial expression.* People communicate a great deal with their faces. A frown can indicate anger or bewilderment, a smile indicates happiness. Lack of eye contact might mean the receiver is not interested in the message, dishonest, embarrassed, or their attention is elsewhere.
- *Clothing.* People often dress or wear their hair in a particular fashion in order to communicate something about themselves. A young man in a leather jacket and boots may want you to think of him as a "bikie".
- *Position and location.* How people place themselves when speaking or being spoken to can convey different messages — for instance standing very close can be threatening, secretive or very familiar, depending on circumstances. In particular, power or dominance can be established through positioning and location. For instance, to use one's own office instead of neutral ground when negotiating can be a demonstration of a

position of power. Arrangement and content of office furniture may also be revealing.

- *Voice.* In addition to using words our voice is used like an instrument to communicate messages. We do this by varying our *tone, pitch and volume*. Our feelings tend to be expressed through the tone of voice. We can vary the meaning of words by placing the emphasis differently. For example:
  - What are *you* doing? Puts emphasis on the person.
  - *What* are you doing? Puts emphasis on the action.
  - In most cases, clear communication depends on the use of both verbal and non-verbal aspects.

¶1-140 Communication networks

Apart from "normal" conversations and interactions, the following are examples of formal communication methods commonly used in organisations:

- interview
- staff meeting, team meetings
- training course
- film
- group discussion
- office equipment, eg computers
- sign/poster
- chart/graph/diagram
- electronic mail
- inter-office memo/forms
- policy or procedure manual
- organisation chart
- suggestion scheme
- notice board
- company magazine
- attitude survey
- induction form
- voice mail messages

It is also necessary to be aware of the difference between each organisation's formal and informal networks.

Formal network

The formal network operates in one of three ways:

(a) downwards — from a supervisor to subordinates through directions, orders, instructions, etc;

(b) upwards — from subordinate to supervisor through reports, advices, action, etc; and

(c) horizontally — people on an equivalent hierarchy level communicate with each other. The downward/upward networks are described as vertical communication.

Informal network

The information network, or grapevine, is perhaps the most efficient and yet most inefficient communicator in an organisation. Its efficiency lies in its ability to reach almost every person in the organisation very quickly with information. Its weakness is its completely unstructured approach to disseminating the information — it depends for its effectiveness on the attitude of staff members to each other. It is impossible to control the information — some may be added, more deleted — the information may be as much the product of fact as of fiction. Yet the grapevine fulfils a very useful social purpose by allowing all members of the organisation to participate in the communication process. Thus it can establish and maintain the morale of a workforce. It also permits access to sources of information which, though unofficial, may represent a closer position to the official source of power in the organisation.

Managers must be aware of the existence of the informal networks operating in the organisation. They should not seek to destroy them because of their enormous socially cohesive force. But management should ensure that the official communication channels effectively disseminate information the company needs its employees to have, and ensure also that official channels allow the expression of opinion to flow from the bottom to the top of the organisation. This upward flow is quickly stilled by a refusal of management to accept the validity of communication from lower levels of an organisation. It is quickly stopped by a belief by management that it is always right. Management always get the information it deserves. Thus managers who always react to bad information by seeking culprits apart from themselves and their policies will rarely be told bad news. They will always be "fed a line" by subordinates eager to protect and enhance their own positions.

How networks operate

It is possible to classify networks, whether formal or informal, into four categories, depending upon intended function. These are set out in the table below.

Network	Purpose	Examples
Regulative	to secure conformity to plans, policies, procedures or rules	job description, supervisor requests/directions, memos, policy statements, organisation chart
Innovative	problem solving and introducing change	suggestion schemes, project teams, staff meetings, employee appraisal
Integrative	to maintain employee morale and organisation stability	grapevine, informal meetings, grievance discussions, coffee break, company magazine, attitude survey
Informative	to improve productivity and effectiveness by supplying information	training programs, interview, memos/reports, notice board, induction program

Some forms of communication, such as an address by the Managing Director, or meetings of small groups could, depending upon the context, be classified under more than one network.

¶1-150 The effects of work groups

The formation of groups of employees in an organisation will affect the flow of communication. Groups may be either formal (established by management on the basis of work flow, location or a particular project) or informal (formed by employees themselves according to personal desires, interests, friendships, peers and social needs). Informal groups may contain members at a variety of levels and locations in an organisation and thus cut across many of its formal communication channels. In many cases, such channels will determine the operation of the grapevine.

Work groups have both advantages and drawbacks as far as communication is concerned, depending upon the group's cohesiveness, leadership and member content. Advantages include the potential to satisfy social and emotional needs, the encouragement and discussion of new ideas (as less risk is involved if there is group responsibility) and the greater likelihood that people will cooperate with each other. On the other hand, the operation of group norms and pressure towards conformity may act as barriers to the spread of ideas (see below). There is also a danger that vested interests may form in conflict with overall organisation goals.

The implications of work groups are that management must be aware of the existence and content of both types of group within the organisation and how they affect the communication process. Communications must be planned so that they can effectively pass through group norms, values, attitudes, interests, perceptions and frames of reference.

Groupthink

"Groupthink" is a phenomenon which often occurs in meetings and groups, where members of the group are reluctant to consider or suggest other approaches for fear of disturbing the group's cohesiveness and power. Maintaining cohesiveness and power takes precedence over conducting impartial evaluations. The symptoms of Groupthink[1] are as follows:

- *invulnerability* — convinced that the group's past successes will continue, members are over-optimistic when faced with contrary evidence;
- *rationale* — through lack of criticism, the group rationalises away threats into a consensus;
- *morality* — members believe they will not make bad decisions, so they ignore criticisms and / or do not fully consider the consequences of their decisions;
- *stereotyping* — when criticism arises, its sources are discredited;
- *direct pressure* — individual members who express doubts or deviant viewpoints are pressured to conform;
- *self-censorship* — individuals keep their misgivings to themselves;
- *unanimity* — the group reaches consensus because the most vocal members are in agreement; and

[1] Identified by IL Janis in "Groupthink", *Psychology Today*, November 1971, pp 43–46.

Chapter 6:

Suggestion Schemes

¶6-000 What Are Suggestion Schemes?

Suggestion schemes are a method by which organisations draw on the expertise of their employees in order to improve the organisation's position, for example through improved products, better work methods, improved efficiency or reduced costs. Employees are encouraged, through a formal process, to submit proposals to management for such improvements. Normally, the employee receives a reward if the organisation adopts the suggestion.

Suggestion schemes have existed for many years, although many organisations have opted instead for a "quality circle" approach which involves groups of employees meeting to discuss work-related problems and suggest improvements or solutions. With suggestion schemes, the emphasis is more on individual contributions submitted in writing.

A suggestion is defined by National Association of Suggestion Systems, USA as follows:

> "... an idea which poses a problem, potential problem or opportunity; presents a solution; is written on the prescribed suggestion form; is signed by the suggester; and has been received and dated and time-stamped by the suggestion office. A true suggestion must contain all these ingredients."

As can be seen from this definition, a suggestion scheme requires some formal administrative guidelines.

¶6-005 Potential Benefits

A well-run suggestion scheme can offer a wide range of potential benefits to an organisation. A full list appears below.

- Improved work methods.
- Improved product design.
- Improved product quality.
- Improved safety.
- Cost reduction/greater cost efficiency.
- Improved workplace communications.
- Improved plant/equipment, or better use of existing plant/equipment.
- More efficient administration/record-keeping.
- Reduced wastage, delays, etc.

- Improved working conditions.
- A "safety valve" where employee complaints can be turned into constructive improvements.

There are also many potential benefits for employees, including the following:

- An opportunity to supplement regular earnings.
- General recognition of the employee.
- An opportunity for an employee to demonstrate special talents or interests and bring them to management's attention.
- An opportunity for employee self-expression.
- Increased interest in the job and the organisation.
- A say in the running of the workplace.

Before introducing a suggestion scheme, however, the organisation should consider some important questions. For example, could the benefits listed above be obtained more effectively by some other approach, such as quality circles or work study? Are employees already contributing suggestions in the course of their employment? Is management willing to treat a suggestion scheme as an ongoing arrangement and display continued commitment and support towards it?

¶6-010 Administration of a Scheme

A suggestion scheme should contain each of the following features:

- an initial statement explaining the operation of the scheme and indicating management support for it;
- the active support of supervisors at the workplace and their participation in promotion of the scheme — otherwise there is a danger that supervisors will be bypassed;
- a standard procedure or form for the submission of suggestions;
- a lodgment procedure, such as a suggestion box or name of a committee member (see below);
- a committee, preferably comprising both management and employee representatives, to administer both the suggestion scheme itself and the evaluation process for suggestions;
- criteria for the assessment of suggestions;
- a structure of rewards for suggestions which are assessed as beneficial;
- methods of promoting the scheme and ensuring its continuity;

- a procedure whereby an employee can appeal if a suggestion is not adopted or not considered valuable; and
- criteria for evaluation of the scheme itself.

To incorporate these features, the following issues need to be considered.

Eligibility

The scheme's initial statement must define who is eligible to submit suggestions. In some cases, it will be possible to include all employees, but in others it may be prudent to exclude senior managers. It may be necessary to exclude suggestions which relate directly to an employee's normal duties and responsibilities, in order to exclude employees involved in review, planning or audit functions. In these areas, some fairly subjective decisions may be necessary to determine eligibility.

Timing of introduction

A suggestion scheme is unlikely to successfully establish itself unless the industrial relations climate at the workplace is favourable to start with. It is important to obtain employee and management support for the scheme from the early planning stages. Both groups must understand the proposal and agree with the motives for establishing it. It must not, for example, be seen as a reflection on management competence. A scheme should not be introduced while an organisation is in a transition period or while there is a backlog of obvious improvements to be made.

Suggestion forms

Where a formal suggestion scheme operates, a standardised suggestion form is probably necessary. The form should contain full details of the scheme's operation (policy, lodgment, evaluation criteria, reward system, etc). It should also allow sufficient space for a full explanation of the suggestion and, where necessary, illustration of it.

Lodgment procedure

Where a suggestion scheme committee is established (see below), the suggestion should be forwarded to it. The committee should promptly acknowledge the suggestion in writing and ensure it is assessed promptly as well. A means by which the anonymity of the employee making the suggestion is protected while the suggestion is being assessed may be necessary.

Assistance to employees to complete the forms used and to present the suggestion in general should be available, both from the administering committee and from relevant managers and supervisors.

Suggestion scheme committee

In most large organisations, a committee to assess suggestions made under the scheme will be required. The committee should consist of both management and employee representatives, in order to maintain credibility and keep employees informed. It should make at least an initial assessment of each suggestion, but will often need to seek further information and evaluation from people who are experts in the area relevant to the suggestion, such as engineers or section managers. The person lodging the suggestion should be advised of the evaluation system used. The committee should retain some record of its discussions and decisions.

The committee may also recommend further lines of enquiry or research to the submitter of the suggestion which may make it more complete or more acceptable.

Appeals provision

It is important to have a formal appeals provision built into the scheme. It could be used by those employees whose suggestions are not adopted and those who feel they received insufficient reward for them. The appeals provision is also a useful safeguard against possible legal problems.

¶6-015 Rewards

Determining rewards to be made under a suggestion scheme is often a very difficult and controversial area. In general, the reward for the suggestion will be based on its assessed value to the organisation, but both subjective and objective factors may be involved. The following criteria may be used to assess the value of a suggestion:

- extent of improved efficiency or productivity;

- extent of improved service;
- extent of cost or time savings;
- how widespread the use of the suggestion can be;
- how long the suggestion is likely to be usable for; and
- how ready the suggestion is for implementation.

Some schemes have devised a point allocation method based on criteria such as the above, and given monetary awards based on the number of points scored by the suggestion. Popular approaches are to offer a monetary award based on either a percentage of the annual cost saving to the organisation or a percentage of the increased profit, up to a maximum limit.

However, there are also many instances where it is inappropriate to assess the worth of a suggestion merely according to some monetary formula, for example in the following cases.

- Some suggestions result in improvements which simply cannot be assessed by a formula, for example many suggestions which improve safety, health or working conditions.
- Many suggestions concern only minor matters or lead to minor benefits, but they are still very useful and must be encouraged.
- A reward should also reflect where possible the amount of effort, research and ingenuity shown by the employee. It may be possible to include this factor as part of a points system.
- Some suggestions may be good ones which involved a lot of effort by the employee, but for some reason the organisation cannot or does not implement them. In such cases, there may be justification for making a nominal award on the grounds of employee recognition, maintaining motivation and maintaining the impetus of the scheme.

In each of the above four cases, it may be appropriate to award fixed monetary amounts to employees. In many schemes, minor suggestions make up the majority of suggestions received and their cumulative value to the organisation may be substantial even though their individual contributions are small.

An important part of the reward system is its non-monetary aspect — recognition. Studies of various suggestion schemes indicate that this aspect can have considerable impact on employees. Therefore, it should be exploited to the full. Approaches include presentations, award certificates, write-ups in company magazines, notifying local newspapers, publication of benefits to the organisation, etc.

Finally, the organisation should decide whether it is appropriate to set minimum and maximum monetary rewards. As mentioned above, many suggestions should receive a nominal reward. Any minimum amount which is set should bear this in mind. Non-monetary rewards should still also be used in such cases. Care is needed if a maximum amount is set — for example, if it is too low the organisation may be accused of taking employees' ideas "on the cheap" and removing some incentive, but conversely an unrealistically high limit may lead to cynicism.

¶6-020 The Legal Position

It is possible for the wording of a staff suggestion form to become legally binding in some situations. It is therefore prudent to have the contents of a form checked by legal experts before issuing the form.

Where disputes between the organisation and employees have arisen, they have generally involved one of the following situations:

- management rejects an employee suggestion initially, but later adopts the suggestion without acknowledging or rewarding the employee; or
- management claims it was already researching the subject matter of the suggestion prior to receiving the suggestion from an employee.

There is an implication for the organisation to keep meticulous records of any proposals it is considering, in case it has to prove their prior existence.

It is a useful safeguard to include an appeals provision for employees in the suggestion scheme.

¶6-025 Potential Drawbacks

While a suggestion scheme can result in many benefits to an organisation, several drawbacks can also surface if it is not carefully planned and implemented. Before establishing the scheme, the organisation must determine whether it has the resources to overcome the potential drawbacks.

For many organisations, the biggest potential drawback could be that a suggestion scheme encourages individual, rather than group or team activity. Group work, because there is input from more people, may come

up with a better long-term solution. Other potential drawbacks of a scheme may include the following:

- It can be hard to provide rapid responses and feedback to suggestions, as they may need to be analysed in considerable detail by a range of people.
- They are sometimes regarded as exploitation of employees, particularly if rewards are inappropriate.
- They may be seen as bypassing line managers and supervisors, leading to alienation of those groups.
- Obtaining continued top level management support can be a problem. There may be a need to continually provide proof of the benefits of the scheme, such as statistics for productivity increases or cost reduction.
- Disputes may occur if subjectivity in the assessment process is perceived.
- Administration of a scheme may become complex, with rules, forms, eligibility conditions and other paper work.
- Many organisations have found it difficult to maintain the momentum of their suggestion schemes. It is important to regularly seek methods of promoting them. One organisation overcame this problem by printing a message on the sugar packets in its canteen. Other approaches include mentioning the scheme in training programs, induction programs and various printed matter.

¶6-030 Evaluation of the Scheme

The effectiveness of a scheme should be evaluated regularly. Evaluation criteria should include trends in the number of suggestions received, types of suggestions, cost/effectiveness (see below) and employer opinions on the value of the scheme.

The main areas of cost in running a suggestion scheme are:

- cost of the award made to the employee;
- maintenance and cost of materials used in the suggestion scheme;
- committee time;
- time and cost of award-presenting ceremonies; and
- time spent in evaluating suggestions.

One formula devised to calculate the net benefit of a suggestion scheme is:

Practices to promote physical and psychological health

Jet lag and cumulative fatigue can affect employees' moods, judgment and behaviour — all of which can adversely affect work performance. Some suggestions to minimise the impact include:

- allow rest and transition time at destinations instead of making employees go to meetings, etc, straight away;
- encourage employees to consult with a doctor regarding any precautions they should take;
- minimise alcohol intake (drink water instead) and eat a healthy diet;
- exercise while on the business trip (note that many airlines now provide information on suitable exercises);
- book business class seats where possible, because they provide extra room; and
- allow one day's rest en route to home or upon arrival before returning to work.

Steps for organisations to take include the following:

- hold managers accountable for setting reasonable travel schedules, including reasonable limits on the extent of travel;
- consider periodic work group discussions on reducing the pressures of work and business travel;
- provide workshops and information on stress management and work/life balance;
- provide easy access to travel medicine information, advisers and providers, both before and after travelling — both preventive and treatment measures require attention;
- manage travel schedules proactively, to minimise the need for last-minute trips;
- use alternatives such as videoconferencing to reduce the need for trips;
- provide time off to recover after long or frequent trips, or to compensate for weekend travel/work;
- allow frequent employer-paid telephone calls to home; and
- seek feedback from employees about their travel experiences, in order to evaluate stress levels and health problems. Consult with both employees and their partners/family members when planning preventive or risk reduction measures.

Chapter 15:

Flexible Work Practices

¶15-000 What are Flexible Work Practices?

Flexible working practices are practices which vary from the "traditional" pattern of working (ie 9 to 5, Monday to Friday, etc) and which help businesses attract and retain employees.

A wide range of options is available to the employee through discussion and often negotiation (in some case there is a legislative "right to request") with the employer in relation to the length of the work period in which work is completed (ie WHEN), the location at which work will be performed (ie WHERE), and the nature of how the work will be completed (ie HOW).

Employers implementing flexible work practices recognise that a flexible environment helps their businesses to better serve their global customers, meet cyclical demand or seasonal business needs, provide continuity on projects and deliver more cost efficient client service. They have learnt that employees who use a flexible work arrangement generally demonstrate increased motivation and commitment to their employer.

It should be recognised that there can be tension between the needs of the business and the needs of employees who are seeking to balance personal responsibilities with work. Employers need to take action to address these tensions when planning changes to existing work practices.

The processes described in this chapter encourage a high level of consultation and communication, so that the respective needs of employers and employees are considered openly. When both parties are prepared to be innovative and accept mutual responsibility in formulating a flexible work agreement, there is a greater opportunity to develop a win-win solution.

Drivers for Change

¶15-010 Differing expectations

The model of the sole breadwinner supporting a dependant spouse with children and working from 9.00 am to 5.30 pm is no longer the norm.

Women's labour force participation has increased progressively, correlating with women's improved educational levels. Women now participate in the workforce more than ever before. The most spectacular increase can be seen in the number and proportion of workers with family responsibilities. Consequently, there has been a great increase in the need for businesses to retain their female workforce by assisting workers to find a sustainable balance between work and their personal lives. There is however, a need to acknowledge that both men and women in the workforce are carers not just of children but also older dependants (eg elderly parents) who may have a disability or suffer from chronic illness.

The fact is a growing number of dual-income families, employees of both sexes are now juggling with care-giving and household responsibilities that were once managed by a stay-at-home spouse. Therefore, not all employees are well served by traditional "one-size fits all" human resource policies which can impose rigid time and place constraints. Traditional promotional practices, which reward long work hours at the expense of personal time, often generate stress and detract from the pleasures of parenting and the enjoyment of personal life. Organisational cultures which focus on the following can also contribute to the same issues of stress and unbalanced work/life practices:

- "doing more with less"
- presence versus performance
- hours worked rather than output
- "where" work is done not how much work is done.

Organisations which dictate that work should take priority over family and personal life make it difficult for many employees to achieve a balance.

Differing expectations of generational groups

The needs and expectations of different generational groups of different generation groups have been summed as follows[1]:

> "... expectations about paid work and the rest of life tend to vary at different times in people's lives. Younger workers tend to want either part-time or reduced hours to combine work and study or exciting, creative, interesting jobs. They also care a great deal about career progression and personal development. Older workers aged over 55 see themselves as working into their 60s, many of them full time. This may be as much out of necessity to avoid impoverishment as out of choice. Older workers are less likely to become unemployed than younger workers but, if they do, they take longer to return to work and are more likely to leave the labour force for good.[2]
>
> Disabled workers, experiencing high unemployment and significant barriers to entering employment including discrimination, may either want to find a route to entry, with expectations about flexibility being secondary or, as they find themselves underemployed, may be seeking better work — measured by flexibility, progression, and skill development. Parents, particularly fathers, may want to spend more time with their children; carers want to be able to combine work and caring responsibilities; and older workers may want more control over how and when they retire. This means that employers need to deal with an increasingly diverse range of expectations from the labour market."

¶15-050 Changes in the workplace

New technologies have revolutionised our workplaces. Multi-skilling has eliminated the need for the "secretary", whose role was to provide clerical and keyboard support. Increasingly, workers now generate their own documents. Scanners, fax machines, modems, mobile phones, computers, voice and electronic mail and other devices make the capacity for work to be increasingly location-independent.

Businesses have increasingly moved to rationalise their staffing levels, redesigning workplaces and improving business efficiency. In many instances, businesses retain the core business functions while outsourcing other aspects of the organisation. Remaining employees are expected to become more flexible and adaptable to meet the demands of the business.

[1] Alexandra Jones, Fiona Visser, David Coats, Stephen Bevan and Alana McVerry 2007, *Transforming work: reviewing the case for change and new ways of working*, Equal Opportunities Commission.

[2] Turner, N and Williams, L 2004, *The ageing workforce*, The Work Foundation.

Case study data[3] has shown that successful managers understand and promote a variety of work arrangements, and effectively support them as a business strategy. Executives and managers wishing to maintain a competitive business edge need to understand that workplace flexibility is no longer an accommodation made for the elite of the organisation or other privileged workers, but an essential part of conducting business.

¶15-070 Managing customer expectations

Increasingly, customer expectations have risen. Businesses must be accessible to customers in a variety of ways, such as: extended hours service, electronic mail, and other computerised technology. In some industries, being available 24/7 is the norm. The challenge for leaders and their teams is to "manage the expectations" of both their internal and external clients, so that they may deliver quality work, on time, to the client's standards, while minimising impact on the employee's work/life balance.

¶15-080 Employer of Choice

Given the increasing demand for flexibility, flexible work practices are an important component of Employer of Choice programs. The Employer of Choice concept became popular during the 1990s as a means of demonstrating that an organisation was committed to implementing business functions or processes that are superior to other known methods. The thinking was that, in being a "best practice employer", this would assist in overcoming the "war for talent" and retain valued employees. Since 2005, Employer Branding has emerged as the favoured tool to attract and retain employees. "Employer Brand" is defined as "the image of your organization as a 'great place to work' in the minds of current employees and key stakeholders in the external market (active and passive candidates, clients, customers and other key stakeholders)"[4].

3 Hor, J & Keats, L 2008 *Finders Keepers – How to Attract and Retain Great Employees*, CCH Australia Ltd.

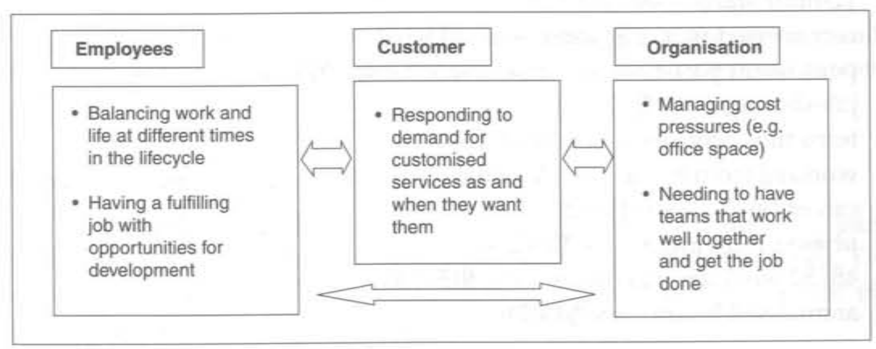
4 Brett Minchington (2006), *Your Employer Brand attract-engage-retain*.

While the focus of both of these initiatives is broader than flexible work arrangements, they are a critical component of the overall strategy.

An underlying principle of Employer of Choice and Employer Branding is that the employer cares for its people and it exercises a sense of social responsibility. The view is that what makes employees loyal is not just high wages, but consideration for their human needs. Employees across the workforce increasingly require a higher level of skills, so retention of skilled employees has acquired greater importance. It has become a factor in organisations' competitiveness. At the same time, the proportion of employees affected by the responsibility of caring for others has increased, and even people who do not have such responsibilities are demanding more flexible work as a trade-off for loyalty. This demand is fed by the fact that it is now more possible to create flexible options for employees, due to the availability of new computer and communication technologies.

In summary, there is a very clear case for change. Work that can be undertaken flexibly while meeting the needs of the organisation, customer and the employee has the potential to increase productivity, efficiency and employee engagement. The following diagram demonstrates the links between the three groups.

Figure 1: Working flexibly meeting the needs of employees, customers and the organisations[5]



5 Jones, A, Visser, F, Coats, D, Bevan, S & McVerry, A 2007, *Transforming work: reviewing the case for change and new ways of working*, Equal Opportunities Commission, ISBN 978-1-84206-048-3.

Types of Flexible Work Practices

¶15-100 Common flexible work practices

The common work practices include:

- flexible working hours – see ¶15-110
- 12-hour shifts – see ¶15-140
- compressed working week – see ¶15-160
- permanent part-time and casual work – see ¶15-170
- job-sharing – see ¶15-180
- term-time working – see ¶15-190
- working from home – see ¶15-200
- career breaks – see ¶15-210
- phased retirement – see ¶15-220
- 48/52 work arrangements – see ¶15-230
- annualised hours – see ¶15-240.

¶15-110 Flexible working hours

Flexible working hours is one of the most established and popular forms of flexible work options in use. It is a way of adjusting hours within

the ordinary working day to better accommodate the needs of the business and the needs of the employees.

Flexible working hours allow the employee flexibility in distributing their working hours over a day, a week or (more commonly) over a month. They may be offered on a short-term basis, but are often seen over a longer period.

Conditions of employment remain otherwise the same, and the flexible hour arrangements can be accessed by full-time or permanent part-time staff.

¶15-120 Types of flexible working hours

Flexible working arrangements fall roughly into the following five categories:

(a) flexibility within the working day
(b) flexibility within the working week
(c) flexibility within the working month
(d) flexibility within the month with carry-forward, or
(e) flexibility within the month with core time off.

Flexibility within the working day

This is the simplest type. It includes a core time, such as 10 am to 3 pm, during which time employees must be at work.

It also consists of a flexible band in the morning and the evening, such as 7.30 am to 9 am and from 4 pm to 6 pm. There is no carry-over to the next day.

Flexibility within the working week

The employee works only the core time on some days only, but must then make up the hours from the flexible bands throughout the week. The hours can be organised to suit either the employee's convenience or the workload without taking overtime.

Flexibility within the working month

Employees need to know how many hours they have accumulated during the month, which is called the "settlement" period.