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1A

Use strategies to establish networks

The first part of the networking process involves communicating with people and finding out about them, their interests and activities.

The second part is deciding how the person, their skills or their information could benefit you or your organisation, now or sometime in the future.

The third part of the process is maintaining these contacts so that you can use them when you need them. There are many different ways you can go through the networking process and different situations will require different strategies.

Networking strategies include:

- participating in conferences
- attending seminars and business functions
- becoming a member of a professional association
- maintaining regular contact with people you meet professionally and personally
- targeting individuals you believe may be able to assist you and your organisation through meetings, correspondence, etc.
- distributing information about your organisation that will be remembered by people who could recommend you to others.

Conferences

Conferences are an opportunity for people working in similar or related fields to come together and share information about their current work, findings and ideas. Thousands of conferences are held every year, representing every possible industry.

The format of each conference varies. A small conference may last one day and consist of papers presented by different people, with a lunch break where attendees can talk informally. A large conference may comprise a whole week of organised activities.

Here are some features of conference activities.

Conference activities

- One or more high-profile keynote speakers
- Papers presented by various speakers
- Workshops where everyone can participate
- Trade displays
- Debates and forums
- Social activities; for example, a cocktail party, dinner or ball, visits to local attractions

Industry websites

Professional associations include organisations that are exclusive to one industry, those that are set up to benefit a particular interest group and those that are geographically based. Chapters or sub-groups within a larger organisation also cater to the needs or interests of a specific group of people.

Here are some examples of industry groups.

Industry groups

- Australian Hotels Association – www.aha.org.au
- Australian Medical Association – www.ama.com.au
- Institute of Professional Editors – www.iped-editors.org
- Master Builders Australia – www.masterbuilders.com.au

Beneficial groups

- American Chamber of Commerce in Australia – www.amcham.com.au
- Chamber of Women in Business – www.cwb.org.au
- Directory of businesses owned by Indians living in Australia – www.indiandownunder.com.au

Geographically based groups

- Australian Business Network in Italy – www.australianbusiness.it
- City of Moreland Economic Development Branch – www.bizmoreland.com.au
- City of Whitehorse Business Group – www.wbiz.com.au

Maintain regular contact with people

One of the most effective networking strategies is to maintain regular contact with people you have met. If you make a conscious effort to remember people, ideas and resources, you can draw on this information and use it when you need to.

Distribute materials

In some cases, you may wish to expand your circle of contacts by sending information out to a specific group of people. Your organisation may want to attract new customers by alerting them to your latest products and services.

You could send brochures, emails or social media links to a particular group of businesses, and then follow up the contact with phone calls, emails, visits or an invitation to visit your showroom or office.



You will probably find that some of the recipients do not respond to your invitations, while others take up your offer to find out more and may even become key contacts.

Choose the right strategy

If you want to contact a large number of people at once, a group email or text message may be appropriate. If there is a particular person you would like to meet, you could devise ways of arranging a meeting or talking to that person at a particular function. If your budget is limited, you can explore new ways to use the equipment and resources you already have, such as calling or emailing people who have attended a function or dealt with your organisation in the past.

Some strategies may yield immediate results, while others may take longer to produce benefits for your organisation. Choosing the appropriate strategy for your purposes will become easier as you become a more experienced networker. There are many different ways to cultivate beneficial business networks.

Factors to consider in networking strategy:

- The type of people you are contacting, either internal or external to your organisation
- The resources available to you
- Your expectations or the benefits you hope to gain from the process

Example: keep in touch with others

The Federation of Automotive Products Manufacturers (FAPM) was formed in 1958 and currently consists of some 80 member companies employing more than 45,000 people, with sales of over \$8.5 billion. It is still recognised as the primary voice of the automotive components industry.

Membership of FAPM offers those in the industry numerous benefits, many of which are financially and competitively oriented. However, the very first member benefit listed on their website is the opportunity to network regularly with industry peers, customers and suppliers at FAPM events.

FAPM has proven beneficial for an account manager at a large aftermarket manufacturer of tow bars. He has been involved with FAPM for seven years and has found the association beneficial for many reasons. FAPM runs presentations from different car companies and has other groups that are affiliated with the automotive industry, such as Austrade and AusIndustry.

He says, 'It's good to hear from them about the state of the industry and programs that are coming up that may give my company opportunities. But the best thing is the networking – knowing what other people are up to, what's happening and hearing "on the grapevine" about new projects.'

You can find out more about FAPM online at: www.fapm.com.au.

continued ...

Make sure the information you record is accessible and easy to use. Be creative. To make the most effective use of network opportunities, keep an open mind about how each contact may be beneficial. Don't dismiss people because their interests are in a field unfamiliar to you. You never know when their expertise may come in handy.

Some contacts may be valuable because they can put you in touch with others. They can be seen as a 'network partner' that you work in partnership with to establish networks.

Personal information that you can record about a contact includes:

- where they work
- the type of work they do
- what their organisation does
- who they know
- their skills
- their access to further resources or information.

Pursue network opportunities – networking skills

Regardless of the strategy you choose, when pursuing network opportunities you require some key skills. The most effective networkers have excellent communication skill and use excellent written and verbal communication skills to establish, cultivate and promote professional business relationships.

Interpersonal skills are important when building relationships with people. To ensure that you do not miss out on networking opportunities, you need to use networking skills. When pursuing any network opportunity, make the most of the occasion or contact by making an effort to remember who was there, what they had to say, what further contacts they may be able to introduce you to and how all this information could possibly assist you.

The following are skills that you may need to practise.

Listening, interpreting and evaluating

While you need to manage your time well, you should also take time to actively listen to those you meet. The sales representative may deal with companies that do have something to offer you after all. Listening to and sifting through the information you hear and drawing out parts that may be of value are important networking skills.

Effective networking

Effective networkers are interested in people and take time to listen to what they have to say, which encourages the contact to disclose information. You can then interpret the information, working out what it means for you and your organisation. The information can later be evaluated by exploring different ways to use it, and recorded for future use.

1C

Share and communicate information about new networks

Sharing information about new networks with individuals, colleagues and clients is an important part of the networking process. Communication is a two-way process and while you are gathering information from someone, they are also gathering information from you. Mutual sharing of information can be extremely beneficial.

By sharing network information, you are making yourself available to receive new ideas, connections and information that you perhaps didn't directly seek out – this is one of the beneficial by-products of networking. If you work alone, sharing information with your contacts about people and ideas that may benefit them will encourage further sharing of information back to you.

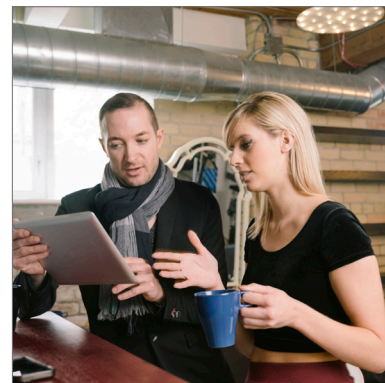
Being involved in a range of networks can reduce feelings of isolation and help you by providing you with a context in which to base your work. The information you have collected can be pooled together with information from others to create a set of data that the work group can use for a range of purposes to benefit the organisation.

Ways of sharing information with networks include:

- in a short written report, memo or email
- via social media such as LinkedIn
- informally, at a meeting
- as part of a verbal presentation
- by entering details into a database
- in conversation at a function.

Use technology

Computers and modern technology such as smartphones and cloud computing make it very easy to record, store, sort, retrieve and analyse information. You can record the details of a casual meeting or some snippet of information about a competitor's product, market intelligence and other network information in a database. When the information is sorted and reviewed along with the other data in the database, important new information and connections may be revealed.



Networking often involves many meetings, encounters and complex interactions with all sorts of people and groups. Databases allow you to collect all these different pieces of information about people and make them work for you.

Databases can be relatively simple, such as an electronic organiser or address book where you record people's contact details and when you last contacted them. A more complex system, like a database for recording sales prospects, may record a larger range of information, such as name, address, business interests, every interaction with the contact over time and their responses to the interactions.

Think about how you can improve the ways you manage contact information by inputting more detail, checking the accuracy of the data and regularly checking the database.

Government agencies

Government agencies such as Austrade, AusIndustry and inter-agency groups within local, state and federal government departments may be able to provide you with useful contacts, networking opportunities, money (in the form of grants), information, support and advice that may help your business grow.

Associations and groups

Here are some examples of types of professional associations and groups.

Professional associations

Professional networks can be defined as any type of business relationship, such as a work team or a group of suppliers you work with. Professional associations are groups set up to represent the views and interests of their members. You may need to pay a fee to become a member of the organisation and, in return, you receive a range of benefits.

Groups for specific projects

You may be involved in a group set up for a specific project, such as a working party, reference group or steering committee. It is important that groups set up to work on a project are conscious of the need to network, both within and outside the group. Involvement in projects can also benefit you after they have concluded.

Advisory committees

Advisory committees may be called on to review information, canvass opinions or make recommendations to others about a situation or issue of importance. Networking is a tool used in these situations that helps committee members understand the concerns and opinions of those affected by the recommendation.

Lobby groups

Lobby groups are most commonly found in politics, where they use their power (often derived from a large member base or combined financial strength) to influence the creation of laws and policies. Lobby groups can be formally organised professional associations or informal groups of people with a common cause or interest.

Benefits of professional networks and associations

Participating in networks and associations involves attending, actively listening, interacting, learning and sharing with others or in a group environment.

Professional networking can provide a range of benefits.

If you are uncomfortable at events that are solely networking opportunities, try to attend gatherings that have a purpose, such as educational seminars or workshops. Such activities have a built-in agenda that involves structured networking. Make sure that you are positive and prepared, and don't keep useful information to yourself.

Here are examples of the reasoning behind why you need to do these things.

Be positive

You may think talking to a particular person or attending a particular event will be a waste of time. Are you certain that this is the case or are you just nervous? Almost all interactions are worthwhile. If they don't produce instant or spectacular results, you will at least have practised your networking skills.

Be prepared

Always keep handy a supply of business cards and also a phone or notebook and pen for recording names and contact details.

Don't keep information to yourself

Some people worry that they will bother people, so they tend to contact others only when they are worried or excited about something. Instead, try to get into the habit of interacting with people over small things. This will help you develop ongoing relationships and ensure that your contacts are there when you need to discuss more important issues.

Example: network the smart way

Ella works in the HR department of a national manufacturing company. She perceives her role as just getting her work done well and on time. When her manager asks her to attend a seminar run by a professional association for people working in HR, Ella is sceptical and cannot see how it is relevant to her job. At the seminar, she is interested to learn about new global developments in HR, which could mean that her role will become more interesting over the next year. She also starts chatting to Rebecca, who is sitting next to her. They are about the same age and have similar jobs.

After that positive experience, Ella decides to join a special interest group for people with job roles similar to her own, organised by the professional association. The group meets once a month. At each meeting, they listen to an invited speaker and then stay for dinner. Rebecca has also joined the group and the two of them have both made further friends and acquaintances with similar work and personal interests. They have exchanged email addresses and Ella finds the group is a valuable resource when she needs advice or information.



2A

Develop and maintain effective business relationships

Organisations that are committed to effective relationship management perform better economically than those that are not, while organisations with poor relationship management find it difficult to compete successfully.

It is important to conduct yourself in an ethical and professional manner when you are working with others, as you are effectively representing your organisation. As an employee, you are obliged to work within certain boundaries and to adhere to standards, policies and procedures set by your organisation.

You may also be expected to report back to your manager, a committee or others within the organisation on your activities, including information on who you met at networking functions (such as conferences, conventions or industry dinners) that you have attended.

An ethical organisation:

- provides information that is accurate
- is open and honest with others
- respects others' opinions
- follows up and does what it says it will do
- has clearly defined business plans with identified goals, systems and processes
- has a quality assurance and continuous improvement program
- follows access and equity principles
- incorporates workplace health and safety policies into all programs
- complies with legal policies, guidelines and requirements.

Behaviours that impact on relationships

There are many ways to establish successful business relationships. Networking is a practice that you can undertake regularly to make and retain contact with people. There are also behavioural aspects to relationship building that can help to foster effective networking, resulting in successful relationships.

Everyone exhibits behaviours that impact on the effectiveness of an organisation. Consider the people working or studying around you. Can you think of a word or phrase to describe each person? Maybe they are hard-working, efficient, lazy, thorough, not a team player, etc.

These are all behaviours (either real or perceived) that affect others. If you behave positively, you encourage others to do the same. An organisation full of positive people is likely to be more successful than one full of negative people.



2C

Use negotiating skills to encourage positive outcomes

An essential element of working cooperatively is negotiation. Negotiation is the process of two or more parties with different attitudes, needs and motivations coming together to try to agree on a matter. People are constantly negotiating how they will do work tasks, such as who will take meeting minutes and who will complete what task and when.

Whenever decisions need to be made between two or more people or groups, negotiation skills are used. Sometimes difficult situations need to be resolved through negotiating solutions.

Successful negotiation requires you to distance yourself from the emotional responses that often accompany conflict and block effective communication. Some of the most difficult business relationships in the world are those bound together in alliance and partnership relationships.

To encourage positive negotiating outcomes, ask yourself:

- What is at stake here?
- What are my expectations?
- What do I hope to achieve?
- What do I know about the other party and what they want?

Plan for negotiation

Before you begin to negotiate, you should have a good understanding of the situation and what you hope to achieve.

Perhaps you need to conduct some research before you begin. If you are unsure about some of the answers to the questions below, you may need to prepare further.

Questions for planning your negotiation

- Who will be involved?
- Where will we negotiate?
- What are the priorities?
- What questions will I ask?
- What skills will I need to use?
- How will I behave if the situation becomes stressful?
- How will I adjust my plan if needed?
- How will I document the key arguments?

Stressful situations

Prepare yourself for dealing with potentially stressful situations. If you learn beforehand some strategies for diffusing tense situations, you will not become unduly stressed if they occur. Refer to the following section on 'negotiation skills' for some tips.

Changes of plan

You can never predict exactly how a meeting will turn out. You will have to make decisions about how to react, what to say and what to agree to as you go along. If you are well prepared and have thought about a variety of possible eventualities, you will be better able to respond appropriately to situations as they arise.

Negotiation skills

Negotiating often involves settling on an agreement or idea where everyone gets part of what they want. This is reaching a mutually satisfactory agreement, commonly known as a win-win situation. To establish this, you need to establish mutual trust, through honesty and integrity from both parties.

It is essential during the negotiation stages that both sides are able to work together to come up with a compromise solution that suits the needs and wants of everyone as far as possible. Acting in an assertive (not aggressive) manner, each party should try to see things from the other's perspective.

Useful negotiating skills include:

- active listening
- questioning and clarifying
- communicating openly and positively
- assertiveness
- acknowledging feelings and emotions
- collaboration
- bargaining and making offers and counteroffers to create solutions
- conflict reduction
- stress management
- empathy.

Implement the negotiation plan

Once you have conducted your research and thought carefully about how you will conduct your side of the negotiation, and then prepared your plan, you are ready to put the plan into action.

Negotiating

Start the negotiations using your plan and prepared questions to guide you. It may be useful to take notes. Refer to your plan frequently to make sure you stay focused on your goals. Be flexible, open and reasonable. Discuss the issues, with each party stating their position. Each party will try to persuade the other side to agree with their point of view.

Expressing disagreement

If disagreement occurs, think about how you can turn it into something positive. When conflict is dealt with effectively, it brings people closer together.

Reassessing

You need to confirm, at an appropriate stage, what has been discussed and where the two parties stand. It is useful to go over areas of common ground and restate the objectives you are both aiming for. Both sides may need to make compromises in order to reach an agreement.

Reaching agreement

An agreement must be settled on by both parties. Everyone must be clear about what has been decided. It is best to put your agreement in writing, confirming the actual wording with the other party. The two sides can then sign off on what they have achieved.

Reviewing

Reviewing what has happened can be useful to establish whether you have achieved your objectives, where you may have gone wrong and what you could learn from the experience for next time, as well as what you did well and how you could repeat that success in the future. It is a good idea to take notes and document the negotiation.

Identify the problem

There are many ways a problem may come to your attention. You could hear about it from someone else, observe it developing or experience it yourself.

Once you are aware of a problem, you can label it broadly. Personality clashes could be labelled 'communication' and staff taking too many sick days as 'absenteeism'.

Problems that may come to your attention include:

- a supplier going to a competitor because they are not satisfied with the service from your organisation
- a difference of opinion between clients and your organisation
- a business associate being unhappy with results of a negotiation
- work not being completed on time
- work not being completed to the required standard
- people arriving late for work
- a colleague divulging confidential information
- lack of resources
- poor information flow.

Analyse the problem

Solving a problem requires some analysis. It is easy to jump to conclusions and base your response on incorrect information. Analyse the potential causes of the difficult situation. Causes for problems can be complex and varied.

For example, if someone is not completing work to the required standard, it could be that the person has never been made aware of the standards expected or they lack some of the skills required to complete the work. The person may have other, more important work competing for their time or have inadequate equipment. In this situation you need to analyse the needs and fears of those involved. Talk to them and find out how they view the situation. What do they really want?

Needs are usually described as wants, interests, values or something you or they care about. Fears can be anxieties, concerns or worries. It does not matter if the fears are realistic or not. Different types of conflict will require different responses, and you need to detect the level of conflict and act accordingly.

Here are some different types of conflict.

Different types of conflict
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discomfort – you sense that people are not happy, something is wrong.• Incidents – minor outbursts often indicate suppressed conflict, with the reason for conflict being unrelated to the minor incident.• Misunderstandings – problems can arise from poor communication or imagined conflict.• Tension – negative and inflexible attitudes exist, or perceptions of the situation are distorted.• Crisis – extreme behaviour is evident, both verbal and physical.

Industry associations and groups

Joining a professional industry association is useful, as they provide a range of services that can help you, such as access to journals, special interest groups, training and business advice.

Specialist advice

If you are developing a contact but don't have the technical knowledge required in the specific area, you need to identify who the most appropriate person might be – either within or outside your organisation – and make an appointment with them. Be prepared with the questions you need answered and the specific specialist advice needed.

Practice task 9

Complete this table to explain how you can seek help when developing relationships.

Action	Why this is important	Who can help
Greeting people appropriately		
Using a person's correct title		
Approaching a new contact positively		
Needing to know more about a specific area		

Topic 3

Promote the relationship

Image is extremely important when selling products or services to customers, presenting ideas to your team, and promoting your organisation to other organisations or your own ideas to your manager.

In order to establish successful business networks, you need to be able to nurture and promote your business relationships in a positive way. Promoting involves communicating in a variety of ways and to a range of audiences for various purposes.

In this topic you will learn how to:

- 3A Develop strategies to represent and promote the interests of the relationship
- 3B Use presentation skills to communicate the goals and objectives of the relationship
- 3C Communicate the relationship's issues, policies and practices to a range of audiences
- 3D Obtain feedback to improve promotional activities

3B

Use presentation skills to communicate the goals and objectives of the relationship

Presenting information professionally takes practice. Develop a range of skills to ensure you present information so your networks clearly understand the goals and objectives of the relationship between them, you and your organisation.

Effective verbal presentations

Much of the communication used to establish and maintain business networks is done verbally. People talk to colleagues, chat to contacts, ask customers questions, negotiate in teams, listen to presentations and hold telephone conversations.

When you are developing a relationship with a new contact, you need to be very clear about what you expect from the relationship and what you can offer the other person, so no misunderstandings arise that could threaten the relationship later.

Speak clearly and honestly. Listen actively to what the other person is saying. Some people are so intent on getting their message across that they don't give the listener time to respond or stop to check that they understand what they have been saying.

Limit the use of jargon unless you are certain the person understands what you mean and explain technical terms they may be unfamiliar with.

Prepare yourself for what you want to say about:

- the goals of the relationship, such as a strong, ongoing partnership
- what your organisation will gain from the relationship, such as an interstate or overseas network
- what the contact will gain from the relationship, such as increased profit.

Present information in a group setting

Sometimes you may have to present information in a group setting. When it comes to making formal presentations, people often become anxious. This anxiety can be overcome by preparing well, practising the necessary skills and learning as much as possible about the issue you are presenting on.

Research suggests that verbal messages (what we say) account for only 7 per cent of what is believed; vocal messages (how we say it) account for 37 per cent of what is believed; and visual messages (what the audience sees and imagines) account for 56 per cent of what is believed.

So it is not only what we say that sends messages to people, but also how we say it. Your body language sends out very strong messages that can be more powerful than the spoken word.

3C

Communicate the relationship's issues, policies and practices to a range of audiences

An important responsibility may be to communicate the issues, policies and practices of the relationship to a range of audiences, in writing and verbally.

There may be sensitive issues such as those concerning funding, confidentiality or people's roles. Approach these thoughtfully and considerately, and be sure everyone is clear on the outcome of any discussion.

You and the group may need to set up policies that will govern the relationship; for example, all information remaining the property of the group; how the relationship will work; and what happens if it breaks down.

Clearly outline practices that will be followed during the relationship; for example, the need to report back promptly from any meetings; communication strategies; work practices of the organisation.



Explain complex information

In many business relationships, the information to be shared is complex. If you are communicating issues, policies and procedures to others, you need to devise effective ways of getting your message across.

When explaining complex information, an important step is to make sure you yourself are clear about what you are presenting. You must understand your topic completely. Look at your information from a number of different viewpoints. Imagine how different people you know may view the information. Are there varying levels of understanding in your audience? Will some people be more familiar with certain technical aspects or jargon than others?

You must also be aware of people's abilities. For instance, a handout written in small type will not be helpful to a staff member who has impaired vision.

In many workplaces, audiences come from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. What may make sense to one person may be difficult to grasp for another, so you may need to present important information in several languages, or take extra time and care to make sure everyone understands the messages you are trying to convey.

Consider running training sessions if there is a lot of new information to share, particularly if you need staff to follow new procedures.

Retain information

When communicating in the workplace, it is vital that you use clear, simple language. Take the time to ensure that the information you are providing is fully understood.

Try to come up with a variety of ways of presenting the information. For example, sales figures may be boring if read out, whereas a graph or chart may make the trends more dramatic and easier to remember.

Improve your verbal communication

Here are five tips to help improve verbal communication and public speaking.

Steps and rationale for public speaking

1

Know your material

Knowing your topic thoroughly makes you more at ease talking about it, better able to respond if people ask questions and more natural in your responses. You sound more interesting to the audience if you are knowledgeable and interested in what you are saying.

2

Know your audience

You may have to do some research to find out how much people know and what they are hoping to learn. You can then tailor your presentation to the audience. People quickly switch off if they think they already know what you are talking about.

3

Engage your audience

Engage your audience by keeping them interested, with their attention on you. Maintaining eye contact helps – try speaking to one person at a time, for a few seconds each. You can also encourage the audience to ask questions or offer suggestions.

4

Make public speaking easy

Nervousness soon disappears once you start talking about a topic you have prepared well. Audiences are very quick to notice if a presentation is poorly prepared. The easiest way to overcome stage fright is through practice. Public speaking becomes easier the more you do it.

5

Use visual aids

Most presentations benefit from the use of visual aids. People become bored listening to one voice and looking at the same thing (the presenter) for too long. Visual aids such as slides, handouts, graphs and products must be simple and appropriate.

Improve your written communication

Are you or your organisation a member of any professional bodies? Do they offer information, advice, workshops or courses that are designed to help members improve their communication skills? Find out what is on offer and whether there are any courses or other resources that could assist you.

3D

Obtain feedback to improve promotional activities

As with anything you do, in establishing business networks, whether it is expanding your circle of contacts or fine-tuning your listening skills, you should aim for continuous improvement. An excellent way to improve your skills in a targeted way is to seek feedback from others.

The feedback you collect can be helpful in directing your future networking activities more effectively. Constructive feedback can be negative as well as positive. Use the feedback to highlight problem areas that require improvement, confirm that you are doing certain things well or poorly, and suggest new areas to explore.

No matter what sort of feedback you are seeking or how you gather it, it is important to remember to ask open-ended questions, rather than yes/no questions. Your questions should focus on the task and what was expected, provide meaningful information on the quality of your work and give people an opportunity to provide clear statements on how you can improve, offer little room for misunderstanding or misinterpretation, and also provide an opportunity to reinforce what was done well.

Take time to review how well you are developing and maintaining your business relationships. It is important to stop, take stock, put things into perspective and evaluate.

Here are some reasons for seeking feedback.

Reasons for seeking feedback

- To make sure that the information you have prepared or shared is accurate and sufficient
- To ensure that the activity you are undertaking is beneficial to your organisation
- To gauge the impact of the message you are trying to send
- To evaluate and compare the effectiveness of different media for your purpose
- To initiate contact with other networks
- To confirm your target audience is appropriate for your objectives
- To evaluate the reaction of competitors

Sources of feedback

Sources of feedback can be internal or external to the organisation. The people you work closely with can be excellent sources of information. Sometimes friends and family can also offer advice.

Feedback can also be sought from those you are trying to develop relationships with: customers, suppliers, colleagues, contacts, competitors, individuals and organisations.

Liaison with networks

- Did you liaise appropriately with networks?
- Should there have been more or less liaison?
- Are there any suggestions or input from network members that should have been incorporated?
- Did all appropriate network members receive the message?
- Do you have strong relationships with network members?
- How can these be improved?

Appropriateness of audience

- Were the right people hearing your message?
- Was anybody missing?
- Were there people who didn't need to be there?
- Was the message delivered in a way that was appropriate for the audience?

Participation of competitors

- Did competitors participate?
- Was this appropriate?
- Was the message appropriate for competitors to hear?
- Was any commercially sensitive information discussed?

Identify areas for improvement

Regardless of whether feedback is formal or informal, it can be useful to record what you have learnt. The feedback can then be evaluated and used to identify ways of improving.

Collect all the feedback relating to a particular task you have undertaken. Rate the information according to how accurate you think it is. Document solutions to overcome the problems identified and discuss these with colleagues.

Be aware that there are very common reactions to negative feedback. It can be difficult for individuals, teams or organisations to hear negative feedback – but remember not to take it personally and try to think of ways you can improve so next time the feedback is positive.

If you can recognise when you are reacting badly to feedback, you will be able to change your behaviour and accept the feedback more appropriately. You will also be able to understand the key messages and improve your performance.

When receiving feedback, whether positive or negative, try not to be defensive, but clarify any possible areas of misunderstanding, get feedback from more than one source if possible and don't overreact. Most people give feedback to help, not hurt, and offer open, honest and sincere feedback.