

Applied Leadership and Management in the Workplace

Module Assignment Submission

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1. Introduction

Effective communication is an important part of successful workplace management because employees and managers depend on timely, accurate and appropriate information to

complete their responsibilities. Poor communication can create uncertainty, duplicated work, delays and frustration. The problem considered in this assignment is poor communication between managers and employees, particularly delayed responses to employee questions, requests and work-related issues.

The issue is considered a complex workplace problem rather than a simple operational problem. Complex problems involve multiple stakeholders, competing priorities, uncertainty about causes and more than one possible solution. They require analysis before an appropriate solution is selected. The current problem meets these characteristics because delayed responses may be caused by workload, unclear communication channels, lack of response-time expectations, management availability, prioritisation problems or employee reluctance to escalate issues.

The purpose of this assignment is therefore to analyse the problem systematically, identify its root causes, develop alternative solutions and select an appropriate solution using structured decision-making techniques. The analysis uses brainstorming, a fishbone/Ishikawa analysis and the Five Whys, followed by grid analysis and cost-benefit analysis. The final sections provide an implementation plan, stakeholder analysis, communication plan and monitoring process.

1.1. Definition of the Complex Problem

The specific workplace problem is defined as follows:

Communication between managers and employees is inconsistent, and employees frequently experience delayed responses to questions, requests for decisions and work-related issues. This creates uncertainty, slows work processes and can negatively affect employee satisfaction and organisational performance.

The core issue extends beyond individual manager oversight. The fundamental challenge is the absence of a standardized, governance-backed communication framework that clearly delineates:

- Which communication channel is appropriate for specific query types;
- Expected response-time benchmarks (SLAs) for urgent vs. non-urgent matters;
- Standardized escalation protocols for unresolved issues;
- Criteria for holding meetings versus asynchronous digital communication;
- Contingency mechanisms for obtaining managerial sign-off during absence;
- Workload management strategies that allow managers to balance direct communication with strategic tasks.

Research confirms that strategic workplace communication correlates directly with organizational productivity and employee engagement, though the dynamics vary across operational contexts (Clampitt & Downs, 1993). Therefore, the problem cannot be solved by merely faulting individual behavior; it requires a structural and cultural intervention.

1.2 Scope and impact

The problem potentially affects:

- employees who require information or decisions;
- line managers who receive multiple requests;
- other team members who depend on decisions;
- customers or service users where delays affect service;
- HR or senior management where communication problems become formal issues.

The impact may include:

1. **Delayed work** – employees may be unable to proceed while waiting for a decision.
2. **Duplication of effort** – employees may ask several colleagues for the same information.
3. **Stress and frustration** – uncertainty can negatively affect employee experience.
4. **Reduced trust** – employees may perceive managers as unavailable or unresponsive.
5. **Lower productivity** – work may remain incomplete while employees wait for clarification.
6. **Poor decision-making** – employees may make assumptions when managers do not respond.
7. **Escalation of minor issues** – unresolved communication problems can become larger workplace problems.

1.3 Why this is a complex problem

The problem satisfies several of the criteria for a complex workplace problem. There are competing priorities. Managers need to respond to employees, but they also have meetings, operational responsibilities, deadlines and their own workload. Employees need quick answers, but managers cannot necessarily respond immediately to every message.

There is also no single solution. Possible approaches include management training, communication standards, a digital task-management system, scheduled one-to-one meetings or a combination of these interventions.

The problem is therefore complex because improving one part of the system may create another issue. For example, requiring managers to respond immediately could improve employee satisfaction but could also interrupt managers' concentration and reduce productivity. A more balanced solution is required.

2. Analysis of the Problem

2.1 Brainstorming

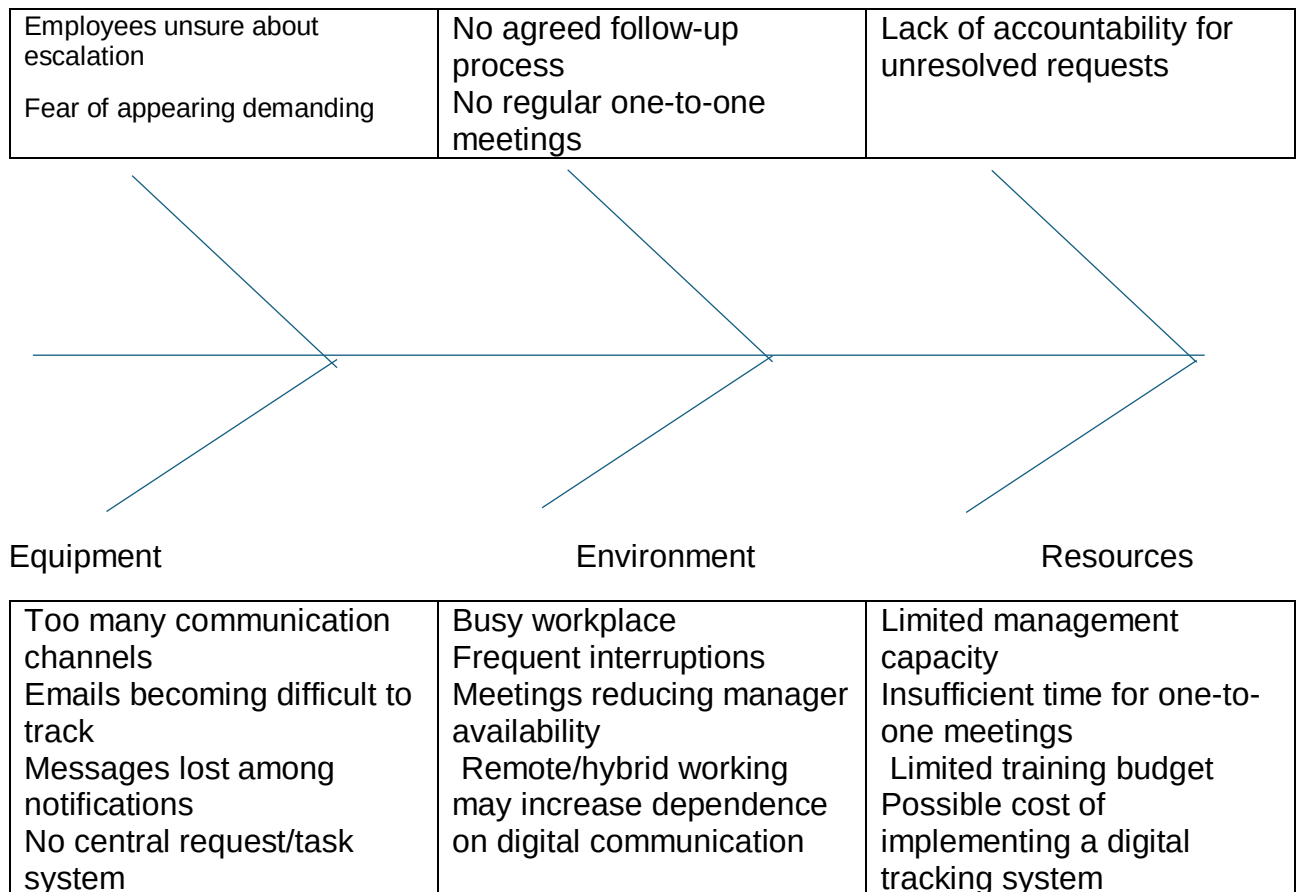
Possible causes	Observed/potential impacts	Possible responses
Managers have heavy workloads	Delayed responses	Set response-time standards
No agreed communication channels	Messages are missed	Introduce communication protocol
Employees use email, Teams, phone and informal messages	Information becomes fragmented	Define channel for each type of issue
Managers may not be available	Employees wait for decisions	Introduce escalation process
Lack of regular one-to-one communication	Small problems remain unresolved	Weekly/fortnightly 1:1 meetings
Lack of accountability for unanswered requests	Messages remain unresolved	Shared task/request tracker
Lack of feedback	Same problems repeat	Regular review of communication process

2.2 Fishbone / Ishikawa Analysis

The fishbone diagram is appropriate because it helps identify multiple possible causes and organise them into categories. ASQ describes the fishbone diagram as a cause-and-effect tool particularly useful for structuring brainstorming and identifying multiple causes.

For this problem, the categories are:

People	Process	Policy
Manager workload Different communication styles Limited listening skills	No defined response-time standard No escalation procedure No prioritisation system	No communication protocol Responsibilities are unclear No agreed expectations regarding response times



2.3 Five Whys Analysis

The Five Whys technique was then applied. The purpose of the method is to move beyond symptoms and investigate underlying causes. ASQ explains that the method repeatedly asks “why” to move from the immediate problem towards root causes.

Problem: Employees experience delayed responses from managers.

Why 1: Why are responses delayed?

Because managers do not always see, prioritise or respond to employee requests quickly.

Why 2: Why do managers not always see or prioritise requests?

Because employees use different communication channels and there is no consistent prioritisation system.

Why 3: Why are different channels being used?

Because there is no agreed communication protocol explaining which channel should be used for different types of communication.

Why 4: Why is there no communication protocol?

Because response expectations and communication responsibilities have not been formally established.

Why 5: Why have these expectations not been established?

Because communication has developed informally rather than being treated as a managed workplace process with clear standards, accountability and monitoring.

The analysis suggests four connected root causes:

1. No clear communication standards.
2. No agreed response-time expectations.
3. No consistent escalation/prioritisation process.
4. Insufficient structured manager-employee communication.

This finding is important because simply telling managers to “respond faster” would treat the symptom rather than the system causing the problem.

2.4 Critical analysis

Managing internal communication requires addressing behavioral as well as procedural factors. Employees contribute to communication bottlenecks when requests are ambiguous, lacks urgency context, or use inappropriate channels.

However, establishing a functional communication culture remains a fundamental leadership responsibility. Edmondson (1999) established that psychological safety is a critical antecedent to learning and problem-solving behaviors in workplace teams. Without a supportive structure, employees hesitate to seek clarification or escalate critical issues for fear of being perceived as demanding. Furthermore, Tourish (2006) highlighted that upward communication is frequently distorted or suppressed within organizational hierarchies. Therefore, any robust intervention must normalize upward feedback and streamline downward manager responsiveness.

3. Alternative Solutions

Based on the root causes, four possible solutions were developed.

3.1. Manager Communication Training

Managers would receive training covering:

- active listening;
- clear written communication;
- prioritisation;
- responding to employees;
- giving feedback;
- handling difficult conversations;
- encouraging upward communication.

Advantages

- Relatively inexpensive.
- Improves management skills.

- Can improve communication quality.

Disadvantages

- Training alone may not change the underlying process.
- Managers may return to previous habits.
- Does not establish formal response-time expectations.

3.2. Digital Communication and Request-Tracking System

A shared system could be used for work-related requests and decisions. Each request would have:

- owner;
- priority;
- deadline;
- status;
- date submitted;
- date responded to.

Advantages

- Improves visibility.
- Reduces forgotten requests.
- Creates measurable data.
- Makes accountability clearer.

Disadvantages

- May involve financial cost.
- Requires training.
- Employees may resist another system.
- Technology does not automatically solve poor interpersonal communication.

3.3. Communication Charter and Response-Time Standards

The organisation could introduce a simple communication charter defining:

- communication channels;
- response-time expectations;
- priority categories;
- escalation procedures;
- manager availability;

- employee responsibilities.

Advantages

- Low cost.
- Clear expectations.
- Easy to implement.
- Addresses a root cause directly.

Disadvantages

- Does not necessarily improve communication skills.
- Managers may perceive standards as unrealistic.
- Requires monitoring.

3.4. Combined Communication Improvement Programme

The programme would include:

1. communication charter;
2. response-time standards;
3. manager communication training;
4. weekly/fortnightly one-to-one meetings;
5. escalation procedure;
6. simple request tracker;
7. monthly monitoring.

3.5. Grid Analysis

To select the optimal strategy, options were evaluated against key operational criteria using a weighted matrix scale (1 = Very Poor, 5 = Excellent).

- 1 = very poor
- 2 = poor
- 3 = acceptable
- 4 = good
- 5 = excellent

Option	Response	Quality	Cost	Implementation	Acceptance	Sustainability	Weighted total
Training	3	5	4	4	4	3	103
Digital tracker	5	3	2	3	3	5	103
Communication charter	4	4	5	5	4	4	115
Combined programme	5	5	4	3	4	5	124

The highest score is achieved by **Option 4 – the combined programme**.

The result is logical because the problem has both process and behavioural causes. A communication charter without manager training may improve structure but not interpersonal communication. Training without standards may improve communication skills but fail to resolve unclear expectations. Combining the two provides a more comprehensive response.

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4. Cost-Benefit Analysis

Illustrative first-year costs

Cost	Estimated cost
Manager communication training	£1,000
Employee briefing/training	£400
Communication materials/templates	£200
Request-tracking system/setup	£500
Monitoring and review time	£900
Total estimated cost	£3,000

Illustrative first-year benefits

Benefit	Estimated value
Reduced time waiting for decisions	£3,000
Reduced duplicated work	£1,500
Reduced management time dealing with repeated queries	£1,500
Reduced delays/errors	£1,500
Total estimated benefit	£7,500

Benefit-cost ratio

Following basic principle:

Benefit-to-cost ratio = Total Benefits ÷ Total Costs.

Therefore:

$$\text{£7,500} \div \text{£3,000} = 2.5$$

The illustrative benefit-cost ratio is therefore **2.5:1**.

This means that, under these assumptions, every £1 invested could generate approximately £2.50 of benefit.

In accordance with HM Treasury Green Book guidelines (2026), quantitative appraisals must be contextualized alongside qualitative parameters. Key non-financial gains include enhanced psychological safety, elevated employee engagement, improved trust in executive leadership, and reduced staff turnover risk.

The qualitative benefits are also important. These include increased trust, greater clarity, improved employee experience, better upward communication and potentially stronger team performance

5. Recommended Solution

The recommended solution is therefore a **Combined Communication Improvement Programme** consisting of:

1. Communication Charter

A one-page document defining:

- approved communication channels;
- response-time standards;
- priority levels;
- escalation process;

- manager availability;
- employee responsibilities.

2. Manager Communication Training

Managers receive practical training in:

- active listening;
- concise responses;
- expectation setting;
- feedback;
- prioritisation;
- difficult conversations.

3. Regular One-to-One Meetings

Managers hold structured one-to-one meetings with employees to discuss:

- current workload;
- problems;
- decisions required;
- development;
- concerns;
- upcoming priorities.

4. Request Tracker

A simple shared tracker records requests requiring management action.

5. Monthly Monitoring

Response-time data and employee feedback are reviewed monthly.

This solution is preferable because it addresses the underlying causes identified through the Fishbone and Five Whys analyses rather than focusing only on the symptom of delayed responses.

6. Develop a detailed implementation plan

Activity	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Responsibility
Collect baseline data	+								Project owner

Employee/manager consultation	+	+							Project owner/HR
Develop communication charter		+	+						Manager/HR
Develop tracker		+	+						Project owner/IT
Manager training			+	+					HR/trainer
Employee briefing				+					Manager
Pilot programme				+	+	+			Manager
Final review					+	+	+	+	Project owner

The implementation should begin with baseline measurement. This is important because the organisation needs to know whether the situation actually improves after implementation.

7. Communicate the plan to stakeholders

7.1. Stakeholder Analysis

Stakeholder analysis should identify people affected by or involved in the solution and determine what they need to know.

Managers are particularly important because they are both stakeholders and key implementers. Employees are also critical because the solution is designed to improve their ability to obtain information and raise concerns.

Stakeholder communication should therefore be tailored rather than identical for everyone. PMI guidance emphasises identifying stakeholder information needs and creating a communication approach that specifies what information is required, by whom, when and how.

Stakeholder	Interest	Influence	Main concern
Senior management	High	High	Productivity and performance
managers	High	High	Additional workload
Employees	High	High	Faster responses and clarity
HR	High	Medium	Consistency and employee relations
IT	Medium	Medium	System implementation

7.2. Communication Plan

The communication plan will ensure that stakeholders understand why the change is being introduced, what is expected from them and how progress will be monitored.

Stakeholder	What	Method	Frequency	Responsible
Senior management	Project progress and results	Report/meeting	Monthly	Project owner
managers	Standards and responsibilities	Workshop/meeting	Weeks 2–4	HR/project owner
Employees	New communication process	Team meeting/email	Launch + monthly	Managers
HR	Training and employee feedback	Meeting/report	Meeting/report	Meeting/report
IT	Tracker requirements	Tracker requirements	Tracker requirements	Tracker requirements

The communication plan is particularly important because the problem being addressed is itself a communication problem. PMI literature stresses that communication planning should identify stakeholder needs, establish appropriate channels and maintain feedback loops.

CIPD also highlights communication planning and the role of line managers in effective employee communication.

8. Monitoring and Review

Implementation requires careful monitoring and that progress should be tracked against the implementation plan and milestones.

Measure	Baseline	Target
Average response time	To be measured	Reduce by 30%
Requests unanswered after 2 working days	To be measured	<10%
Employee satisfaction with manager communication	Baseline survey	+20%
Requests requiring repeated follow-up	To be measured	Reduce by 30%
Managers following communication standards	Baseline audit	>90%
Regular 1:1 meetings completed	Baseline	>90%

The targets should be reviewed after baseline data are collected.

A monthly dashboard will show:

- number of requests;
- average response time;
- percentage answered within standard;
- number of escalations;
- employee feedback;
- manager feedback.

A three-month review should determine whether the improvement is sustained.

If response-time targets are not met during quarterly reviews, secondary diagnostics will evaluate whether non-compliance stems from structural workload overcapacity rather than communication governance failures.

9. Conclusion

Poor communication between managers and employees and delayed responses represent a complex workplace problem because the issue involves multiple stakeholders, competing priorities, unclear causes and several possible solutions.

The analysis used brainstorming, Fishbone analysis and Five Whys to identify four main root causes: lack of communication standards, unclear response-time expectations, weak escalation procedures and insufficient structured manager-employee communication.

Four possible solutions were considered. Grid analysis identified the combined communication improvement programme as the strongest option because it provides a balance between effectiveness, cost, feasibility, acceptance and sustainability.

The recommended approach combines a communication charter, response-time standards, manager communication training, regular one-to-one meetings and a simple request tracker. The illustrative cost-benefit calculation produced a ratio of 2.5:1, although actual workplace financial data must be used before this figure can be considered evidence.

The solution should be implemented through an eight-week action plan and supported by stakeholder analysis, a communication plan and measurements. The success of the intervention should ultimately be judged not by whether managers simply respond faster, but by whether communication becomes clearer, more predictable, two-way and supportive of effective workplace performance.

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