

COMMUNICATION

1 Oral and written communication on site

The differences between oral and written communication is very evident. While in oral communication, we use spoken words, in written communication we use written signs or symbols.

Oral communication can be developed in face-to-face conversations, speech, telephonic conversation, television, video, radio or voice over internet for example. The main advantage with it is that we can get quick feedback. Besides, we can get additional information apart from words just with the voice tone, face or body expressions. On the other hand, the user is not able to think deeply about the message he is delivering.

Written communication allows making a more elaborated message. It is influenced by the vocabulary and grammar used, writing style, precision and clarity of the language. It can be via email, letter, report, etc. The main important aspects of written communication is that messages can be edited and revised before sent and it provides record of every message sent. Besides, a written message enables the receiver to fully understand it and send appropriate feedback. These reasons are the main points to consider written communication as the most important way of communication for business.

2 Main communication tools for the construction industry

2.1 Site meeting

The smooth and efficient running of any organisation relies upon information being exchanged at all levels. Meetings are arranged to ensure that parties concerned or interested in events can meet and discuss points. To be effective, meetings must be run correctly, in an orderly yet friendly manner without any unnecessary time wasting.

To produce results, meetings should be run on organised lines. This means first electing a chairman whose role is to control the meeting, generally summarising so that points raised during discussion are quite clear to everyone, to see that the agenda is adhered to, and open and close the meeting. At site meetings the chairman is generally either the architect or a senior site supervisor, if the meeting is between supervisory and contractors' staff.

The secretary's duties are primarily to take down items raised in the meetings, generally preparing all the arrangements including the agenda. The secretary is usually a member of the architect's clerical staff, the site clerk, or similar, depending upon whom calls the meeting.

It is obviously unmanageable to have an exclusive number of people at the meeting and only people who are interested or can play an active part in the proceedings should be called. Generally, tradesmen are not requested to be present and if in any way not essential the foremen will not be present.

2.1.1 The agenda

It is vital that meetings are carried out in a logical sequence so that nothing is left out. To achieve this, an agenda is sent to all members required to be present. This ensures that the meeting will be carried out in sequence and will also enable people to collect data or check on items stated in the agenda before meetings take place. This may result in the saving of considerable time and trouble. A typical agenda is as follows:

Agenda of meeting of Safety Committee, to be held at on at

1. Apologies for absence
2. Minutes of the last meeting
3. Matters arising out of these minutes
4. Any items carried over from last meeting
5. New business for present meeting
6. Any other business
7. Possible date and venue for next meeting. (It is always better to have this on the same day of the week at the same time so that people will become familiar with the pattern).

2.1.2 Minutes

These are the official record of the business of the meeting related to the agenda, and are the responsibility of the meeting's secretary.

The secretary will have taken notes of all discussions throughout the meeting. It is essential that it is agreed that the minutes of any meeting is an accurate and factual representation of what was agreed in the meeting.

It is generally a good policy to offer tea and biscuits at meetings for it is surprising what information may come to light during a relaxed interval.

2.1.3 Initial Site or Briefing Meeting

As soon as practicable, after the contract has been placed, the building team should meet. Although this initial meeting may take place on the site, it will more probably take place in either the architect or contractor's main office.

The representatives of the following should attend this meeting employer, architect, quantity surveyor, structural consultant, services consultant, contractor, principal nominated subcontractor, principal nominated supplier, and clerk of works.

The agenda for his meeting should include:

1. Introduction of those attending
2. Factors affecting the carrying out of the work
3. Programme
4. Sub-contractors
5. Communications
6. Invoices
7. Procedure to be adopted at subsequent meetings

2.1.3.1 Factors affecting the carrying out the work

The factors affecting the carrying out of the works should certainly be described fully in the contract documents but may require emphasis and clarification at this initial meeting. They may include access to site, space availability, restrictions, buried services, site investigation, and protection of the works.

2.1.3.2 Programme

The contractor should attend the initial site meeting with an outline programme for the work prepared in advance, the necessary basic information regarding delivery dates and construction times having been obtained from the principal nominated sub-contractors and suppliers. It is helpful to have this programme circulated to those attending before the meeting. Following this the contractor can prepare the final programme and circulate it to all concerned.

It should be stressed in the meeting the importance of adhering to dates once this has been agreed by the contractor and the nominated sub-contractors and suppliers. It is common for the contractor to indicate on his programme the latest dates by which he requires drawings, instructions for placing orders, schedules and other information from the architect.

2.1.3.3 Sub-contractors

Many problems on building contracts arise from delay in the issue of instruction by the architect regarding nominated sub-contractors and suppliers, and from difficulties in liaison between contractor and sub-contractors. It is advisable at this initial meeting, therefore, to clarify the position regarding nominated sub-contractors.

It is essential that all nominations are made in adequate time for the work concerned to be phased into the contractor's programme without causing disruption. It should be made clear to the contractor that, once nominated, these sub-contractors and suppliers are his responsibility contractually.

It is recommended in most cases that direct agreements between employer and sub-contractor are made, in which case the standard form should be used.

2.1.3.4 Communication Procedure

Although detailed in the Conditions of Contract, the procedure regarding instructions should be noted.

2.1.3.5 Subsequent Site Meeting

The frequency of formal site meetings will vary with the size and complexity of the contract and according to the particular stage of the job and any difficulties encountered. It is unlikely that meetings at any stage would be at intervals of more than four weeks, and especially in the early stages they will be held more frequently.

On many large contracts it may be more convenient to divide the site meetings into two parts. The first, under the chairmanship of the contractor, will concern itself with the method of carrying out the work. It would be attended solely by the contractor's representatives and those of sub-contractors and suppliers. It will plan and organise the work on site. The second meeting will monitor progress and performance. It will be chaired by the architect and attended by the design team, the contractor, and such sub-contractors as are requested to attend. The object of this

meeting would be to give the contractor the opportunity to raise questions on the drawings, specifications, schedules and instructions issued and to request additional information.

Consideration of the value of people's time should be shown at all meetings; care should be taken not to call to meetings persons whose presence is not really necessary. A badly run site meeting can be a serious waste of time. There is little doubt that periodic meetings keep people up to the mark and impart a sense of urgency which is difficult in day-to-day correspondence.

2.2 Letter writing

Every party in the construction industry can use written letters as a way of transmitting information accurately or making enquiries that require an answer/feedback.

Essentials for letter writing:

- Written in the correct format
- Short and to the point
- Do not use abbreviations
- Free of any grammatical or spelling mistakes
- Must be dated
- Show the name and address of the receiver (above "dear sir")
- Introduction or 1st paragraph to state why the letter has been written
- The body of the letter must be
 - Brief
 - Use suitable punctuation and short sentences
 - Cover subject logically
 - New paragraphs for new ideas
- Use a suitable complimentary close
 - Dear sir – yours faithfully
 - Dear Mrs Jones – yours sincerely
 - Dear John – Yours truly

2.3 Site Inspections

The engineer or architect will normally have more time to inspect the work when making routine inspections than on those occasions when a formal meeting is held. The frequency of these inspections will obviously depend on the size and complexity of the work and the speed of the progress being made.

As a matter of courtesy the architect should make his presence on the site known to the construction manager who will normally accompany him around the site. When making a site inspection it is easy to be distracted and to overlook items, therefore, it is best to list in advance particular points to be looked at. The architect's representative on site will ensure the architect's instructions are adhered to.

At site meetings, the question of progress and delays are often discussed and it is essential, therefore, that full details of any problems as they arise is available for reference, especially by the consulting specialists at these meetings.

The principal records that should be kept are:

2.3.1 Inspector's daily returns

This provides information regarding the work done during the day, how many men were engaged on each part of the project, and the delays. They are of great help should any dispute arise with the contractor as to progress or payment for standing time or extra work.

2.3.2 Site diary

This is a day-to-a-page diary which is built up from the inspector's time sheets, notes of the weather, visitors to the site, architect's operations and any other relevant matters.

Weather records should be kept in the diary recording maximum and minimum temperatures and what time is lost due to rain, snow or freezing conditions. It might be thought that temperature records are not really necessary; however, sometimes inexplicable events or failures occurring later may be traced to the weather prevailing at the time.

2.3.3 Construction manager's diary

The aim is to record all major decisions made and instructions given and should include the following:

- a) Visits of all representatives to the site
- b) Any disputes which have arisen during the day, particularly any verbal instructions given as a result
- c) Any notes regarding particular stages of work or operations carried out
- d) Important events which may be relevant at a later stage in the contract

2.3.4 Weekly report

This would be in the form of a summary of all the relevant events occurring over the past week.

2.3.5 Day-to-day instructions to the contractor

There are often daily occasions when it is necessary to inform, or make requests to, the contractor about the work. Some simple system of sending notes to the agent or to members of his staff is necessary. It is best to have only one book in use at a time, all staff writing their notes in it.

All these documents must be carefully filed; the number of separate files required will depend upon the size of the project and how many contractors are engaged on site.

2.4 As-built records

As a project is nearing completion the question of as-built drawings become of greater importance as these are the drawings the contractor is finally judged upon. The work on record drawings should continue throughout the contract, a special set of contract drawings being provided on which the architect marks out all deviations from the original design.

Where pipes are laid underground special care must be taken to chart the course of these pipes accurately.

2.5 Test results

These will often be referred to in meetings and must be carefully recorded. Whenever more than a few samples of natural materials are likely to be taken for examination it is important to open a sample register in which every sample is booked down for whatever purpose they are used.

2.6 Safety

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 creates general duties on employers to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of employees. A similar duty is placed on employees to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, that other persons are not exposed to risks to health and safety which result from their activities on the site.

Enforcement of the Act is placed in the hands of inspectors who have the right to enter premises to make examinations, to take samples, to take possession of articles, to require persons to answer questions and to require the production of documents. Where there is a contravention of certain statutory provisions the inspector may serve an improvement notice, and where the contravention involves a risk of serious personal injury he may give a "prohibition notice".

The main provisions regarding safety precautions on site are contained in four sets of regulations:

- Construction (General Provisions) Regulations 1961
- Construction (Lifting Operations) Regulations 1961
- Construction (Working Places) Regulations 1966
- Construction (Health and Welfare) Regulations 1966
- Control of substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) 1988
- The Construction (Head Protection) Regulations 1989
- Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 1994
- Health and Safety (Safety Signs and Signals) Regulations 1996

The contractor shall have full regard for the safety of all persons entitled to be upon the site and shall keep the site and the works in an orderly state appropriate to the avoidance of danger to such persons, and shall provide and maintain at his own cost all lights, guards, fencing, warning signs and watching, when necessary, for the protection of the works or for the safety and convenience of the public.