

# *Improving Internal Customer Service*



*“The quality of service provided to your customers by front line staff is largely dependent on the quality of support they receive internally”*



# The Importance of ICS

*Organisations are taking the issue of Internal Customer Service (ICS) seriously because:*

- The quality of service provided by front line staff is largely dependent on the quality of support they receive internally.
- For a customer service culture to become embedded in an organization, it must be demonstrated by everyone, in all aspects of their work, to both external and internal customers alike.
- Employers have a responsibility to provide employees with the facilities and support required to perform their jobs safely and effectively.
- Best practice ICS ensures that limited resources are used most efficiently. This maximizes benefits for both internal and external customers as well as the organisation itself.

# Best Practice ICS

## Service

- ▶ Identifying and addressing the needs of your internal customers.
- ▶ Ensuring that your employees receive the support they need from their internal suppliers
- ▶ Encouraging, acknowledging and supporting initiatives and examples of good practice ICS.

## Fairness, Equality and Respect

- ▶ Communicating to employees that each has a responsibility to ensure that a positive and effective internal customer service culture exists.
- ▶ Communicating to employees that it is important to treat their co-workers fairly and to acknowledge their input and views.
- ▶ Ensuring that rules and procedures are applied fairly.

## Professionalism

- ▶ All employees recognize that excellent customer service to a colleague deserves the same in return.
- ▶ Employees work in an environment of trust and shared understanding.
- ▶ Effective training programs are used to ensure employees are committed to achieving results.
- ▶ Effective lines of communication are established between internal customers and suppliers so that each has a clear understanding of the others work.

## Partnership, Consultation & Involvement

- ▶ All employees regardless of rank, role, location, division or status as an internal customer or supplier see themselves as working in partnership to provide high quality external customer service.
- ▶ Ensuring continuous and effective communication between internal customers and suppliers.
- ▶ Ensuring decision making processes are transparent and involve consultation with employees. This helps foster and environment of wider ownership and inclusiveness.

# Improving ICS: Organisation & Division/Dept Level Actions

Action needs to be taken at both Organisation level and Division/Dept level to improve ICS. The required actions are outlined below

## Organisation level action

### ► Internal Customer Service Action Plan

(Makes official the organisation's commitments to ICS)

### ► Management Support

(Culture will only change if this is provided and visible)

### ► Partnership Process

(ICS improvements should be managed through existing partnership structures. This spreads ownership of any changes and ensures practicality)

### ► Internal Communication Strategy

(Integral if different areas of the org are to work together to deliver better service. Each needs a clear understanding of the others work)

### ► Acknowledgement

(Best practice ICS delivery by individuals and teams should be acknowledged by reward schemes.)

### ► Long-term Commitment

(ICS improvements will take time and require continuous effort)

## Division/Dept level action

### ► Identify Internal Customers

### ► ICS Division/Dept Action Plan

(Make official the actions required to address ICS in individual Divisions/Departments.

### ► Skills/Training

(Identify skills and training needs of staff in respect to ICS delivery and ensure these are met)

### ► Consult

(Hold workshops, joint training sessions and establish cross-team service improvement groups with internal customers to identify, discuss and resolve problems)

### ► Survey

(Conduct benchmarking and subsequent surveys to determine internal customer satisfaction)

### ► Service level Agreements

(Develop service level agreements and/or service commitments between internal customers and suppliers)

# Improving ICS: Developing an ICS Action Plan

## Objectives

- ▶ Highlight and promote awareness of the internal customer service principle
- ▶ Develop and embed an internal customer service culture within the organisation
- ▶ Identify the commitments made to each other, as internal customers
- ▶ Detail, how internal customer service will be improved.

## Development

- ▶ A fully representative cross-functional working group should be established to draft elements of the plan taking into consideration the aforementioned objectives.
- ▶ The various divisions/departments of the organisation will be required to supply the group with material indicating their roles, their specific commitments to internal service and how they can be contacted when their services are required. (This has the added value of encouraging areas to identify their internal customers, what is needed from them, what is needed by them, and to think about what gaps might exist.)

## Implementation

Implementation of the plan should be monitored by a fully representative issue focused sub-group who will be required to:

- ▶ Record ICS plans
- ▶ Assess and monitor progress made by all areas in regard to ICS
- ▶ Report this progress and any issues arising to the planning group
- ▶ Ensure staff across their Division/Dept are aware of ICS initiatives through all the various communication channels.

# Improving ICS: Developing an Internal Communications Strategy

In order to develop a strong ICS culture across your organisation, it is essential that correct lines of communication have been established between management and employees. Otherwise, messages sent by management regarding changes to organisational culture will not get through, and staff will not be able to communicate their feelings on any changes back to management.

In addition, it is also essential that effective lines of communication have been developed between internal customers and suppliers so that each can understand the other's needs.

A sound internal communications strategy can improve ICS by....

- ▶ Creating a workplace where all your employees are in the loop, working towards the same goals, and by the same rules.
- ▶ Ensuring all employees hears the same consistent messages
- ▶ Encouraging a sense of belonging in all staff, being part of a common culture, being privy to what is going on and why and therefore sharing a common ground
- ▶ Reducing the capacity for conflict or ambiguity of messages or ideas that have the potential for reducing workplace conflict
- ▶ Promoting a clear, shared understanding of any change process. This helps gain commitment, minimize misunderstanding and reduce anxiety about the change process.
- ▶ Improving staffs understanding of and response to each others needs.
- ▶ Motivating performance by linking individual and team efforts with the “bigger picture” and by recognizing desired behaviours and effort throughout the business.

# Improving ICS: Developing an Internal Communications Strategy cont'd

The most successful internal communication strategy is one that has been identified as the most appropriate for your type of business. You have to find the communication method that effectively engages your staff in better internal communication practices. A non-exhaustive list of typical Internal communication methods is outlined below:

## Methods of Internal Communication (Not-exhaustive)

- ▶ Email
- ▶ Staff Newsletters
- ▶ Communication Sessions
- ▶ Team Meetings
- ▶ Manager/formal leader on a one to one basis
- ▶ Intranet
- ▶ Website
- ▶ The Grapevine
- ▶ Notice Boards
- ▶ Policy Documents
- ▶ Telephone
- ▶ Other

## An Internal Communications Survey

When planning an internal communication strategy or cultural change programme, it is important to survey all staff, both to increase awareness of the ICS issue and to give employees a chance to participate in the development of the communications strategy. An Internal Communications Survey should look at the following issues.

- ▶ Satisfaction with the standard and methods of communication between management and employees
- ▶ Satisfaction with the standard and methods of communication between internal customers and suppliers
- ▶ Satisfaction with training and development programs to improve internal communications
- ▶ Satisfaction with support resources for communication technologies
- ▶ Eagerness to improve the quality of internal communications
- ▶ Current method of receiving information versus preferred method of receiving information

# Improving ICS: Developing an Internal Communications Strategy cont'd

The Internal Communications Survey should help develop a vision for change and set objectives for achieving change.

Following completion of the survey, a representative sub-committee should be formed to prepare an Internal Communications Strategy to address the issues highlighted. The strategy should lay down the responsibilities of management and employees in supporting effective internal communications and highlight principles of best practice communication to guide employee behaviour.

## An effective internal communications strategy will:

- ▶ enable a two-way process of discussion between staff and management
- ▶ be integrated with the business' overall strategy
- ▶ have long term focus
- ▶ have clear values and goals
- ▶ be comprehensive and utilise appropriate mediums
- ▶ have consistent messages which never talk down to staff
- ▶ involve the management team in being committed to reinforce the perceptions conveyed by the communications strategy

## Principles of best practice communication:

- ▶ We communicate with our colleagues with mutual respect
- ▶ We facilitate effective two-way communication between staff and management, recognising this takes time and resources.
- ▶ Staff have opportunity to express their views and provide feedback that can influence policies and procedures
- ▶ All Division managers understand their responsibility to communicate effectively with their staff and with other Divisions.
- ▶ The channels of communications used are appropriate to the target audience i.e. staff at various levels and in differing roles
- ▶ All staff have equal access to information to enable them to do their job effectively and efficiently.

The committee should monitor progress of the Internal Communications Strategy and continue promotion of the best practice communication principles to ensure communication is always on the agenda. A staff services guide providing information on the services available to them should also be put on the agenda.