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Organization and Management

Lesson 3: New Approaches to Motivating Staff

Learner Notes

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This lesson is part of the IMARK Module on "Investing in Information for Development". The Module contains six units. The unit on "Organization and Management" comprises three lessons:

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> Lesson 3: New Approaches to Motivating Staff

This course is available in self-paced e-learning format on CD-ROM and the Internet (www.imarkgroup.org).

Learning objectives

At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- identify investment options for dealing with the **motivation** and **retention** of skilled staff.

Introduction

Organizations are often at a disadvantage when it comes to retention of information staff.

The main reason is that the job market for information professionals is booming. Information management has become a "mission critical" function for many private-sector companies, which can usually afford to pay higher salaries to attract skilled personnel from public organizations.

A real danger, therefore, is the emergence of a "personnel divide" between those organizations that can afford to hire good IM/IT (Information Management /Information Technology) staff and those that cannot.

Staff and the new information environment

The "information revolution" has definitely affected staff. How? Here are five areas that have been particularly influenced:

Content

Scientists, managers, teachers and farmers are all making use of new technologies to gain access to new sources and new types of information. But there is a danger of being overwhelmed. Some analysts have compared the Internet to a high-pressure fire hydrant with a huge potential for inundating its users.

Technology

IT is constantly changing, and the stream of new IT products hitting the market shows no sign of slowing down. Organizations and users with limited resources can therefore fall behind quickly.

Activities

Governments and funding agencies are continually redefining approaches to development. These organizations usually make most funding available to innovators. But it is difficult for a professional to feel like an innovator if (s)he also feels inadequately informed about the latest advances in IT.
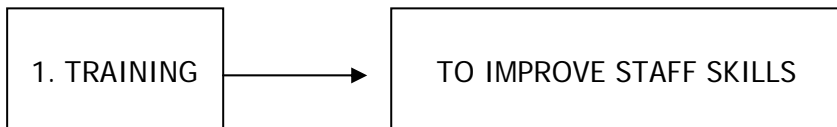
Dissemination

One of the by-products of new IT is the availability of many new techniques for providing information to users (e.g. e-publishing, e-extension, e-education). But professionals can easily become frustrated if they do not have the skills or facilities to use these technologies and techniques.

Career Options

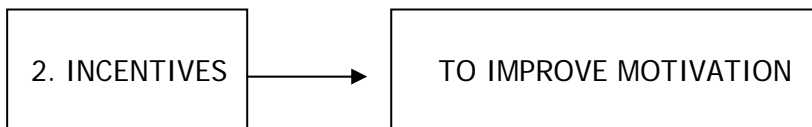Perhaps most important, the job market for people skilled in IT/IM has boomed. In most countries, there are numerous alternatives in the public, private and non-governmental sectors for people with information skills. Retention of good staff in this area is very difficult.

What can a manager do to help staff deal with the pressures of the "information revolution"? Here are two possible **areas of intervention:**

| 1. TRAINING | → | TO IMPROVE STAFF SKILLS |

It is important that information staff keep their specialist skills up to date. Apart from that, organizations have to ensure a minimum level of IM/IT competencies of their other staff. In particular, older staff tend to be less familiar with information issues than are younger staff, and will need more training.

| 2. INCENTIVES | → | TO IMPROVE MOTIVATION |

It is important that organizations provide professional incentives to their information staff, as they can be hard to retain and difficult to replace

Let's consider in more detail four options referring to **training** and **incentives**.

Four options for motivating staff

The goal of each option is to increase the motivation (and retention) of your information staff.
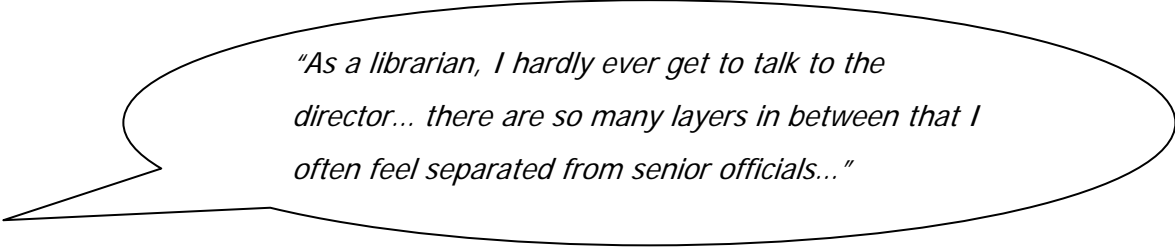
1. **New communication practices:**
   to encourage better links between senior management and information staff.

2. **New decision-making procedures**:
   to involve information staff in the planning and implementation of key activities.

3. **New approaches to training**:
   to be sure that information staff are able to keep their skills up to date.
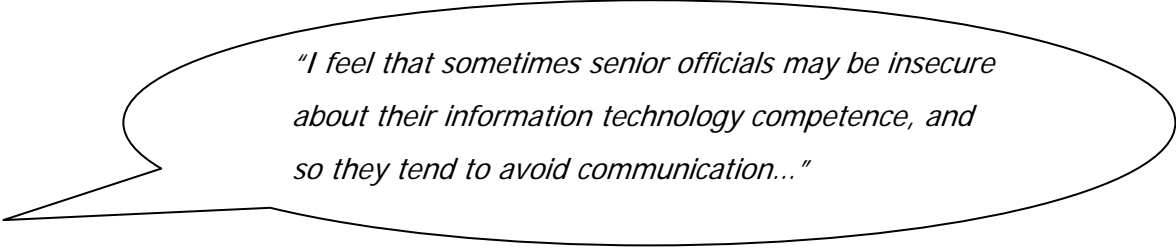
4. **New commitments to facilities development**:
   to ensure that information staff have the resources required to do their jobs.

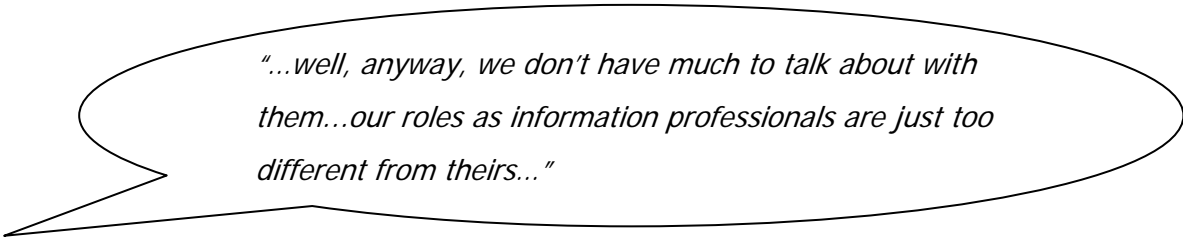# Option 1: New communication practices

The first option concerns communication. Regular and meaningful communication between senior management and their (often junior) information staff is usually less than ideal. Why? Here is what some members of information staff are saying:

"As a librarian, I hardly ever get to talk to the director... there are so many layers in between that I often feel separated from senior officials..."

"I feel that sometimes senior officials may be insecure about their information technology competence, and so they tend to avoid communication..."

"...well, anyway, we don't have much to talk about with them...our roles as information professionals are just too different from theirs..."

In these comments, we can identify three barriers to effective communication between senior management and information staff. Any one of them can lead to decreased staff motivation (and retention):

Problem 1: too many layers

Solution: Build better links to increase AWARENESS.

Are senior managers sensitive to the potential of the new information environment? Do they have the vision of how to invest in new information resources to improve organizational performance? Can they find out how?

The best way to check on the managers' awareness is usually the simplest one: ASK the information professionals.

Problem 2: nothing to talk about

Solution: "Put yourself in their shoes" to improve UNDERSTANDING

Are managers tuned in to the aspirations of their information professionals? Do they identify with the frustrations of coping with IM/IT facilities that may be less developed than those in other organizations? And are they sensitive to the fact that some information personnel, computer professionals particularly, are often regarded by other staff as on call 24/7?

The issue here is what sociologists call "taking the role of the other". The best manager will sometimes try to put himself/herself in the shoes of his/her information professionals.

Problem 3: personal insecurity

Solution: Support training of managers to develop new SKILLS.

Do senior managers know enough about the details of IM/IT to be able to direct the planning and implementation of new information programmes? Again, the answer is too often "no". Even though most do have basic computer skills, they usually lack experience in finding and using digital information, as well as in using new IT to improve management procedures and processes. What's the solution?

A promising approach is "on –the job" training, in which the manager calls a staff member and asks to spend several hours with him/her in order to learn more about his/her job.

Now let's become more specific... How many senior managers really understand the conditions in which their information staff work? Suppose that a director of information services in an

agricultural institute is phoning the head of his publications department who is experiencing some problems, and says:

"I would like to come and spend some time in the department with you, to see what I might be able to do to help you"….

This approach is an example of opening up new channels of communication. The director is "taking the role of the other" (the head of the publications department). If the director follows-up by spending some actual time in the department, (s)he will hopefully understand better the kind of work that goes on there. And the by-product, again hopefully, is that the head of the department will become more motivated.

Option 2: New decision-making procedures

The second option is about decision-making procedures.

Improved communication is not an end in itself: more awareness of IM/IT issues, better understanding and new management skills will only be important if they are put to good use.

A change in communication practices must be translated into **more active involvement** of IM/IT staff in decision-making on information issues.

But too often information staff such as the librarian or the head of computer services are only seen as "support staff".

What can a manager do to increase the quality and performance of his/her information professionals?

| MORE AWARENESS |
| of information issues and |
| options |

+

| BETTER |
| UNDERSTANDING |
| of staff goals and work |

+

| NEW MANAGEMENT |
| SKILLS |
| in IM/IT |

=

| MORE ACTIVE |
| INVOLVEMENT |
| of IM/IT Staff in |
| organizational decision- |
| making |
| situations |

As an example, let's consider a real-life scenario.

The director of a national rice research institute is speaking to the head of his library:

"I'm disappointed in the quality of recent research proposals. Most have inadequate literature reviews. Our scientists seem not to take into account what's going on elsewhere in the country or in the world. And I'm very surprised that hardly any of the proposals say anything about the use of new tools and methods to collect, manage or analyse data…"

"You're right. I think most of our scientists don't really try to do good bibliographic searches. If only they would come to me, I could help them. Our library can get access to a lot more material via the Internet, online databases, and inter-library exchanges than they think we can. And I'd like to get more involved in helping scientists with their research…"

As the conversation continues, the head of the library tells the director that the computer centre reports the same kind of problem. Most scientists seem to avoid asking about new hardware and software. The institute actually has a lot more IT facilities available than the scientists think it does.

As a solution, the director will require that the principal investigator for each new research project have meetings with the head of the library and the head of the computer centre to discuss issues of appropriate scientific information and information technology for the project.

This approach is pro-active and promotes dialogue.

Option 3: New approaches to training

The third option concerns training.

Even if new communication practices and new decision-making procedures are introduced, most information staff will still need to keep their IM/IT skills up –to date. Moreover, in the fast-changing field of IT, information professionals need **continual** "training" if they want to:

- maintain self-confidence about their individual expertise and competence;
- retain the respect of their peers (both inside and outside the organization); and
- keep their career options open.

But then the question becomes: training in what?

Because an organization cannot train everyone in everything, it is important to **set priorities.** Does your organization have a human resources development plan that specifies precise IM/IT training needs? Here is an example of a simple matrix tool that can help a senior manager analyse training needs and potential targets for investment.

Training Priorities	Policy	Acquisitions	Data Analysis	Outreach	Software	Hardware
Senior Managers	1					
Administrators					1	
Scientists			1			
Teachers				1		
Librarians & Documentalists		1				
Publications Specialists					1	
Computer & Telecom Professionals						1

The matrix has 42 cells. Let's suppose that we try to identify our seven highest IT/IM training priorities by placing a "1" in each of those cells. The example shown has "1"s in seven cells that *might* represent training priorities for a research institute.

Training can be expensive. And in public organizations, there are usually rules regarding which types of employees can be sent for which types of training and how often. The strongest case that a manager can make for more training money is likely to be based on an **analysis of potential staff turnover**. If an IM/IT staff member leaves, the institute or university will usually have to replace him/her.

An example of **balancing the costs of training against the costs of staff replacement** is provided below. A manager armed with these figures can make a strong case for training.

Costs (of Training)		
STAFF COSTS		TOTAL
Number of Information Professionals	8	
Average Daily Salary	20	
Average Number of Training Days Per Year	10	
COURSE COSTS		
Number of Courses Per Year	12	
Average Tuition Cost	50	
Average Travel Cost	100	
Average Allowances Per Course	200	
TOTAL COSTS FOR TRAINING		5800
Benefits (Savings by Avoiding Turnover)		
COST OF EMPTY POSITION		
Average Daily Salary	20	
Number of Days Position Vacant	150	
HIRING OF TEMPORARY OUTSIDERS TO FILL GAPS		
Average Daily Salary	30	
Number of Days	40	
ADVERTISING AND RECRUITING		
Average Daily Salary of Institute Management	15	
Number of Staff Days (Administration, Interviews)	20	
Travel and Allowances	400	
INTRODUCTION AND TRAINING OF NEW RECRUIT		
Average Daily Salary	20	
Number of Days Before New Recruit Fully Operational	80	
TOTAL COSTS FOR HIRING NEW STAFF		6500

But formal course-based training is not the only approach to upgrading skills.

Another, very under-used, approach is **on-the-job training** in other organizations.
If a university is known to have a good library, for example, might it not be possible for IM/IT staff from another university or research institute to spend training time there?

Has your organization ever tried this type of training? It has five obvious advantages over traditional training:

- **Location**. The manager and the IM/IT trainee can have an input in deciding where (s)he wants to be trained.
- **Timing**. The timing and schedule of the training can be flexible.
- **Cost**. A host organization may be selected that does not charge tuition and has living arrangements on campus.
- **Practical Focus**. Most new IM/IT skills are best learned in a real organizational setting, rather than in a classroom.
- **Inter-organizational cooperation**. Partnerships between like-minded organizations in training can lead to collaboration in other fields.

Option 4: New commitments to resources development

Let's take a look at our fourth investment option: investment in IM/IT resources.

New facilities are important motivators for staff who want to be sure that they are keeping up – to date in their fields. Two types of resources are particularly crucial.

- **Periodicals and Journals;**
- **Hardware and software.**

How many IM/IT journals and periodicals does your organization receive regularly?

For many institutions, the answer might be "not many". Organizations will normally place the highest priority on acquisition of journals and periodicals on topics related to their technical work, e.g. agriculture. However, in an information-oriented organization, there is a strong case

to be made that information professionals should have the same claim on journal subscriptions as researchers and teachers. How can an organization expect its IM/IT staff to keep up –to date if they do not have access to current literature?

Nevertheless, many professionals "look down" on IM/IT literature, often seeing it as being too "technical". Also, they are not sure where to find relevant articles, and are too busy to search. But awareness of developments in IM/IT is important.

Professionals are seldom specialists in IM/IT, and are unaware of new technologies, software etc. that may be relevant to their organizations. The challenge is to inform them in an effective way. For example, IM/IT managers may carefully select **relevant articles** and **popular periodicals** for circulation to the professionals

Apart from specialist literature, does your organization allow its information professionals to purchase modest amounts of experimental information technology for research, evaluation, and testing? And if not, why not? Have you ever considered allocating a small budget for research and development on IM/IT? You probably have such budgets for other professionals.

Summary

A real danger for organizations is the emergence of a "personnel divide" between those organizations that can afford to hire good IM/IT staff and those that cannot. Here are four investment options to address this issue:

Option 1: new communication practices. Communication barriers between senior management and information staff need to be broken down, with the goal of improved management awareness and understanding of IM/IT issues, as well as training of managers to deal with these issues.

Option 2: new decision-making procedures. Improved awareness should lead to better understanding of staff goals and work situations, which should be translated into more active involvement of IM/IT staff in organizational decision making.

Option 3: new approaches to training. Training can be expensive. The strongest case for more training money is likely to be based on an analysis of potential staff turnover if training is not supported.

Option 4: new commitments to resources development. New resources are important motivators for staff who want to be sure that they are keeping up to date in their fields. Two types of resources are particularly crucial: hardware/software and specialist literature.