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## Building a Reliable Communications Strategy

Every company needs to identify the best way, according to company culture, for that company's employees to create and share information. To communicate.

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topics: Collaboration, Enterprise Content Management

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In today's world, users have many ways to communicate information required during their work day. There is both formal communications that follow a defined process to exchange information and then there is the informal communication channels that are more ad-hoc and less controlled. Organizations use both forms of communications to exchange information and make key business decisions. One of the biggest dilemmas facing users today is their willingness to rely on the accuracy of the information that they have access to. I have found that a user will be more likely to get up out of their chair and find a person that they deem to be "knowledgeable" to ask a question than to trust the data that is stored in one of the company's systems. It's not that the information is unreliable, but that the user will often challenge the means that the information was originally communicated and ultimately stored, managed, and categorized. Not trusting the means of communicating the information will lead to the user not trusting the information. I have developed a communications triangle that attempts to categorize levels of information integrity and trust. Using this communications triangle will enable your organization to define the appropriate vehicle for information exchange, based on the types of information and the level of importance for that information.



### Communications Triangle

The following triangle documents the effectiveness and integrity of different communications styles:



**Voice/ Physical Communications** – This is the simplest form of communications. As information is passed from one person to another, the accuracy of the information can suffer.

**Instant Messaging** – This is still a 1-1 communications vehicle. While this uses a written approach, it is still subject to distortion and interpretation as the information is passed from one individual to another.

**Email** – This is a one-to-many communications vehicle. While the accuracy of the information is improved with this method, it suffers from another set of problems ranging from the endless thread of messages a user needs to weed through to find the information they need to the problem that duplicate files are often attached to the message. This is indicative of the "Reply All" syndrome.

**Face-to-Face Meetings** – Meetings have proved to be the most effective means of exchanging information and making decisions. Information exchanged in meetings is often lost and meetings are not always documented well and thus the basis for decisions is lost. Information used to make the decisions is often lost as it is not documented and stored in a place that is easily retrievable.

**Virtual Meetings** – These are meetings that can be held via conference call, Web conferencing or both. If the meeting utilizes a Web conference, the meeting participants will be able to visually share presentations or other materials related to the meeting.

These Web-based solutions also provide markup capabilities that promote meeting discussions and collaboration. Virtual meetings typically provide the capability to record the meeting, thus capturing the minutes and decisions of the meeting.

**File System** – Information stored in a File System lacks the ability to easily find the “right information.” The other problem often encountered in an organization that relies on a File System to store and manage information is that the File System lacks meta data to describe file contents and the controls to insure a “Single Source of the Truth” and eliminate redundancy

**KM Repository** – A KM repository stores and organizes information that is described using the company-approved taxonomy. This allows for easy retrieval of information. This type of repository also instills the controls necessary to insure the “Single Source of the Truth.”

#### **What's the Right Communications Strategy for You?**

The goal of a communications strategy is to be able to provide a platform and process that facilitates the capture and management of information that is critical to running the business. Understanding your organization's culture will provide the insight required to determine where on the Communications Triangle your organization falls. As you move up the triangle, there is more effort and discipline required by the users to identify the information that is important to the business and manage that information in a way that makes it easily accessible. The changes in effort to better capture, tag, and manage the information returns double to triple the value in the ability for users to easily find the right information

Finally, remember that when building a communications strategy, it is critical that you assess your organization's ability to accept change. As with any technology project, the success of the project will depend upon;

- The user's perception that there is value in this new solution
- The user's ability to adopt to the change required to use the new solution and follow the new processes that are required by the solution

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