

Chains of Communication as a Factor in Workflow Change and Job Redesign

We do not realize it, but each of us has learned a set of cultural rules and regulations on how to behave and communicate. We know who should be copied on an issue and what lines of authority must be respected. When technology is introduced, we need to learn new cultural rules and regulations. It is very easy for technology to be used to copy everyone on an issue, or to send something along the wrong chain of communication and command. The result can be bulging electronic in-baskets, information you do not want, or staff members trying to use technology to circumvent the decision making process.

The Department generally considers there to be **five different chains of command and communication** that must be considered in any planned alteration of workflow patterns or job duty packages. These are listed below. (We have given examples largely from Headquarters as being those most universally comprehended.)

1. The Administrative Chain

The administrative chain is the routing of any given document: i.e. the series of addressees in the department who are not part of the approval chain but through whom, for administrative reasons, a given document must be routed either before or after it is signed. For example, before a memorandum for the Minister is signed by a Deputy Minister it must go through CMGR; after any document has been signed a copy must be sent to BICO, "diary", "chron", and "circ".

2. The Consultative Chain

The consultative chain refers to the process of inviting consideration/comments which might be substantially or peripherally affected by a proposal or policy issue. For example, a decision to open a new passport office should be cleared through Federal/Provincial Relations Office, as well as through CFX, BFC, and BCM Divisions in addition to the substantive areas (MINA, CMA, MPD, etc.)

3. The Distribution Chain

The distribution chain is the series of addressees (both inside and outside the Department) who are neither part of the approval, administrative or consultative chain, but who must be kept informed on a particular subject for a variety of reasons. For example, a numbered letter prepared in HQ to one particular post can be distributed for information to a number of different posts in the same geographic area.

4. The Approval Chain

The approval chain is basically the chain of command in our organizational structure which ensures the completeness and accuracy of the work of a person who reports to him/her and who in turn forwards it to his/her superior for the same reasons. The intention of this chain is to ensure consistency of reply and conformity with departmental objectives. This chain of command is determined by organizational charts and job descriptions. It may or may not require