

Learning Activity #6 Communications Case Study

Instructor Directions:

Explain the exercise to the students and break the class into groups, ideally 4-5 students per group. Ask the students to read the scenario and complete both steps in their groups. Each group should designate a spokesperson to share out when the class gets back together.

Estimated time for students in group: 30 minutes

Overall estimated time for activity: 45 minutes

Participant Directions

Step 1. Initiating Communications

Read the case study below and answer the questions.

Because of your outstanding reputation as a facility manager, you have been asked by the Mayor to facilitate an IAQ investigation of complaints in the city hall building. In recent months, employees have reported an increase in respiratory infections, headaches, and other illnesses. The facility has often been said to be too warm or too cool and a number of symptoms resembling those of Sick Building Syndrome have been alleged from time to time. Many employees were upset about the inconvenience of temporary moves associated with ongoing renovations. The last meeting between management and employees to discuss the building conditions and grievances was two years ago. A pervasive atmosphere of mistrust is apparent on both sides. The mayor makes it a point to remind you that city management came under heavy criticism when they built the costly new city hall three years ago.

1. How could the current state of communications affect your investigation?

There is a very negative atmosphere and a history of mistrust between occupants and management. This atmosphere makes your investigation harder as you need to build trust.

2. What specific actions could you, as the facilitator, take to establish a more cooperative atmosphere as you proceed with your investigation?

Opening communication, defining roles and responsibilities, set and manage expectations of occupants who could see you as a fixer and you have limited control. Develop a plan, explain what you will do, full communication plan.

Step 2. Characterizing the IAQ Complaints

A questionnaire was administered to the building occupants. The results are summarized below:

- 20% of the cases were reported to physicians, half of whom suspect the building was the source of the problem but had no specific diagnosis.
- Symptoms are generally worse in the afternoon, with no other pattern in regard to timing.
- Frequency varies by individual and relief usually occurs overnight.
- Zones 1 & 3 have a relatively “typical” amount of complaints about building conditions.
- Zone 2 occupants reported high rates of dissatisfaction with thermal conditions and ventilation.
- Most symptoms in Zone 2 appear to date back to the respondents’ first employment in the building.
- Zones 1 & 3 had a small number of building-related complaints (less than 10%). This percentage would be considered “typical background” for facilities in general.
- 60% of Zone 2 respondents claimed building related symptoms. This percentage is higher than “typical”.
- 55% of the respondents from Zone 2 had a symptom pattern suggesting their complaints were building related.

1. Based on the questionnaire results, what part of the building would you focus your investigation efforts?

Zone 2.

2. What further action is needed to resolve the problem?

Full understanding of where and how symptoms are occurring. Check all HVAC and baseline CO₂, humidity, temperature in Zone 2. Look at preventive maintenance done in Zone 2. Develop a testing plan, determine exactly what to test for, how to test it, and what you will do with the results. Need to be ready to respond when results come in.