

# Staff summary

Prepared by  
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## Improving Employee Communications

An in-house study by Organizational Results in cooperation with  
Community Relations

### MoDOT Summary Statement

*Based on the analysis of four regional focus groups, participants generally believe that current methods of providing organizational information to employees should continue. Many of the suggested improvements focused on ensuring effectiveness of communication methods and opening access to all employees. The “lack of communication from senior management,” reflects employee perceptions of district managers, as well as Central Office. Several concerns were also raised about employee participation in policy development and inconsistency among supervisors in implementing employee-related policies, particularly in areas of promotions. These concerns, while not directly related to MoDOT’s formal communication efforts, were prevalent in all focus groups. A suggestion was also made in one focus group to follow up with the same participants one year later to assess if the improvements to MoDOT communication efforts have made a positive impact.*

### MoDOT Project Overview

MoDOT senior management identified a concern regarding employee-management communication based on responses from the 2005 employee satisfaction survey. In the 2005 survey, two percent of employees responding to the survey offered comments that they did not see enough of, and lacked communication with, senior management. In response, Community Relations wanted to ascertain MoDOT employee opinions as to the effectiveness of our current communication and outreach efforts (*e.g. publications, meetings, emails, etc.*) and if the methods used are those that are most preferred by employees. Employee focus groups were conducted across the state in order to gain an understanding of this employee-defined communication issue.

Organizational Results worked with Human Resources to obtain a list of randomly selected employees to attend four regional focus groups on this topic. The employees that participated provided a representative sample of all non-management MoDOT staff working in the districts and central office. Organizational Results then contacted 10 to 12 participants for each focus group. Staff made efforts to minimize the travel time for MoDOT employees by encouraging employees to attend a focus group nearest to their work location. Focus group sites were also selected based on a location central to the districts being represented. Each focus group was held from 11:00 to 1:30 (*allowing ½ hour for lunch*). Detailed focus group information is contained in the following table.



## MoDOT Project Overview (cont'd.)

| Location       | Districts   | Date       | Number Attending |
|----------------|-------------|------------|------------------|
| Cameron        | 1, 2, and 4 | 09/14/2006 | 10               |
| Columbia       | 3 and 5     | 09/20/2006 | 5                |
| Ste. Genevieve | 6 and 10    | 09/26/2006 | 7                |
| Springfield    | 7, 8 and 9  | 09/28/2006 | 6                |

*Figure 1, Employee Communications Focus Group Schedule.*

At each focus group, participants were asked to give responses to the following questions:

- How do you prefer to receive information from MoDOT?
- What does MoDOT do well in terms of communication?
- What does MoDOT not do so well in terms of communication?
- What would you like to see done to improve MoDOT communication?

## MoDOT Staff Findings

In brief, the employees participating in the focus groups prefer to receive MoDOT information via e-mail, verbally (*face-to-face*) or a combination of both. Participating employees were generally forthright in their comments. Many perceive senior management to be at the district level when asked about what employees meant by “senior management”. When asked if “senior management” included central office or department management, many used the term “Jeff City” to refer to that level of MoDOT senior management. MoDOT field employees generally felt that while senior managers generate communication efforts, there is a breakdown in communication as it comes down the chain to field level employees.

Among the communication efforts that MoDOT does well, employees believe that MoDOT provides accurate and reliable information in a timely manner and that MoDOT management makes a visible effort to communicate with employees. Newsletters, both electronic and paper, are well received, but information delivered by the employee’s immediate supervisor is more highly valued. The greatest number of comments during the discussions centered around the question “What does MoDOT not do so well in terms of communication?”

Responses to this statement were grouped into the following areas:

- Little or no follow through to determine effectiveness of communication
- Lack of sharing of expectations
- Minimal direct access of information
- Lack of trust in sharing of information
- Little or no visibility of management to convey information
- No opportunity for employee input
- Inconsistency of messages
- Too much information



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## MoDOT Staff Findings (cont'd.)

When asked to provide suggestions on improving MoDOT communication, most ideas centered on correcting perceived communication deficiencies. These included:

- Allowing employees to directly access information
- Having management ensure that messages have been effectively communicated
- Improving consistency of policy administration
- Providing learning opportunities
- Giving further explanation or sharing whole story



## Employee Responses

The following is a summary of all the comments provided by the focus group participants. Organizational Results staff combined similar comments together and assigned a category phrase to each group. (*Note: The comments are in the employees' own words.*)

### **How do you prefer to receive information from MoDOT?**

- E-mail
- Verbal/direct/face to face
- Combination of both

### **What do we do well?**

#### *Timely sharing of information*

- Quick notification
- General information readily available
- Death and employee injuries are quickly reported

#### *Accurate and reliable information*

- Accuracy
- Reliability of information and timeliness such as *E-connections* and most issued publications
- Documentation of information helps on reliability of information

#### *Visible communication effort*

- Make effort to communicate (*sr. level management*)
- Making sure information is distributed to most employees
- Interaction and getting to know employees, directors take the time to meet and introduce themselves

#### *Feedback on performance*

- Immediate feedback
- Feedback on job well done or job not good

#### *Informational meetings*

- Getting updates on policies, plans and goals at statewide or regional meetings
- Quarterly/monthly meetings (*open for questions, etc.*)

#### *Availability and access*

- Availability of contact people for easy access
- Phone communications at maintenance sheds

#### *Supervisors share information*

- Supervisors communicate well - information passed along efficiently
- Talking to supervisors - asking questions, getting answers one-on-one

#### *Newsletters*

- Receive newsletters
- *Connections* (*gives information from all over the state*) and district newsletters (*learn more about co-workers and district "happenings"*)



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## Employee Responses (cont'd.)

### *Ungrouped ideas*

- Use of technology (*ITS, internet, etc.*)
- Written communication
- Employees asked their opinions and feel input is valued
- Birthday letter/e-mail from Pete
- Communication between employees is most common & useful. Get best information from talking with each other.

### **What do we not do so well?**

#### *Follow through to determine effectiveness*

- No follow up if the message was communicated
- No accountability on decisions and follow-up regarding communication
- No follow through on big plans - start, but no finish or recognizable results

#### *Method of communication*

- How we get messages is not consistent and wrong format (*e.g., recognition to be given directly not just written*)
- Impersonal communications

#### *Sharing of expectations*

- Explanation not given if promotion is given or not given
- Not telling the truth (*e.g., rehiring same person who is not promotable*)
- Promoting people to management/supervision who have trouble communicating with people or seeing the “big picture”
- Don’t communicate expectations clearly or consistently between employees
- MAPS doesn’t work (*inconsistent, supervisor wants to look good, expectations aren’t standard for each pay grade, don’t follow through on what they will do/provide – for example, training on equipment*)
- Training on equipment (*not communicating expectations/fairness issues*)

#### *Direct access of information*

- Access to computers is not available to everyone
- “To all employees” information is not shared with all employees. (*i.e., not posted, etc.*)
- E-mail not provided to all employees
- Censoring of information by supervisors - they only print out what they want to share; Can not directly access a policy without going through a supervisor
- Don’t get information all the way to field level
- Have to get information from 3<sup>rd</sup> party (*other coworkers*)
- Mixed/conflicting information from the same source (*supervisor*)
- Intermittent information – not consistent; not always getting information (*Connections’ copies not delivered/distributed*)
- Detailed information not available

#### *Trust and sharing of information*

- MoDOT senior management does not trust its people with information
- Secrecy
- Don’t share everything



## Employee Responses (cont'd.)

### *Trust and sharing of information (cont'd.)*

- Don't get assurances/acknowledgement regarding human element of change/upheaval
- Process of change is not communicated – change just occurs
- Don't answer the “whys”
- No responses to inquiries

### *Management awareness/visibility*

- Management doesn't grasp the full reality of what's going on even though they are out and about
- Human contact with senior management (*senior management not visible, impersonal communications – DEs at district level*)
- Inconsistency on why and when senior management interacts with employees
- See two senior managements – district and Jeff City
- Upper management not seen often
- Every manager under Pete should be personable with staff and share reliable information with staff on a regular basis

### *Employee input*

- Not getting input from users, especially users in the districts thus not really being true to the “support center” philosophy
- No one's listening – not 2-way (*get to give input, but don't do anything with the input/going to do what they want anyway*)
- Senior management in JC and district make decisions without hearing ideas from employees
- Employees not part of decision making or input in decisions
- Not asking/listening to employee suggestions
- Actual needs of individual sheds aren't asked about and are not told – don't listen anyway

### *Inconsistency of messages*

- Too many levels of management
- Several filters or translations before it gets to me
- No sense of who is in charge of the information
- Inconsistency between messages sent by different managers within same area (*managers given discretion what to share or how to share – nothing's uniform*)
- Some management still following procedures that are outdated
- Inconsistently following policy (*for example, promotions*)
- Loopholes are left up to supervisors to do what they want - no consistency on policies

### *Sharing of information between units and districts*

- Department to department and district to district communication is lacking
- Different work groups don't know what other groups do
- Right hand doesn't know what left hand is doing



## Employee Responses (cont'd.)

### *Too much information*

- Pertinent information not selective enough (“users” e-mail account)
- Too much information
- Too much irrelevant information (*other districts’ weather reports, retirees, etc.*)
- No time to read or look at information

### *Valuing employees*

- Where do employees fit into tangible results
- No connection to mission statement and what we do
- Pete e-mails are all politics – no substance; we’re not empowered
- Don’t feel a part of MoDOT
- Not taking advantage of employees as goodwill ambassadors

### *Ungrouped Ideas*

- Not timely
- Daily priorities change frequently
- Make effort to get things out to district but assume central office employees know. This used to be opposite.
- “Big Brother” – feel like every move is watched
- Implement (*policies and procedures*) before “testing” – have to make changes later.
- Human interface with technology

## **What would you like to see done to improve communication?**

### *Directly access information*

- Be able to directly access policy (*Computer access for all employees by having a computer in each location*)
- Direct mailing to personal address as some management pick and choose what is or is not presented to all employees
- Need to be able to get what we need when we need it
- Invite new employees to management team meetings
- Yearbook/pictures of employees with name and title
- Supervisor drowning in clerical work...no time to do their job
- List for who to contact at districts (*a district pointer list*). Who’s who in all the districts - Use Lotus Notes database or intranet
- Having general, non-pertinent information in a centralized place
- Give computer access to all employees (*at least one accessible computer in each building*)
- Internet access available when needed for work

### *Ensure that message has been effectively communicated*

- Have a return path of communication such as surveys, a mechanism that gives sender “confirmation”, or a sampling across districts/departments to see how we are doing the new procedure...include informing people up front that at some point sampling will be done



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## Employee Responses (cont'd.)

### *Ensure that message has been effectively communicated (cont'd.)*

- Accountability for communications as a promotional tool
- Better documentation/recordkeeping on communication
- Develop documentation to show what they heard from employees then share what was used or not used and why used/not used
- Clarification on terminology – define terms
- Use Community Relations people to communicate (*outreach coordinators*)
- Hold supervisors accountable for lack of communication
- Solicit input from employees on how well policies and procedures are working and then show the results
- Use 5 or 6 questions on a survey if the full picture has been communicated

### *Improve consistency of policy administration*

- Keep policy consistent and don't allow supervisors so much flexibility
- Give written guidance that is uniform (*managers need agreement and understanding of policies and procedures before communicating further*)
- Consistency with policies and procedures among districts, supervisors and managers
- Remove levels of management
- Be accountable to follow the policy

### *Give further explanations or share whole story*

- Communicate why you're doing what you've been told to do
- Know whole picture
- Multiple ways to communicate the messages
- Informing all employees, before a news event, with a summary of how did we get to where we are (*announcing the Safe and Sound program—all of a sudden, it's there*)

### *Communicate pertinent information through one source*

- Pete or Shane Peck to communicate any information needed by entire MoDOT staff (*have one source for "users", for example*)
- Consistency throughout the organization the way management is communicating

### *Get input from employees*

- Things seem to get done when the public calls in but not when employees bring it to the attention of management. Non-responsive to employees' suggestions or calls
- Have a virtual suggestion box visible by all to see and give comments (*keep anonymous and do at both district and state levels*)

### *Clear communication of job expectations*

- MAPS need to reflect job expectations more clearly and need to relate directly to the job
- Clearly communicate expectations and feedback to all employees, including seasonals and temps.
- Tell the truth (*model the behavior you want to see and don't mislead*)



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## Employee Responses (cont'd.)

### *Provide learning opportunities*

- Cross training and education between work groups
- Have district managerial counterparts from around the state meet more frequently through the year (*request topics from employees to add to the agenda*)
- Workshops where districts can share best practices
- Identify, share and use best practices
- Have a forum for people with the answers to interact with the people who have the questions (*enable two-way communication and use a small-group setting*)
- Group meetings

### *Timely communication*

- Communicate major project issues to employees before media (*we hear things from news media before MoDOT*)
- Communicate job issues in plenty of time for employees to react
- Contract – vs. in-house. Consultants are in the know, but MoDOT employees are not

### *Coordination of activities/equipment between work groups and districts*

- Just looking at population statistics to base decisions – decisions on an area's needs regardless of population and size
- Coordinating activities better through communicating up, down and across
- A MoDOT "E-Bay" site to share equipment and resources

### *Process for addressing communication issues*

- Employees need means (*a process or mechanism*) to bring issues up to supervisor and upper management. Then acknowledgement and follow-up if necessary
- Need to be continuous, structured effort to address communication issues
- Gather same focus group participants back together in one year to discuss implemented ideas

### *Make it a requirement that managers have good communication skills*

- If you have the skill reward them for it
- Promote people with good communication skills
- Better survey implementation in order to get feedback from employees

### *Ungrouped Ideas*

- Keeping managers on the same level as the employees--seems segregated
- Use Lotus Notes calendar
- Awards/Incentives for Tracker/D-Tracker
- Give credit where credit is due
- Develop tangible results geared toward employees
- Develop documentation on all our processes (*have history like the HR policy manual*)
- Similar discussion for databases, but keep current – need one that is user friendly
- Process improvement
- Need support and back-up
- Check off list of information

