

Higher Administration & IT – Unit 1 Administrative Theory and Practice



Outcome 1

The learner will:

1. Provide an account of the factors contributing to the effectiveness of the administrative function by:

- 1.1 Describing strategies for effective time and task management and their importance
- 1.2 Describing the characteristics of effective teams
- 1.3 Explaining strategies to ensure compliance with workplace legislation
- 1.4 Explaining how modern IT has had an impact on working practices

Outcome 2

The learner will:

2. Provide an account of customer care in administration by:

- 2.1 Explaining benefits of good, and consequences of poor, customer care
- 2.2 Describing a mechanism for monitoring and evaluating the quality of customer care

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1. Factors contributing to effectiveness of the administrative practices within organisations

Time and task management:

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- setting targets for the individual and the organisation such as:
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 - action plans and to-do lists
 - Gantt charts
- dealing with changes in priorities
- monitoring and evaluating progress
- time stealers and strategies to minimise their effect in independent and group working and meetings
- benefits of good time and task management — to the individual and organisation
- consequences of bad time and task management — to the individual and organisation

Effective teams:

- features of effective teams
- team formation
- skills of team members
- benefits of teams to individuals and the organisation

Workplace regulations:

- employee and employer responsibilities under current workplace legislation in the areas of:
 - health and safety legislation
 - data handling

Impact of IT:

- The positive and negative impact of IT on areas such as:
 - office layout and ergonomics
 - employee morale and wellbeing
 - working practices:
 - homeworking
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- communication methods
- data handling:
 - software applications
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2. Customer care

The features of good customer care such as:

- written customer care policy
- service level agreements
- complaints procedures

The benefits of good customer care

The consequences of poor customer care

Methods for monitoring and evaluating the quality of customer care such as:

- satisfaction surveys
- customer focus groups
- market research
- quality management systems

1. Factors contributing to effectiveness of the administrative practices within organisations

Time and task management

Time management

To work effectively you really have to manage your time. We all have moments when we wonder what happened to the day and we seem to get nothing done, but in business, time is money and every hour you spend at work costs your employer a lot of money.

Much of the time we spend working is spent doing routine, unimportant tasks and research indicates that up to 80% of our time is spent on tasks of this type. Pareto's Law states that 20% of the time produces 80% of the results and 80% of the time produces 20% of the results.



For the individual, good time management skills usually mean that the employee feels more in control of their workload. This in turn means that the employee is likely to find working less stressful and will be required to spend less time in their place of work, leaving more space for quality time spent at home or in leisure activities. Good time management therefore results in benefits for both the employee and the employer.

Good time management is a very important life skill.

Time management is not about *how much* time you spend, but *how* it is spent.

Benefits of good time and task management — to the individual and organisation

Good time management techniques should ensure that:

- the best use is made of the time available
- time-wasting activities are minimised
- more time is available for important or urgent jobs.

Consequences of bad time and task management — to the individual and organisation

Poor time management is usually shown by:

- getting less done than you expected
- an inability to meet deadlines set by your line manager
- spending much longer on some part of the job and then having insufficient time to do the rest of the job.

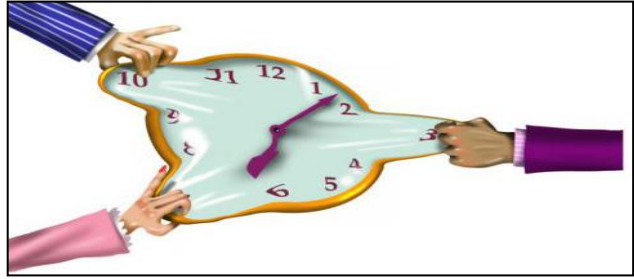
Time management will only improve once we understand how time is wasted leading to reduced effectiveness in the workplace, these are known as time stealers. Once we are aware of time stealers we can improve the situation.

Time stealers and strategies to minimise their effect in independent and group working and meetings

Examples of common time stealers are:

Time stealer	Ways to improve
Lack of forward planning	Make use of planning aids such as priorities lists and action plans.
Interruption from the telephone	Learn to control the conversation and do not allow conversations to run on too long. Possibly make a time of day to make telephone calls.
Interruption from visitors	Learn to control the conversation, be assertive and explain that you are busy and maybe arrange for a time to meet.
Taking on too much work	Be assertive and learn to say ‘no’. If work is getting too much talk to your line manager or try and delegate some tasks.
Desk stress	Ensure that papers are filed and that desks are tidied on a regular basis to ensure that documents can be found.
Procrastination	This is when you keep jumping from one task to another but do not complete any of them. To overcome this have a to-do list and try to have self-discipline and stick with one task.
Meeting over-running	Ensure that meetings have a time limit – maybe use alarms so that people know how much time they have to talk.
Making unnecessary journeys	Group jobs together so that visits to other departments or the photocopier are only carried out once or twice a day.
Communication problems	Ensure that you clearly understand the tasks to be carried out and ensure that there is a clear line of communication between you and your line manager.

Most of us are guilty of allowing our time to be stolen by some of the factors outlined above. The important thing when you are looking at how you manage your time is to identify what are your critical time wasters.



Task management

An administrative assistant will often have many tasks to deal with at any one time. Effective task management is essential to ensure that targets and deadlines are met and to help ensure freedom from stress.

An orderly and neatly arranged workplace will assist the administrative assistant in carrying out tasks.



The following organisational or planning aids can assist the administrative assistant in managing tasks:

- use desk or electronic diaries to record appointments
- prepare a priorities list or an action plan for larger tasks
- keep your workstation tidy, use trays, file regularly

In addition to the appropriate use of these tools, effective time and task management involves a number of skills:

Skills required for effective time and task management

- **Prioritisation:** deciding on what tasks are important and being able to decide which tasks should be carried out first and which tasks are less important.
- **Organisation:** being able to look ahead and plan tasks that need to be carried out.
- **Delegation:** deciding when it is appropriate to ask someone else to do some of your tasks.
- **Assertiveness:** being able to say ‘no’ when necessary when you have taken on too much work.

- **Negotiation:** being able to negotiate deadlines and resources.
- **Control:** tackling tasks calmly and in order of priority.
- **Evaluation:** being able to look at tasks, seek improvement and identify the causes of any problems.
- **Resource management:** making effective use of time, staff and equipment.



Good time and task management techniques

Here are some techniques which might help you to improve how you manage your time:

1. At the end of each day compile a to do list for the next day giving each job a priority and trying to note how long you expect to spend on the job. Try to stick to your list and tackle all the jobs with a high priority first. This means you are planning your day and will make you feel more in control.
2. Try to prioritise your tasks. Most of them will fall into 3 main categories:
 - immediate action by you
 - some action by you but also some on-going work by you or others
 - information for reading, circulating, filing or disposing of

Develop your own code for marking tasks as one of the above categories.

3. At the end of each day try to clear your desk so that when you come in the next day you have a clear approach to your work and space to work in.
4. Make sure you do the most difficult tasks in your prime time, when you are at your best.
5. Try to handle papers, emails or tasks only once, i.e. read them, take any actions needed and file them. If you deal with things promptly there is less chance of a backlog of work building up.
6. Try to avoid being interrupted. This may be difficult in an open plan office, but if necessary, move to a quiet work space. Incoming phone calls could be diverted to someone else to deal with.

7. Make outgoing phone calls in a block. Be clear what you want before you make the call to minimise the time used.
8. Do not put off difficult tasks or those you don't know how to do. Ask for help.
9. When you feel your concentration going and you know you are not working effectively, move on to doing something else.
10. If possible, delegate tasks.

Effects of good time and task management

Effective time and task management will bring benefits to both the individual and the organisation, including:

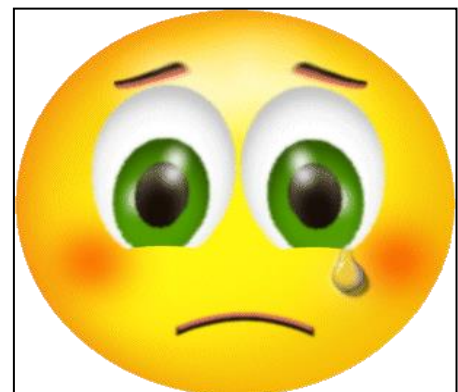
- increased productivity and better quality of work
- increased morale and motivation
- increased job satisfaction and lower staff turnover
- lower stress levels among staff, which will reduce absenteeism
- better relationships with management
- good customer relations as deadlines will be met.



Consequences of poor time and task management

If time is not managed effectively this will have a negative impact on both the individual and the organisation, including:

- staff being stressed, which leads to absenteeism
- lower productivity and poor quality of work
- lower staff morale and motivation
- poor job satisfaction and high staff turnover
- poor customer relations and an increase in customer complaints
- poor relationships with management
- increased costs to the organisation.



Target Setting

It is important within an organisation that staff share the management's vision. It is the duty of the senior administrative assistant to set both personal and departmental targets to enable the organisation to meet its long-term goals. Departmental targets will only be achieved by employees working as a team and to their own personal targets.

It is important that individuals set targets as part of their job as this gives them a focus and something to aim for. It is also important that organisations share their management aims and vision with their employees so that everyone is working together to achieve the targets set.



When targets are set it is important that there are methods in place of recording the tasks that need to be completed to achieve the targets. This could include the following:

- personal development plans
 - to-do lists
 - priorities lists
 - action plans
 - electronic diaries
 - gantt charts
-
- **Personal development plans**

This is a document that allows employees to formally record areas of strengths and areas for training and development. Employees should discuss the plan with their line manager on a regular basis and it is often discussed annually. This allows the employee to focus on aspects of their job, identify skills they have that could be shared with others, identify their training needs and prepare them for promotion.

Personal Development Plan

What are my development objectives?	Priority	What activities do I need to undertake to achieve my objectives?	What support/resources do I need to achieve my objectives	Target date for achieving my objectives	Actual date of achieving my objectives
Review Date:					

- **To-do lists**

This is a document that an individual could use on a day-to-day basis to remind them of the tasks that need to be completed.




- **Priorities lists**

The same list of tasks but this time put in an order showing which tasks needs to be tackled first.



- **Action plans**

This is a document that could be prepared to help plan a long-term project and show the tasks that need to be completed, an estimate of how long the tasks should take and any notes to explain actions.



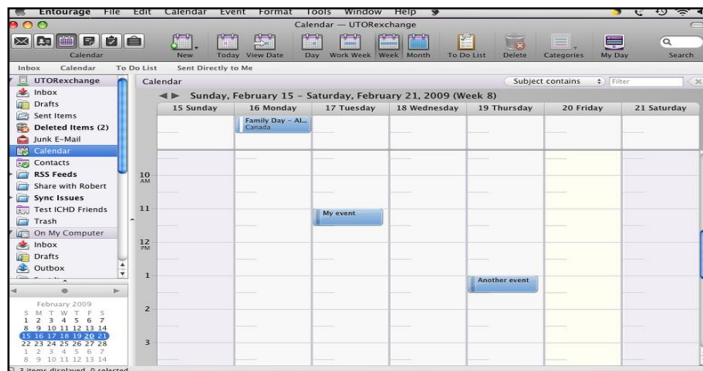
Action plan template

Filling out an action plan will provide a clear sense of what needs to be done and give purpose in reaching your objectives.

Objective (what)	Actions (how)	Responsible(who)	Timescale (when)	Progress (review regularly and sign off when completed)

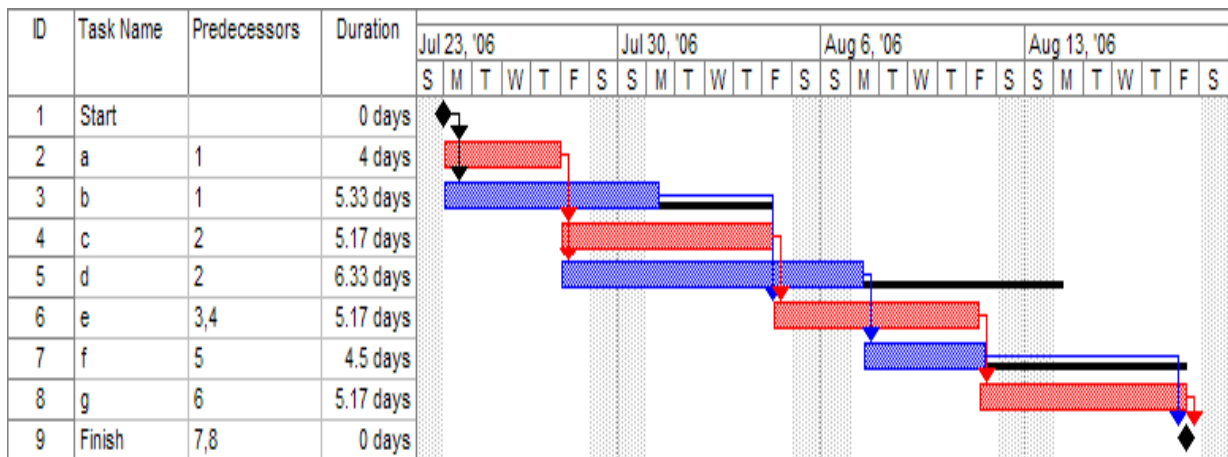
- Electronic diaries**

Useful for arranging meetings as days, weeks and months can be seen at one glance, and the e-diaries of all participants can be seen at the same time. Most e-diaries have electronic tasks lists.



- Gantt charts**

This is a chart that a manager could put up to allow individuals to see key dates at a glance and the tasks that have to be completed. It can also be used to monitor when tasks have been completed.



It should be remembered when preparing Priorities Lists and Action Plans that:

- work schedules should have some degree of flexibility built in
- tasks should not be left to the last minute – planning should ensure that should an unforeseen situation arise, it would be unlikely to make the completion of a task go beyond the scheduled deadline.

Priorities lists should have a mixture of high, medium and low priority tasks so that some tasks can be delayed if necessary. If a Priorities List only included high priority tasks then an emergency requiring a change to plans would result in the administrative assistant not knowing which task should be left until another day. A mixture of tasks would enable low or medium priority work to be tackled another day, whilst hopefully, leaving some time to deal with the high priority tasks.

Dealing with changes in priorities

Sometimes work plans and targets have to be changed due to unforeseen circumstances. These circumstances can affect work on a day-to-day basis and sometimes they can affect the long-term achievement of targets.

Examples of circumstances that could affect day-to-day work include:

- a member of staff failing to show up for work
- the network crashing
- a manager changing a deadline for a piece of work.

If any of these situations arise the employee should remain calm and maybe call on the help of others to complete tasks.

Setting targets

Targets can appear in many different documents, e.g. Action Plan, Priorities Lists, Personal Development Plans, etc. and in many different forms. Whether targets are complex or simple, short term or long term, for an individual or for the organisation, they should all have certain characteristics, i.e. they should be SMART targets.



S	Specific – Is the target well defined and does it state exactly what is required?
M	Measurable – What will be the measurement unit to see whether or not the target has been achieved?
A	Agreed – The target must be discussed and agreed with your line manager as part of your personal development.
R	Realistic – Do you have the necessary skills and knowledge to complete the target or are you being over-ambitious?
T	Timed – A time should be set as to when the target will be completed.

Monitoring and evaluating progress

When targets are set it is important that measures are put in place to monitor the progress of these targets. Such systems should not be over-complicated and should not be viewed by employees as a way in which they are being spied upon. They should be seen as constructive aid to help the individual worker achieve targets and receive any necessary assistance. Some of these control mechanisms are:

- **Sample checks:** where some but not all of the tasks are looked over by the immediate supervisor
- **Line manager:** checking at regular times how the work is progressing
- **Buddy system:** where an employee is paired with a more experienced member of staff who can be called on for help and advice
- **Mentoring system:** where an employee is assigned a more senior member of staff who can be called on for help and advice
- **Gantt chart:** a chart that can be used to monitor progress against planned targets and actual progress
- **Audit or system check:** where current procedures are reviewed and changes made to improve efficiency
- **Regular meetings:** between staff and line managers.



Control mechanisms should aim to establish sooner, rather than later, whether targets are running to the planned schedule. Systems should, therefore, monitor progress on an on-going basis. Possibly the best method of monitoring progress continuously is to ensure that there are good communication channels in

operation which allow employees to discuss whether or not targets are on schedule. Progress can be discussed and recorded at:

- regular team meetings
- regular one-to-one meetings between employees and their line manager

As well as these control mechanisms being in place, individuals may also use planning aids to help them keep track of their own progress, including:

- desk diaries
- electronic diaries
- priorities lists
- action plans.

It is also important that employees are given opportunities to evaluate their performance on a regular basis, possibly through the process of staff appraisal.

There are occasions, when problems occur, even though monitoring has been in place. When there are deviations, or targets are not met, then some questions need to be asked before a solution can be put in place.

- Were the targets SMART?
- Did the actions of others hold you up?
- Did additional tasks occur after the job started?
- Did the task extend beyond your capabilities?
- Did your line manager support you?

If any of the above happens it is important that it is discussed with the line manager as soon as possible. Solutions will include extending the deadline, offering overtime, being assertive and saying no to additional work, and calling on additional help from others. It may also be necessary to discuss the target with your line manager and ensure that you understand the extent of the task.

Effective teams

The expression ‘no man is an island’ is very true – it is not often that people can successfully work alone without the need for someone else.

In today’s competitive environment, organisations recognise the benefits to be gained from team working. Changing working practices have therefore included more team work.

A team can be defined as a group who have been specially formed for a particular purpose – to achieve a common goal or particular aim.



A team is characterised by 3 factors:

- a shared purpose or goal
- a sense of belonging to a team (having an identity)
- a dependence or reliance on each other.

Features of effective teams

The following are the factors that make an effective team:

- **Team composition**

Consideration should be placed on factors such as personality, interests, age and backgrounds when forming a team. If the members of a team think along the same lines then they will usually work together effectively.

- **Team development**

A group of people who have worked together before will know each other and will develop more quickly.

- **Nature of the task**

Everyone in the team needs to believe in the task to be undertaken. The clearer the task and the more involved the members feel, the more effectively the team will work together.

- **Team maintenance**

It is important that the people who belong to a team identify themselves as part of the team and are given opportunities to develop as part of the team.

Opportunities should be given both inside and outside the workplace for the team to take part in activities that allow their relationship as a team to develop.



- **Leadership**

It is important that a team has an effective leader who can motivate the team towards their goal and minimise any conflict in the team.

Stages in team development

It is thought that before teams are fully effective they go through various stages:

- **Forming**

The team members are introduced to each other.

- **Storming**

Members compete for roles, there could be some dispute and power struggles.

- **Norming**

Members start working together and for each other, conflicts are resolved. Shared sets of standards and values are agreed and adopted by the group – once this happens a team will work as a cohesive group and pull together.

- **Performing**

The team is settled and working together well, achieving success.

Team formation

According to Meredith Belbin, a leading management theorist, there are clear roles that team members will adopt. He suggested that careful consideration should be given to the size of a team and that teams of around 4 to 6 people are the most effective. If a team is too large there is a danger of sub-groups developing and if a team is too small there is a danger of one person dominating the team.

Effective teams need to have a balance between the people who have the ideas and those who put them into action. If the team leader is able to identify the types of individuals when starting up the team and is able to ensure a good balance, then it may be easier to manage the relationships, behaviours and characteristics of the team.



The following are the team roles according to Belbin:

The ideas person: This is someone who is creative, imaginative and has the ability to solve problems.

The motivator: This is someone who can get things moving and drive the team forward.

The organiser: This is someone who can plan and co-ordinate activities, and pulls things together.

The implementer: This is someone who can get tasks started and turn ideas into actions.

The checker: This is someone who can monitor and ensure that tasks have been carried out correctly.

The finisher: This is someone who ensures that tasks are completed on time.

The go-getter: This is someone who develops contacts and can seek out resources.

The team player: This is someone who thinks about the people in the group and listens to others to minimise conflict.

The specialist: This is someone who can provide vital knowledge and skills.

Skills of team members

Leadership skills: A leader is someone who influences others towards the achievement of goals. Instead of having to coerce followers to achieve a task, a good leader will be able to motivate people to willingly work towards their goals.

He/she will do this by:

- setting a clear vision or goals for the team
- meeting the needs of the team (providing information, communication, etc.)
- meeting the needs of the individuals within the team (support, training, etc)
- meeting the needs of the task in hand (resources, use of team skills, etc)
- liaising with the team, management and other work areas

A good leader will deploy team skills effectively, ensure conflict is kept to a minimum and that communication is open and constructive. Good leaders involve their team in decision making and listen to ideas on the best way to achieve the task. They encourage a sense of team ownership and commitment to the task and the organisation – ensuring that the job gets done but also ensuring that the team has a sense of satisfaction in doing it.



The kind of leadership required by a team will depend on a number of factors – whether it is a new or established team, how

effective the team is and how complex the task is, etc. A directing leader is more necessary in a less experienced, less effective team, however, more experienced or effective teams will often need a leader who is more a co-ordinator of activity and provider of resources as they will need less direction. The more effective a team is, the more the members will interact with one another and take on roles to support one another – there is less need for a leader to direct operations, but rather to pull things together and support the activity.

Listening skills: Team members should be able to listen to each other's ideas and points of view.

Communication skills: Team members should be able to put their thoughts into words for everyone to understand. Team members should be able to communicate both verbally and in writing.

Team conflict

There are many reasons for conflict but it usually occurs when there are:

- **Conflicting goals**

2 members of the team want to go in different directions.

- **Personal disputes**

There are always people who will not get on, causing difficulties for the team.

- **Lack of resources**

Not being able to pull all ideas into action because there is not enough money, staff, equipment, etc.

- **Changing expectations**

Perhaps moving deadlines or the targets being changed after the work has started.

- **Loyalty issues**

Affected by the relationships that exist between members of the team



Benefits of teams to individuals

- **Increased morale and motivation**

Individuals working in a team will have a greater sense of involvement and this can improve job satisfaction.

- **Shared knowledge and skills**

Teams can greatly benefit from sharing ideas and knowledge with one another, which can help develop an individual's role within the organisation.

- **Risk-taking**

Individuals working in teams have the ability to share the risk, which encourages them to try out new ideas that they might not have tried as an individual.

- **Sense of being valued and belonging**

Individuals working in a team may have an increased feeling of belonging and team identity.

Benefits of teams to the organisation

- **Pooled resources**

‘Two heads are better than one.’ Bringing people together, with the variety of knowledge and skills they possess will generate more ideas and solve more problems than using individuals separately. Exchange of ideas and shared skills benefit the organisation in terms of creativity, it is also of benefit to the individual involved for their learning and development, which in turn increases motivation.

- **Multi-skilling**

Teams allow the workforce to be more flexible and to adapt to needs as required, for example if a member of staff is absent, then other members of the team can cover their duties between them.

- **Responsibility**

Effective teams need less supervision as they are more likely to take on more responsibility. This could result in layers of management being reduced, which would reduce costs for an organisation.

- **Higher productivity**

Because of the increased morale and motivation of employees, the organisation could benefit from increased productivity and lower staff turnover.

- **Risk-taking**

Teams are more likely to take risks and this can give an organisation a competitive edge.

Workplace regulations

In order to create a safe and healthy working environment for both staff and visitors to your organisation everyone must adhere to health and safety legislation. Health and safety legislation is constantly changing and being updated. You should know the main provisions of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 which is really like a large umbrella covering the minimum standards that need to be followed. It is also known as an ‘enabling’ act which means it allows for any new acts or amendments to acts to be added.

Employee and employer responsibilities under current workplace legislation in the areas of health and safety:

- **Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (HASAWA)**

This is an umbrella Act covering the minimum standards and applies to all places of work. It sets out the general duties that employers have towards employees and members of the public. It also sets out the general duties employees have to themselves and each other.

Under this legislation employers must:

- provide a safe place of work for employees, including safe access and exit, and ensure that entrances and exits are clearly marked
- provide safe equipment and ongoing maintenance of equipment and ensure that regular checks are made on equipment and machinery
- provide information about safety in the workplace and provide training programmes and advice to employees
- provide information to all employees about safety in the workplace by displaying health and safety information on notice boards
- provide a written health and safety policy, circulate written statements and ensure that details are kept up to date
- provide a safety representative to represent employees’ needs.



Under this legislation employees must:

- take reasonable care for the health and safety of themselves and ensure that they report any faults immediately
- take reasonable care for the health and safety of other people and be observant and spot any hazards outwith their own area and report them
- co-operate with the employer or line manager by attending any health and safety sessions and knowing the organisational policy on health and safety
- refrain from misusing or interfering with anything provided for health and safety and never operate machinery they are not authorised to.

HASAWA is the main piece of health and safety legislation in the UK but the following are other regulations that employers should be aware of:

- **Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992**

These regulations cover the four main areas of the workplace:

- the working environment safety,
- facilities and
- the maintenance of equipment and
- premises.



- **Health and Safety (First Aid) Regulations 1981**

These regulations state that there needs to be a qualified first-aid person and suitable first-aid equipment depending on the number of employees.



- **Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1999**

These regulations state that there must be a means of alerting people to a fire, suitable means to escape a building, fire-fighting equipment provided and staff trained in areas of fire safety.



- **Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) 1995**

This deals with the reporting of injuries and accidents at work – serious and fatal.

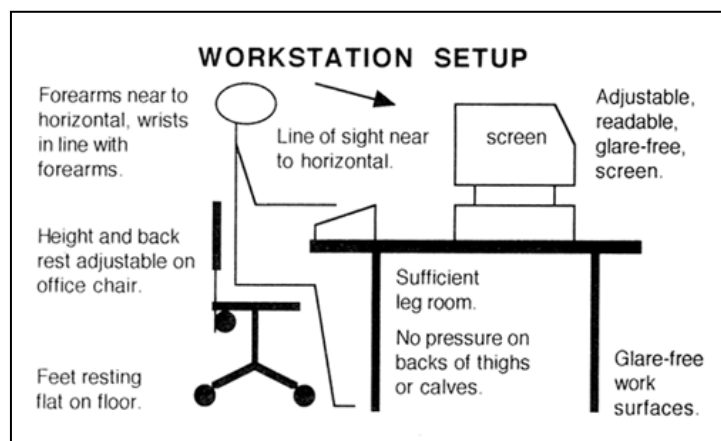
- **Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) 1994**

This deals with the storage and control of hazardous substances and items such as protective clothing and equipment.

- **The Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992**

These regulations provide protection for employees working with VDUs and computer equipment. Some of the areas covered by this legislation are as follows:

- Employers must examine workstations and ensure that they are suitable for the work to be carried out.
- Employers must ensure that workstations meet minimum requirements: the VDU can be adjusted with brightness and contrast, adjustable chairs are provided, footrests are provided if requested, keyboards can be adjusted and are separate from the screen.
- Employers must ensure that employees are given suitable breaks or can change activity away from the VDU.
- Employers must provide eye tests if the employee requests this and provide glasses or contact lenses if special ones are needed for VDU work.
- Employers must provide health and safety training and information to employees to ensure VDUs and workstations are used safely.



In addition to the above legislative requirements, in 1993 6 European Health and Safety directives were enforced in Britain. These became known as the ‘6-Pack’, and covered many aspects of health and safety legislation: however, there were 2 main additions:

- The requirement for risk assessment and monitoring by employers – it is now the duty of employers to carry out a written assessment of all risks in the workplace, identify hazards involved and outline actions to eliminate or minimise the risks
- Increased worker participation

Further information on health and safety legislation can be found online at www.hse.gov.uk.

Breaching health and safety legislation

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is responsible for enforcing workplace health and safety legislation. If an organisation does not follow this legislation then the HSE can:

- enter and inspect premises without warning
- provide advice
- issue improvement notices and give warnings
- shut down premises
- impose a fine or prosecute if necessary.

In addition, employees who believe that the organisation has breached health and safety requirements can take their case to an Industrial Tribunal. Examples might be the non-provision of safety equipment or protective clothing or failure to remedy a reported hazard, which has results in subsequent injury. If a case is proven against the employer, it may result in fines or compensation to the employee.

Employees also have to take health and safety procedures seriously and if any employee breaches these procedures then they will be dealt with through the organisation's discipline procedure, depending on the severity and nature of the incident, which could include:

- a verbal warning
- a written warning
- suspension
- dismissal
- fine
- criminal or civil prosecution.



Disciplinary procedures need to be formal and it is important that all parties know why they have been taken. When an employee is issued with a verbal warning they must be made aware of the consequences of not heeding this warning. They should know that the written warning is a second and possibly last chance before really serious action will be taken. If they are suspended from work it could ruin the employee's reputation and they may not receive any pay. A fine could also cause financial hardship but dismissal and prosecution are obviously the most serious steps in the discipline procedure and should only be taken when all other steps have been followed or if the offence is extremely serious. There should also be an appeals procedure, to give the employee the opportunity to argue their case against wrongful dismissal.

The issue of health and safety is a very serious one for both employers and employees and failure to comply with either legislation or organisational procedures can result in heavy penalties for all concerned. Communicating legal requirements to employees

Communicating legal requirements to employees

It is an employer's responsibility to provide information to employees on health and safety. In fact, by law, any organisation employing more than 5 staff must produce a written Health and Safety Policy, which must be passed on to employees.

There are a number of ways organisations can ensure information is communicated to staff and these methods include:

- **Induction training**

When a new employee starts they should receive a copy of the health and safety policy and also receive any necessary training on health and safety issues, e.g. fire drill procedures.

- **Ongoing staff training**

Staff should be kept up to date on a regular basis on health and safety issues, including the safe use of any new equipment.

- **Organisational handbook**

This is usually distributed to staff or made readily available and usually includes health and safety policies and procedures.

- **Notice boards/posters/LCD screens**

These can be displayed in certain areas to remind staff about procedures such as fire drills, warning notices and no smoking signs.

- **Company intranet**

This can be used to pass on key information to staff as all staff will have access to this and files can be stored in a central area.

- **Demonstrations**

This can be used for practical activities such as fire drills or first-aid procedures.

- **Staff meetings**

If information regarding any health and safety policies need to be given to all staff than a meeting is the quickest way to ensure that this information is passed on.

- **Health and safety representatives**

These are people who should be available for advice and can provide information to employees.

Of course, whilst it is a legal requirement for organisations to provide information, it is also an obligation of the employee to ensure it is read and complied with.

Data handling legislations

• **Data Protection Act 1984 and 1998**

This piece of legislation exists to protect individuals who have personal data stored about them and to ensure that organisations process this data lawfully.



The key terms used in the Data Protection Act are:

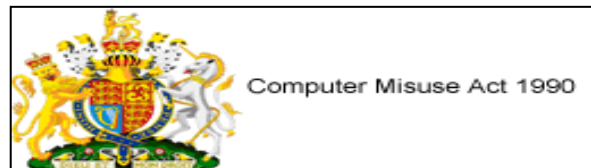
- **Personal data** – data about a living individual
- **Data subject** – the individual that the data is about. The data subject has rights that must not be infringed by organisations that hold and process our data
- **Data controller** – the individual or organisation that holds the data, this could you a school, college, bank, employer, hospital, a company that you have bought something from, etc. Data controllers have certain obligations that they must adhere to when holding and processing personal data.

Data controller obligations	Rights of the individual
<p>They must notify the Information Commissioner’s Office to let them know what personal data they are holding and why. They must also pay a fee and register as a data controller.</p> <p>There are 8 data protection principles that a data controller must adhere to. Data must be:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. fairly and lawfully obtained and processed 2. accurate and kept up to date 3. adequate, relevant and not excessive 4. processed for limited purposes 5. held securely 6. not held for longer than necessary 7. processed in accordance with the individual’s rights 	<p>The rights of the individual are clearly defined by the Data Protection Act and include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • subject access – you can find out what is held on computer about you • prevent processing – you can ask a data controller not to process your information • direct marketing – you can ask that your data is not used for direct marketing • automatic decision making – you can object to decisions being made on your behalf on account of the data held • compensation – you can claim compensation for damage or distress if the Act is breached • rectify, block, erase or

<p>8. not transferred outside the EU unless the country has adequate protection for the individual</p>	<p>destroy – if the data is not accurate or has opinions based on inaccurate information you can apply to the courts to force the data controller to rectify, block, erase or destroy the data.</p>
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- **Computer Misuse Act 1990**

This legislation was created to prevent unauthorised access to computer systems. There are 3 offences covered under this legislation:



1. No unauthorised access of computer material – this means that it is an offence to access computer material that an organisation or individual has no right to access, for example it is an offence to log on to a computer system using the login details of a colleague or friend. This offence applies to people that hack into computer systems too – even if they do no damage.
2. No unauthorised access with the intent to commit or help further offences – this means it is an offence to access a computer system with the intent of committing an offence to gain information that you have no right to gain or use, or to delete or modify data. You commit an offence even if you do not succeed in your ultimate aim.
3. No unauthorised changes to computer material – this mean that it is an offence to modify or delete information on a computer system that you have not been authorised to. Many organisations limit the number of people who are allowed to update the data on their system, giving limited ‘read only’ access to most people who need access.

- **Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988**

Copyright gives the authors of written and recorded works rights about how their works can be used. The works covered by the Act include books, film, music and computer programs. The purpose of the Act is to ensure that exclusive ownership of the work is retained, and that no unauthorised copying of the work takes place.

Organisations must be careful not to infringe copyright when it comes to using computer software. Each organisation must ensure that they have purchased enough licences for their use and that employees do not copy software.

- **Freedom of Information Act 2000**

The Freedom of Information Act provides public access to information held by public authorities. This means that:

- public authorities are obliged to publish certain information about their activities
- members of the public are entitled to request information from public authorities



The Freedom of Information Act means that information previously regarded as 'secret' will ultimately be available to everyone.

Impact of IT

The positive and negative impact of IT on areas such as:

- **Office layout and ergonomics**

Office layout

The work environment has changed greatly in the last 20 years. The building of any new work premises will take environmental factors into account and will be designed to make the best and most flexible use of the available space. There will be a mix of traditional desk areas, but there will also be touchdown areas for using laptops and other mobile technologies and chill out areas for staff to socialise.

Most organisations will use one of 2 layouts:

- cellular
- open plan

Each of these layouts has advantages and disadvantages. ICT has had an impact on these layouts as more modern organisations will have an open-plan layout and be able to share ICT for the benefit of the employees. Most organisations will develop areas such as hot-desks and touchdown areas where ICT equipment, such as laptops and other mobile technologies, can be shared.

The type of layout used will depend very much on the type of work done within the organisation.

The layout and condition of the office will affect work in a number of ways. Poorly designed layout will disrupt the efficiency of the workflow. Staff should not have to walk from one end of the building to the other just to retrieve work from the shared printer. Even if staff hot-desk, it still makes sense for them to be located physically in the same department. This is often achieved by the use of partitions or screens, plants and the grouping of the furniture. Staff are motivated by pleasant surrounding and being able to access resources easily, so morale and productivity can be affected by poorly designed conditions.

A cellular layout consists of individual offices where people work on their own.



Advantages of cellular layout	Disadvantages of cellular layout
Gives individual privacy	Wastes space
No distractions and allows individuals to concentrate on their work	Difficult to share resources such as printers
Ability to personalise the working space and regulate heating/lighting	Employees may feel isolated and does not promote team spirit
Status – allows people to feel important	Difficult to supervise with everyone in individual offices

An open-plan layout consists of a number of individuals working in a large open space. An open-plan layout can be total open (without any kind of partition of space at all) or ‘landscaped’, which is more often the case. Landscaped layouts will use plants, furniture and partitions/screens to create separate areas within one large space.



Advantages of open-plan layout	Disadvantages of open-plan layout
Easier to supervise	Lack of privacy, so meeting rooms may have to be used
Promotes teamwork and team spirit	Can be noisy and lots of distractions
Resources can be shared, which saves money	Difficult to suit personal requirements such as lighting/heating
Less space is wasted	Does not give an individual status

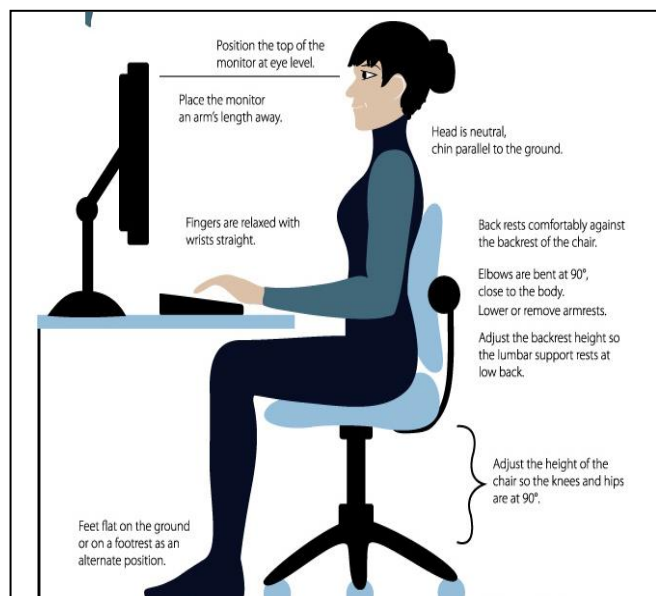
Employees who work in large open plan environments sometimes complain of illnesses such as headaches, sore throats and tiredness, which they believe are associated with the building they work in. This is known as sick building syndrome.

Ergonomics

Ergonomics is the study of the working environment and ways to prevent health problems for employees. Because of the increased use of ICT employees can develop problems such as eye strain, headaches, backache, RSI and neck pain. A well-designed working environment should help to reduce these problems and the risk of sick building syndrome, and can benefit the organisation due to higher moral and motivation, which increases productivity.

Considerations for a well-designed ergonomic environment include:

- **wall colours:** colours should be used which are relaxing and will minimise glare
- **lighting:** this should be non-glare and desk lamps should be used if appropriate
- **noise:** consideration should be given to floor coverings and noisy equipment should be placed in a separate room
- **heating:** good circulation should be provided, with opportunities to adjust heating temperature to suit individual needs
- **equipment/furniture:** desks and chairs should be provided that adjust to suit individual requirements and are suitable to carry out the work required.



Working practices

If you were to look at how organisations carried out their activities just 20 years ago, the picture would seem very different from today. Employees held either permanent full-time or permanent part-time contracts and carried out their work almost entirely on the organisation’s premises. Most full-time staff worked from 9 am until 5 pm from Monday to Friday.




Today things look very different and organisations use a wide range of employment contracts and working practices to carry out their operations. These changes are due to a number of factors including:

- **new technology** – particularly the Internet which has made communication and the exchange of information easy, fast and relatively cheap
- **competition** – the highly competitive business environment has forced organisations to streamline their activities and adopt working practices which are as cost-effective as possible
- **social trends** – the changing needs and demands of the workforce have influenced organisations to adopt more flexible working practices. Social legislation, reflecting changes in social trends has also forced changes in the workplace.

The key word for both the employer and employee is flexibility. The employer can offer a range of flexible working practices and the employee can benefit from flexibility in terms of when, where and how they work.

Flexible working practices

Different working practices that organisation might operate include:

Terms of contract	Permanent Temporary Fixed-term Casual	
Working hours	Full-time Part-time Flexi-time Job-share	
Mode of work	Office-based Homeworking Teleworking Hot desking	

In addition, organisations might choose to:

Outsource - whole areas of its operations (for example marketing, recruitment or payroll services). They contract another organisation to deliver a service or particular skill rather than employ and train staff of their own.

Career breaks - can be granted to employees with a certain length of service to take time out from their career to pursue other interests or family commitments. At the end of the agreed period, the employee will return to their position in the organisation. Employers have realised that there are advantages to holding on to able, experienced staff and, rather than lose them permanently, employers are increasingly agreeing to these temporary breaks in employment.

Unpaid leave - can be given to staff for a period of time. For example to parents during school holiday periods, especially during the long summer break when parents often find it difficult to find child care.



Case loading - has also been adopted in some organisation to replace the more traditional 9 to 5, 5 days a week approach. A shift in emphasis means the completion of a given workload is considered more important than working a set number of hours in a day. Therefore, where it is considered that the overall work of the organisation will not suffer, employees are often allowed to adopt more flexible working patterns.

Impact of flexible working practices (organisation)

Advantages for the organisation:

- Short-term contracts can be used to employ staff only when they are needed (especially useful in businesses where demand for their goods/services is seasonal). In addition, organisation can buy in specialist skills for short-term projects without incurring the need for training/re-skilling of their existing staff.
- Organisations can retain workers whose personal circumstances have changed (e.g. new mothers/fathers) rather than lose the knowledge and skills of these experienced workers. Consequently, there is no need to recruit and train new employees.
- Fewer employees in the office results in savings in terms of less work space is needed meaning less rent, electricity costs, etc. Fewer employees also means less equipment, furniture, etc. has to be purchased.

- By increasing the choice of working methods to suit employees' lifestyles, the organisation will benefit from better morale, motivation, productivity and less absenteeism.
- Outsourcing of services to specialist firms can be cost effective, despite the possible loss of control over a particular area of work.



Disadvantages for the organisation:

- It can be difficult to offer training and staff development to all part-time workers.
- It is not always easy to ensure health and safety in the home environment.
- It is harder to organise and control a large number of part-time workers.
- There may be difficulties in communication.
- Impact of flexible working practices

Impact of flexible working practices (employee)

Advantages for the employee:

- Greater choice and flexibility to suit changing needs and lifestyle, e.g. it makes it easier to combine work and family life especially for single parents or carers.
- Part-time workers tend to have lower stress levels as they have some time to 'recharge' themselves on days off.
- Freedom to choose when and where to work.
- Reduction in travel time and costs.

Disadvantages for the employee:

- There may be fewer opportunities for staff development and training.
- There can be feelings of isolation when working from home.
- Hot desking may result in depersonalisation of space, leading to a feeling of not belonging to the organisation.
- It can be more difficult to develop



new relationships.

- Difficult to balance work and home commitments, need for discipline to work working hours.
- Question of security of job if contracts are increasingly of a temporary or fixed-term nature – implications for e.g. pensions, ability to get a mortgage, etc.

The increased use of ICT across businesses has result in many advantages including:

- An increase in the volume of information which can be accessed, process and transmitted
- An increase in the speed and ease with which information can be accessed, processed and transmitted
- An increase in employees' productivity
- An improvement in the quality of output of information (accuracy and appearance)
- An increase in employees' motivation (the time spent on routine, repetitive tasks is reduced)
- The increased opportunity to standardise the collection, processing and transmission of information within the organisation
- Greater flexibility in the use of equipment (computers can be used to operate a range of software packages)

Developments in ICT have resulted in a large number of people being able to carry out homeworking and teleworking due to better methods of communication. It has also meant that video and audio conferencing have made remote meetings possible within the workplace.

- **homeworking**
- **teleworking**

Homeworking is when employees carry out the duties of the job from home and teleworking is when employees carry out the duties of the job away from the organisation and use ICT to keep in contact. This has had an impact on both employers and employees.



Advantages of homeworking and teleworking	Disadvantages of homeworking and teleworking
Allows a better work–life balance for employees, which can increase morale and motivation, and thus increase productivity	Staff may feel isolated and it is difficult to promote team spirit
Reduction in travel, which reduces stress among staff	Staff may find it difficult to discipline themselves to get the work done as there may be more distractions at home
Organisations can save money on smaller premises as they won't need to accommodate everyone in the office	It is difficult to ensure that staff are complying with health and safety requirements when they are working at home
Allow for the organisation to retain employees whose personal circumstances have changed	It is difficult to supervise staff who are working from home

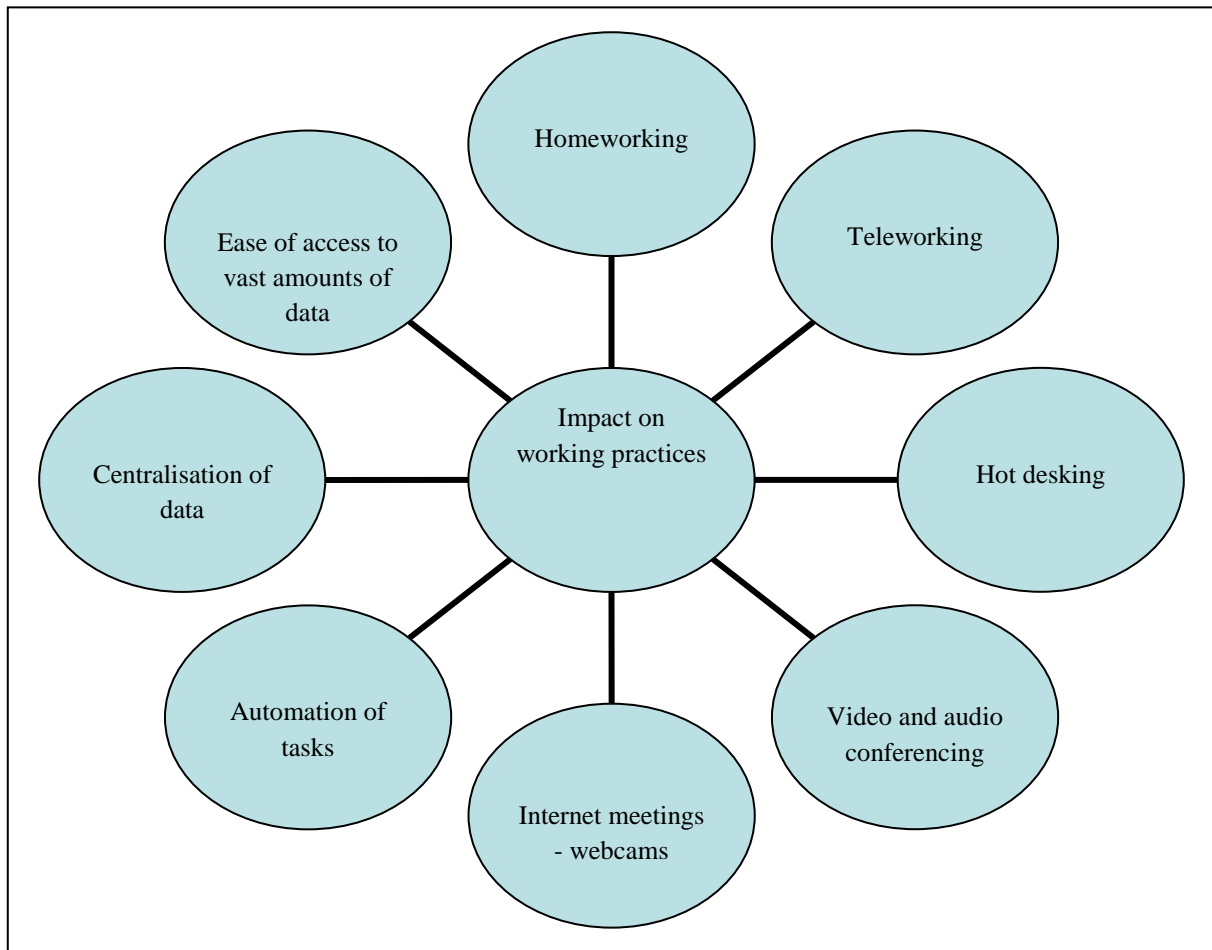
Developments in the internet, mobile telephones, webcams, video and audio conferencing now mean that individuals can work collaboratively without physically being in the same rooms. Technology such as Skype and FaceTime has developed this further, with the ability to hold meetings at your fingertips.



Advantages of technology advances	Disadvantages of technology advances
Meetings can take place around the world without people having to travel, which saves time and money	Some people may feel awkward in front of a camera and still prefer a face-to-face meeting
Using Skype or FaceTime is more personal than telephone calls and	If there is a network fault or the system crashes then the meeting will have to be

allow people to see each other, see people's body language and therefore help clarify points	postponed
Allow for demonstrations to be given and files to be exchanged	

The use of ICT has had a considerable effect on our working practices. The main areas are summarised in the diagram below:



Communication

In every survey asking employers what they want of employees, all rate good communication skills very highly. It is not only important that you can deal with customers or people outside your organisation but your ability to communicate well with people at all levels within your organisation is also important. Managers need to know what is happening to plan, co-ordinate and control operations and need to communicate information to ensure that targets and performance match.

Communication using ICT is constantly developing.

- **Mobile phones:** The features of mobile phone technology are always changing. The main ways to communicate by mobile phone are through SMS, FaceTime and Skype.
- **Email:** Email is an extremely quick way to communicate and most email accounts can also be used through mobile phones. The benefits of using email are that the same message can be sent to a number of people, files can be sent as attachments and it can be used anywhere in the world.
- **Instant messaging:** This allows you to have a private chat or discussion with another user. You can exchange messages in real time, which is just like a telephone conversation but using text.
- **Wikis:** This is a collection of articles on the internet that users can add to and edit freely.
- **Blogs:** This is an online diary where thoughts and opinions can be displayed.

Data handling: Software applications

Most organisations will use a combination of general purpose software such as word processing, spreadsheet and database applications which can be used by all employees within the organisation. Integrated packages (for example Microsoft Office) are now commonly used – this is where different applications are available within the same package and feature common commands and the ability to integrate data between them. Most organisations will operate their software on a network basis for common access and communication. Some organisations may also use customised software which has been specially written for the organisation. Examples of this might be specialised timetabling or database packages.

Most organisations will choose the software that suits their business needs. The most common software applications are the following:

- **Word processing:** This is used to create various business documents such as letters, reports, minutes etc. The main functions are creating tables, formatting text, creating electronic forms and mail merging. The advantages of word-processing software are improved accuracy and quality of documents, easy to make changes to documents, integration with other software applications possible.
- **Spreadsheets:** These are used to perform calculations and analyse numeric data. The main functions are calculations carried out using formulae, formatting of cells and producing charts. The advantages of spreadsheets

are that calculations are more accurate, data is updated if inputs are changed, data can be analysed using IF and SumIF, etc. and charts can be used to help understand data.

- **Databases:** These are used to store vast amounts of information (like an electronic filing system) about customers, suppliers, employees etc. The main functions are sorting data, performing queries and displaying data in reports. The advantages of databases are that information can be kept secure using access rights, information can be found quickly using criteria in queries, mail merge can be used to link information to other documents and data can be formatted and updated as appropriate.
- **Presentation software:** This is used to present information using slides and handouts. The main functions are to add animation effects and use sound and graphics to present information in a more interesting way. The advantages of presentation software are that it can be used to gain the audience's attention, information can be integrated from other applications to support the presentation and presentations can be given a more professional look.
- **Electronic mail software:** This is a fast, efficient and cost effective way to send messages anywhere in the world. Email software includes many useful features like the ability to attach files to a message and the same message can be sent to many people at the same time. The advantages of email software are it can be accessed anywhere with an Internet connection, it is a very fast method of communication and is an ideal method when communication across different time zones because recipients can view their mail at a time that suits them.
- **Electronic diary software:** This is an electronic calendar and personal organiser. The main features of electronic diary software are that it can be used for noting appointments and meetings, and there is a to-do list facility to keep track of tasks. The advantages of using an electronic diary are that it is easy to alter/amend/move/delete appointments, tasks, etc. and everything is in the one place which makes it easier to keep track of your schedule and check what you should be doing.



The only disadvantages of using business software are the cost of purchasing the software, the time and expense of training staff to use the software effectively and the effort taken to ensure confidentiality and security of the information.

Networks

Organisations use networks to access and communicate information without the need for paper copies to be passed around the office. There are 2 types of network:

- Local area
- Wide area.



Local Area Network

Local area networks (LANs) use servers to connect computers and peripherals within small geographical areas, e.g. within a building.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Easy to share peripherals such as printers and photocopiers, which can reduce costs.	If the network goes down, then no-one can access files, which will slow down productivity.
Make it easier to share files and information with employees.	If the file server is damaged or stolen then all files could be lost.
Back-ups can be taken on a regular basis, which reduces the chance of losing files.	A virus can spread very quickly over a LAN.
Security can be set to restrict access to certain areas of the network (access rights).	

Wide Area Network

A wide area network (WAN) is a network that connects computers on a world-wide scale. The best example of this is the internet, but a WAN can also be used to connect different branches of an organisation anywhere in the world.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Data can be transmitted between branches very quickly.	People outside the organisation could have access to your data so there need to be tight security measures in place.
Gives easy access to the internet.	There is no control over external websites – they can be removed or changed by the owner so some pages could become unavailable.

Internet

Most organisations now use the internet to advertise their business, advertise job vacancies and, most importantly, for e-commerce (trading on the internet).

Advantages of e-commerce for the organisation	Disadvantages of e-commerce for the organisation
The organisation can reach a wide range of customers world-wide.	The cost of setting up a website and keeping it up to date can be high.
Customers have access to the site 24/7, which could increase sales.	Security systems have to be in place that will ensure that the customer has no worries about inputting personal information.
The organisation can reduce costs by not needing to have retail premises and not having to increase staffing.	Organisations lose out on face-to-face contact with customers.
Organisations can monitor what customers are buying and use this information for marketing purposes.	

Advantages of e-commerce for the consumer	Disadvantages of e-commerce for the consumer
Consumers can browse and buy 24/7.	Some customers like to see products before they buy them.
Customers can shop from the comfort of their own homes and get products delivered to their door.	The organisation or supplier becomes faceless – some companies are better than others at dealing with any problems
Items can be purchased from all over the world increasing the choice available.	A badly designed website can make it difficult to find the required information, which can be frustrating and potentially off putting for the

	customer.
Products and prices can be compared easily.	

File management

File management is the organisation of computer files. Organisations will put their own procedures in place to ensure that files are stored properly.

Procedures should cover:

- **File locations:** information should be given on where files should be stored, e.g. on the server, in which location and whether an external storage device is required
- **File names:** files should be stored in named folders with appropriate file names that will make it easy to find files
- **Routine maintenance:** information should be provided to staff about deleting unnecessary files as storage may need to be freed up on the server
- **Back-up procedures:** back-up copies should be made on a regular basis and staff should know the procedure for this. Some servers may automatically back up data on a regular basis.



Consequences of poor file management

File management is really important to organisations and it is vital that information can be found when needed. If good procedures are not in place then the following can happen:

- time will be wasted looking for files, which can lead to stress for staff
- relationships with customers could deteriorate as they may complain if information cannot be found
- computer systems could slow down as the server is holding too many files

- wrong management decisions could be made if out-of-date information is used
- there could be legal implications regarding data handling.

2. Customer care

Good customer service is the most important feature of any business. Customers are at the heart of any organisation and it is important that customers receive a satisfactory service and will return. It is much easier to keep existing customers than to find new ones.

Most organisations will have a mission statement which outlines the organisation's main aims and goals. This statement is usually only a couple of sentences but employees are encouraged to learn it and share the management's 'vision' of how the organisation hopes to grow and develop.

Customer service is probably the most important aspect of any business, as without customers there is no business!

Because of increased global competition the market place is now extremely competitive and attracting and retaining customers is a prime factor in many customer service policies.



In order to meet increased customer expectations businesses need to implement procedures that ensure customer satisfaction. Satisfied customers will be happy customers who tend to come back and even recommend the organisation to others.

Customers are not only external to the organisation but are also internal (employees and stakeholders). If the staff are motivated and valued they will be more likely to promote a good company image. Even the way the telephone is answered can have an effect on a potential customer. Therefore it is important to be professional at all times. To encourage such professionalism, many organisation will have policies and strategies in place to ensure that the customer gets what they want.

The features of good customer care such as:

- **Written customer care statement/strategy**

This is a statement about the standards that a customer should expect from an organisation in terms of how the organisation will deal with them, deadlines and quality of service. This statement should be shared with both employees and customers so that everyone is aware of the standard expected. This will allow for customer loyalty and a good reputation.

- **Customer service level agreements**

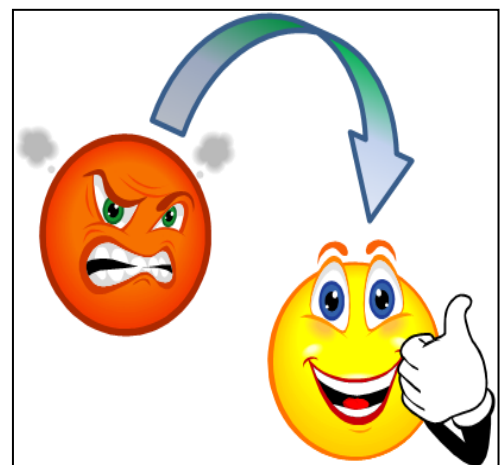
This is an agreement between the organisation and the customer that describes what the organisation promises to do and what the customer can expect. This is usually used when big contracts are drawn up between an organisation and a customer. The agreement may include the following aspects:

- how the organisation will deliver on the promises
- what will happen if the organisation fails to deliver on its promises
- the responsibilities of both the organisation and the customer
- any hidden or extra costs.

A service level agreement will allow an organisation to see what their standards are and if they do not meet them the reasons why they failed. This agreement may be used for both internal and external customers.

- **Complaints procedures**

In reality things do go wrong and when they do it is important that a procedure is in place to deal with customer complaints. It is important that both staff and customers know what this procedure is. Even though a customer has a reason to complain, as long as the complaint is handled effectively the organisation may not lose the customer. If, however, the customer has a negative experience when making a complaint the chances are they will tell others of this experience.



The following should be covered by a complaints procedure:

- All complaints should be taken seriously, logged and given a reference number.
- Staff who deal with complaints should be trained appropriately.
- All complaints should be acknowledge in some way and some indication of the next steps should be outlined.
- Clear timelines should be given to customers and an indication of how long they should expect to wait for a response.
- The result of the complaint should be communicated to the customer as soon as possible.

Often customers do not complain about poor services, the reasons for not complaining might be:



The benefits of good customer care

The benefits of good customer care are:

- high staff morale and motivation, which can increase productivity
- low staff turnover as staff will want to stay in an organisation where there are not many customer complaints
- satisfied customers who will remain loyal to the organisation and also recommend the organisation to others
- good reputation
- competitive edge in the market place
- increased market share.



The consequences of poor customer care

If a customer does not have a good experience then the following are the consequences of this:

- demotivated staff and low staff morale, which will result in poor working relationships
- dissatisfied customers who will not return and will not recommend to others
- loss of the competitive edge and market share
- high staff turnover
- very difficult to build reputation back up
- downfall of the organisation!

Monitoring and evaluating the quality of customer care

It is important that organisations gain feedback from customers on the customer care they receive so that any improvements can be made. There are various ways to do this and most organisations will use a variety of methods.

- **Mystery shopper**

This is when someone is employed to act as a customer and report back on the service they receive. This information is given to staff and any concerns regarding poor standards can be rectified. Praise may also be given to staff if the mystery customer has a good experience.



- **Satisfaction surveys**

This is a way of collecting information from customers and listening to what they are saying about the service they receive. One of the most common methods of doing this is by giving customers a questionnaire to fill out that allows them to rate the service. However, sometimes it is difficult to get these back from customers and it can be a costly process to send them out and analyse the results.

Another way of surveying customers is to conduct a telephone survey. This can be used to quickly gain feedback from customers as the response is immediate. However, many people find this an intrusion of their privacy and may not answer the questions.

Sometimes organisations interview customers in the street or in a store on a one-to-one basis. Again this will give the organisation immediate feedback but it can be very time-consuming and many people are unwilling to stop and give their opinions.

An increasingly popular method of surveying customers is to use online surveys. This involves emailing customers and asking for feedback on a recent purchase. This method is fairly inexpensive and customers can quickly answer the set questions. Many companies now use customer ratings on their websites, allowing customers to see other people's opinions of products and services.

- **Customer focus group**

A focus group is a face-to-face meeting with a group of customers to allow them to provide feedback to an organisation on goods and services. A focus group allows the organisation to gain immediate feedback from the customer. Being part of a focus group makes the customer feel valued and think that the organisation will take their opinion into consideration. The organisation may also gain a more detailed response from the customer as they are able to probe points further. However, a focus group can be very expensive to arrange as the participants may have to be paid a nominal fee and the cost of travel and a

meeting venue would have to be covered. Also, customers may only tell the organisation what they want to hear and not give any negative feedback.

- **Loyalty cards**

Loyalty cards are used to reward customers for their loyalty to an organisation by giving them points that can be exchanged for rewards. The main loyalty cards are Boots, Tesco and Nectar. This is a good way of retaining customer loyalty. Organisations can also use the information from loyalty cards to gain information



about their customers and their spending habits. They can use this information to target customers by gearing special offers on the products they buy towards them.

- **Market research**

All of the above are methods of gaining market research about customers. Market research is the process of collecting information and feedback about what customers think of an organisation and improvements that can be made. Market research is also used when organisations are thinking of launching new products onto the market to gain the opinion of potential customers before a product is launched.

There are two main types of market research. The first is field or primary research, which is when information is collected from customers first hand through surveys, interviews etc. The second type is desk or secondary research, which is when an organisation uses information that already exists for the benefit of the company, e.g. financial reports, government statistics etc.

Quality management systems

Using quality management systems an organisation instils a culture where quality is the responsibility of all staff. The customer is at the heart of the organisation and customer service is the responsibility of everyone and not just the people who deal directly with the customer. It is important that all staff are committed to improving standards and delivering what has been promised to the customer.