Handout 4: Filtering Information

Ever done a net search?

If you have you'll know that 16547 "hits" doesn't mean you've found anything useful. You need to filter out the irrelevant, out of date, and just plain wrong information. When you carefully choose the keywords you use, or 'refine your search', you are actually using a finer filter.

Information needs to be selected, so that people are not overloaded with irrelevant material. With the huge amount of information bombarding services it is important that it is screened and prioritised. Think: what is the most important information with regard to recent developments in legislation, regulation, training opportunities, Occupational Health and Safety, wages and conditions, theoretical models, developments in best practice, policy changes? What should be acted upon now, what should be flagged for the future, what can be safely ignored?

There is responsibility at both the sender's and receiver's end. When distributing information, the sender should not swamp recipients with material they don't need. For the recipient there is the need to filter out the unimportant - which may be as simple as chucking the junk mail in the recycling!

Screen, then store

Data should flow into an organisation, be sorted out, then get sent to the correct people. Information dissemination in large or growing organisations may need to be rationalised. A service with a number of different sections might receive a great number of (say) minutes of various meetings attended. Some may be sent in multiple copies to the service (wasteful duplication). Others might be sent as a single copy that the receiving section will read but others will never see. A central database that indexes all these minutes so that they can be quickly located would be of great value. In all organisations, of whatever size, it is useful to record outgoing and incoming correspondence, and where it is filed.

Anticipate and prevent problems

It is usually better to have an active rather than reactive organisation, meaning that problems are predicted and prepared for rather than responded to after they happen. It is probably inevitable however that communication mechanisms will have attention drawn to them only when they break down, and it may take such breakdowns for people to bother to improve them. As long as the problems is are small 'hiccups' rather
than major crises it shouldn't matter too much if improvements to the communication mechanisms are made in response to such hiccups as they arise. If, however, such problems are symptomatic of systems that are fundamentally flawed, people will be too busy reacting to the crisis to do anything about its causes. It will be too late. Channels of communication should, therefore, be reviewed regularly to ensure staff are informed of relevant information a timely way.