Communication in Facility Management & Maintenance:

30 WAYS OF ENSURING A SMOOTH FLOW OF INFORMATION WITH TECHNICIANS, CLIENTS, AND SUPPLIERS

INFRASPEAK

Contents

What to expect from this Infraspeak Guide

Are you a facility or maintenance management service provider? Then, this guide is for you!

We've compiled 30 suggestions to improve communication and avoid sneaky misunderstandings. You don't have to read it all in one sitting – we've prepared different chapters for technicians, clients, and suppliers.

You will learn how to:

- **Leverage mobile technology** to enhance communication flows between the backoffice and field teams.

- **Promote teamwork and group accomplishments** to improve productivity and stimulate engagement.

- **Kickstart repairs when a client reports a failurE** using Infraspeak Direct™ and Infraspeak Gear™.

- **Use an SLA to manage your customer's expectations** and show how you're delivering on that agreement.

- **Prove your impact on your client's bottom line** and establish yourself as a strategic long-term partner.

- **Improve stock management** to place orders within your suppliers lead time.

Not a maintenance or facilities service provider?
We prepared this guide about communication in Facility and Maintenance Management with service providers in mind. If you're not a service provider, skip through the **"Communication between clients, managers, and stakeholders"** section (15-26). You'll still find plenty of goodies in the other two chapters!

Does communication need reactive maintenance?

"As always: the urgent does not leave time for the important."

The quote isn't ours and it's straight from one of Quino's Mafalda comic strips. Urgent issues often overwhelm us so much that they leave no time for what matters in the long run, such as communication. When maintenance departments find themselves "fighting fires" day after day, it is easy to let communication fall behind. So, is your communication in need of repairs?

The cost of poor communication
Inefficient communication has nefarious consequences for maintenance teams. Managers who are disconnected from their field teams delay repairs, which means longer breakdowns. In the worst-case scenario, technicians have to go back to the office to receive instructions and (gasp!) new work orders on paper. In turn, paper trails lead to the loss of information that could be useful in the future.

Ensuring good communication between managers and technicians is pivotal to increasing productivity, avoiding duplicate tasks, and prioritising work, just to name a few. Plus, poor communication is demotivating. Maintenance is such an "invisible" task that, without strong communication skills, technicians will quickly feel undervalued and unengaged. Effective communication promotes teamwork

and reduces technician turnover. Of course, all of this assumes that you know a failure has occurred. But you won't know if there isn't an established flow of information between you and your clients. As a service provider, communication is a necessity. From their part, clients need to know they can count on you to deliver excellent service and drive their bottom line. Something as simple as a report can sometimes bring them some peace of mind and boost customer loyalty.

Finally, let's not neglect suppliers. If you aren't able to keep a smooth working relationship with them, your performance will suffer. Effective communication will allow you to adjust to one another: you'll know their lead times, and they'll understand your requirements. This will avoid stockouts or delays, and you can give accurate information regarding ETAs to your clients.

However, as usual, repairs and do-overs are not the best way to manage things. Instead, you should prevent miscommunication with your technicians, clients, and suppliers.

In this guide, we will give you 30 ways to improve information flows with technology and intelligence. Keep reading and become the manager we all know you can be.

Communication between managers and technicians

There is one thing we all have in common: our ability to process and absorb information is limited. In the last twenty years, the average human attention span decreased to a mere 8 seconds. FYI, that's a second less than a goldfish.

When you're trying to communicate effectively, remove all the noise. As a manager, it's easy to get lost in the technicalities. However, if your technicians don't require that piece of information to perform their jobs, leave it out. **The first question you need to ask yourself before requesting a work order or drafting a standard procedure is "what does the technician need to know?"**

1 STANDARD PROCEDURES ALL THE WAY

Don't go over the same things time and time again. Create standard procedures and troubleshooting flowcharts that technicians can always check and reuse. This is easier if you use a maintenance platform to associate procedures and checklists with work orders.

2 IMPROVE ACCESS TO RECORDS

If records are cloud-based, everyone has access to them. This means technicians can use them to diagnose failures and solve them faster. Bonus tip: use NFC tags to identify assets and access records with a single swipe.

3 AND LAY OUT THINGS FOR THE DAY

Whenever possible (there will always be surprises and reactive maintenance!), let technicians know what their work for the day will be. If you manage schedules with your software, technicians don't even need to drop by the office.

We're off to a good start. But we can't forget that maintenance work plays out in the field, and it can be both lonesome and challenging. **Keeping in touch with your technicians is a way to make them feel like they're a part of the team, and not alone in the wild west of repairs.**

4 PROVIDE A DIRECT LINE

Let technicians know they can always reach out to their managers or supervisors if they have doubts or something unexpected comes up. Use in-app communication to provide a direct line to senior staff or approve new requests without hassle. You can also integrate maintenance software with other communication tools to create a different line for emergencies.

5 GIVE SUPPORT AND FEEDBACK

Feeling undervalued or invisible at work is the first step to do a mental checkout, which sometimes leads to unnecessary risk-taking. Motivate your team with monthly or quarterly feedback and use KPIs to provide constructive, well-founded criticism.

6 ENCOURAGE SUGGESTIONS AND COMPLAINTS

Use those meetings to hear suggestions and complaints, because that's what leads to continuous improvement. Are they happy with their schedules? Or do they feel overworked? Is there too much multitasking?

7 ONE-ON-ONE TIME

Team meetings are valuable, but so are one-on-one conversations. Good teamwork should not come at the cost of individual guidance. Schedule one-on-one meetings to show each team member they're a valuable asset.

8 PRACTICE ACTIVE LISTENING

Communication is a skill. That means it can be trained, just like painting or playing an instrument. Even if you're not naturally gifted at it, practice active listening and improve your skills – maintain contact to show you're listening, paraphrase, clarify and summarise what other people are telling you.

7 DON'T GIVE IN TO THE MICROMANAGER IN YOU

Micromanaging is inefficient and will deteriorate your relationship with technicians. Like a coach, focus on guiding the team and sorting out workloads. If you are prone to micromanaging, self-examine your triggers: are you afraid of losing control? Don't you trust your staff? Do you believe output will decline?

"Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence win championships."

– Michael Jordan

We really have nothing to add.
In the championship of maintenance, which goes well beyond the occasional "game" of repair, how can you use teamwork and intelligence?

10 SET EXPECTATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Good communication is a great deal about avoiding miscommunication. Every technician (or other personnel, in cases where each operator is responsible for minor maintenance tasks, like lubricating their equipment) should be aware of their responsibilities and what's expected of them. One-on-one conversations are another opportunity to reinforce this.

11 CREATE GUIDELINES – REGARDING PRIORITIES TOO

This is one of the things you should establish from the get-go so that everyone knows how to proceed. Even when technicians and users submit a request on the maintenance platform, they should be able to assign it a priority (low or urgent) in order to streamline communication and operations.

12 HELP MEMBERS LEARN FROM ONE ANOTHER

We've already mentioned that logs are valuable in troubleshooting. But who made those logs? Perhaps technicians that are still on your team. Use their experience to train new members and reinforce team spirit. Furthermore, instead of putting teams against each other or comparing technicians, ask top-performing staff members to share what they're doing that sets them apart.

13   HIGHLIGHT GROUP ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Highlight group accomplishments Rather than using KPIs just to highlight what your team could do better, implement transparency and share quarterly reports in a group meeting. Highlight group accomplishments to reinforce team spirit and eliminate excessive competitiveness.

14   BE REALISTIC ABOUT WORK

On an average workday, only 24.5% of the time is spent on actual maintenance and repairs. Monitoring work order data allows you to understand how much time your technicians spend searching for tools, reading orders, and getting acquainted with safety procedures. With that in mind, improve their work schedules and be realistic about your demands.
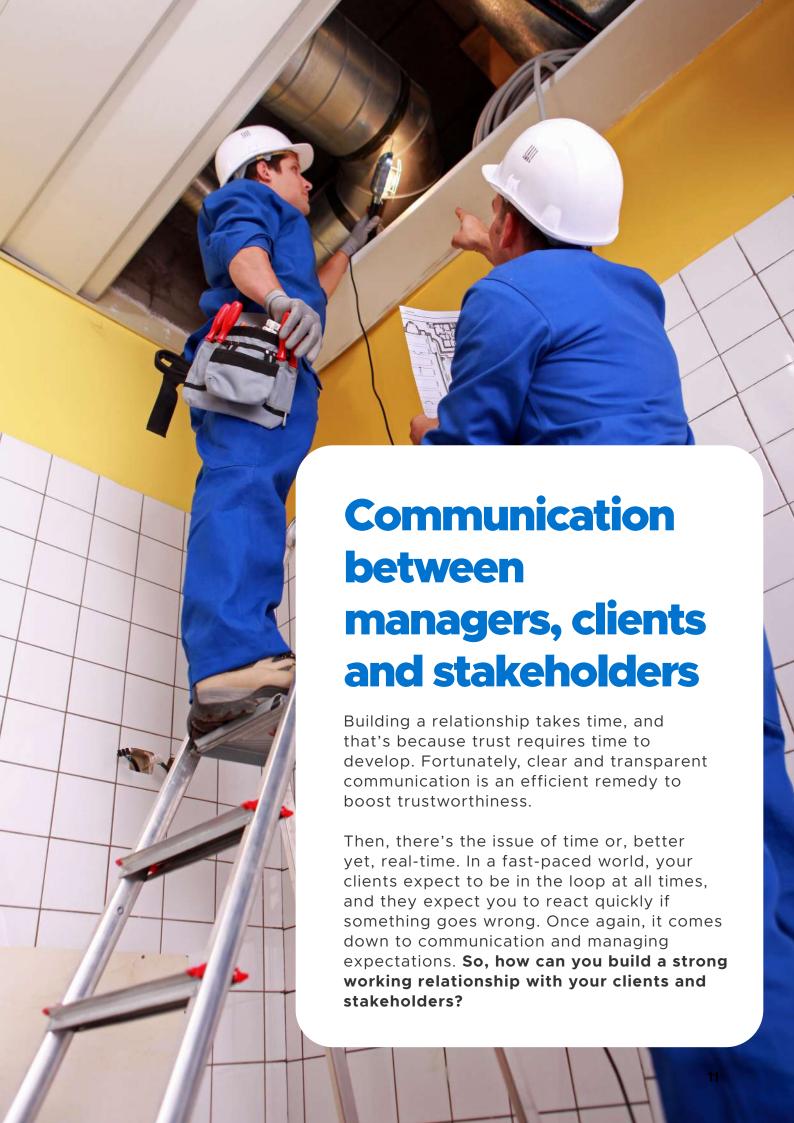
HOW AN INTELLIGENT MAINTENANCE MANAGEMENT PLATFORM WORKS

Use Infraspeak's Planner app to schedule work orders. Technicians view their own calendars on Infraspeak Mobile and seamlessly access checklists, logs and information about the asset. Push notifications warn them of new tasks and managers will be notified if a technician puts in a request (via the Requests app). The field team and the backoffice are in constant touch and communication flows.

Remember that Infraspeak Mobile works both online and offline. And, if you need extra communication channels, you can integrate Infraspeak with communication apps, such as Gmail, Slack and Microsoft Teams, and with project and tasks management apps, like Trello, Airtable, ClickUp and Todoist. Using our app doesn't mean you need to ditch tools that your team is already used to!

Communication between managers, clients and stakeholders

Building a relationship takes time, and that's because trust requires time to develop. Fortunately, clear and transparent communication is an efficient remedy to boost trustworthiness.

Then, there's the issue of time or, better yet, real-time. In a fast-paced world, your clients expect to be in the loop at all times, and they expect you to react quickly if something goes wrong. Once again, it comes down to communication and managing expectations. **So, how can you build a strong working relationship with your clients and stakeholders?**

15 IDENTIFY THE STAKEHOLDERS

Specifics change from client to client, but it's never just the contract manager that you need to worry about. Identify the stakeholders, ask for their contact information, and engage them with relevant information, such as end of year reports. You may even give them access to the platform so they can check progress and compliance.

16 BUILD RAPPORT WITH YOUR CLIENTS

Building a relationship takes time, but you can create some rapport from the start. Ask your clients about the main issues they're facing and what they would like to change in their current operations. And you know what we're going to say next – practice active listening with your clients too.

17 MANAGE EXPECTATIONS – AND DON'T OVERPROMISE

Now that you've understood the issues your clients face, you can engage them with a maintenance strategy. However, you might feel tempted to exaggerate the results they will experience. Fight the urge to overpromise: breakdowns might still happen, although they are less likely to. The more promises you make, the bigger the chances of disappointing your clients.

18 SET AN SLA FOR EACH CLIENT

Service Level Agreements (SLAs) are a convenient way to set the rules and manage expectations. An SLA should establish the type of service you will provide, its desired performance, and your responsiveness after a request (e.g. time-frame to solve a failure). Moreover, it can establish how your performance will be assessed (e.g. relevant KPIs) and the repercussions for infringements.

Now that you set the maintenance strategy on paper, how do you go about it every day? Once again, you can use **intelligence and technology in your favour.**

19 SHARE REPORTS WITH CLIENTS

Intelligent Maintenance Management Platforms generate automatic reports based on the data you collect. Instead of leaving your clients waiting for the latest news, you can send them a work order report once it is closed. You can also track KPIs and share those reports to increase transparency and show compliance.

20 LET CLIENTS REPORT FAILURES

Some breakdowns are unavoidable, but communication breakdowns can effectively be over if you let clients report failures. Infraspeak Direct™ allows clients and staff to report them directly on the platform, which means managers are notified immediately. There's no time to waste.

21 SEND QUOTES IN-APP

Businesses that outsource maintenance management expect efficiency. Use an SLA to align goals, establish what to measure, and outline the terms of service. Then, export data from your software and generate periodic reports that show compliance with the SLA.

22 SIGN OFF ON YOUR DOCUMENTS

Use digital signatures to sign off on your documents, such as work order reports or quotes, and add an extra layer of trust and accountability.

You've gained the trust of your clients, but you're not invaluable yet. **Stay relevant by being on top of emerging issues and add value to your customer's bottom line.**

23 AUDIT MAINTENANCE REGULARLY

Remember when we suggested assessing problems and issues to build rapport with your clients? That's a great tactic, but you can also take matters into your own hands. Make maintenance audits to see where your services can improve. While you are at it, ask your clients for feedback.

24 SHOW STAKEHOLDERS HOW YOU CONTRIBUTE TO THE BOTTOM LINE

Prepare thorough reports that show how effective maintenance and repairs contribute to achieving strategic goals for the company, i.e. improving services, complying with health and safety standards, becoming a greener business, and bringing their vision to life.

25 PAY ATTENTION TO EMERGING ISSUES

Political, economic, social, technological and environmental factors change. Show how you're committed to keep a working relationship over time and conduct an emerging issues analysis. You may want to integrate new tools with your platform, search for other suppliers, or prepare to comply with novel legislation.

26 PRESENT CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENTS AND SOLUTIONS

If you are aware things are about to change, think about how your services can adapt and propose a few improvements. An ever-evolving strategy is a great way to establish yourself as a "partner" rather than a "provider".

HOW AN INTELLIGENT MAINTENANCE MANAGEMENT PLATFORM WORKS

Apart from Infraspeak Direct™, which we've already mentioned, there's much more you can streamline with an intelligent platform. Use Infraspeak's SLA app to configure agreements and deadlines for each client. Then, go to the Analytics app to track KPIs and generate automatic reports that you can share with clients. Finally, turn to the Audits app to plan and perform audits that are easy to read and spot non-conformities.

Communication between managers and suppliers

Apart from your team and appropriate software, there's a third element that enables you to perform your job flawlessly and on time. We're talking about suppliers, of course, and here are 4 ways to improve your communication with your own service providers.

27 TRACK STOCK

Take the reins of your relationship with suppliers by tracking stock. Although tracking stock can be a challenge, intelligent platforms integrate inventory with work orders, which means you can keep your stockroom in check!

28 ASK ABOUT THE MINIMUM ORDER

Your clients need to know what to expect from you as a service provider. Likewise, you also need to know what to count on. Ask your suppliers about the minimum order, guaranteed lead time, the details of each of their products (to check which ones are compatible), and avoid lengthy conversations about terms & conditions every time you need to order.

29 SCHEDULE ORDERS IN TIME

Do you track stocks? Check. Do you know the lead times? Check. Then, what's the minimum amount of stock you need to keep? Do the math. Set minimum amounts on your software and place orders before you run out. Ordering in advance is respectful of your supplier's time and conditions.

30 ESTABLISH REQUIREMENTS

You can also establish requirements with suppliers, such as standard costs, the percentage of defective parts, on-time delivery performance (for recurrent, periodic orders).

HOW AN INTELLIGENT MAINTENANCE MANAGEMENT PLATFORM WORKS

Use Infraspeak's Stock Management app to manage your stockroom, place orders and avoid delays. You can also use the Order Management app to control purchases, check order history and prices, and scroll through regular suppliers or subcontractors. You'll be able to use that information to choose suppliers, repeat orders or place new ones much faster.

Conclusion

Communication is one of the few things we cannot automate. However, technology certainly helps! An Intelligent Maintenance Management Platform connects clients to service providers and enables constant communication between managers and field teams. The first allows maintenance teams to react faster. The second guides technicians. Both drive productivity and, ultimately, customer satisfaction.

Apart from streamlining communication, intelligent platforms also enable openness, transparency and accountability. Clients can see you are keeping up with what you agreed to as a service provider. Teams can understand where you're coming from if you suggest some changes, and everyone works towards the same goal. In both cases, communication promotes trust and long-lasting partnerships.

Now, speaking of long-lasting working relationships, we cannot overlook the importance of using software that is reliable, scalable and adaptable for the future. As societies evolve toward a greater work/life balance, laws change, and your clients' clients grow more demanding, you'll need to swim in turbulent waters. **Plus, let's not forget that intelligence is working less… and getting a lot more done.**

Sources

Almquist, Eric. Cleghorn, Jamie. Sherer, Lori. (2018). The B2B Elements of Value. Harvard Business Review. Retrieved from https://hbr.org/2018/03/the-b2b-elements-of-value

Baker, Adam. 5 Ways To Strengthen Your Communication With a Supplier. Lean DNA. Retrieved from https://www.leandna.com/blog/5-ways-strengthen-supplier-communication/

Christiansen, Bryan. (2018). Improve communication flow between maintenance managers and technicians. MRO Magazine. Retrieved from https://www.mromagazine.com/features/improve-communication-flow-between-maintenance-managers-and-technicians/

Cuncic, Arlin. (2020). How to Practice Active Listening. very well mind. Retrieved from https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-active-listening-3024343

Deloitte Digital. (2019). Smart field service: Connecting customers, assets and employees. Retrieved from https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/uk/Documents/consultancy/deloitte-uk-smart-field-service-deloitte-pov.pdf

Harter, Jim. Adkins, Amy. (2015). Employees Want a Lot More from their Managers. Gallup. Retrieved from https://www.gallup.com/workplace/236570/employees-lot-managers.aspx

Infraspeak. (2021). Client Management in FM: How to Promote Transparency. Retrieved from https://blog.infraspeak.com/client-management-fm/

Infraspeak. (2021). Team Management: Building the Pillars for More Efficiency. Retrieved from https://blog.infraspeak.com/team-management-building-more-efficiency/

Knight, Rebecca. (2015). How to Stop the Micromanaging Your Team. Harvard Business Review. Retrieved from https://hbr.org/2015/08/how-to-stop-micromanaging-your-team

Maybin, Simon. (2017). Busting the attention span myth. BBC World Service. Retrieved from https://www.bbc.com/news/health-38896790

Quino. (2014). Toda a Mafalda. Verbo Editora.
Rigoni, Brandon. Nelson, Bailey. (2016). Engaged Workplaces Are Safer for Employees. Gallup. Retrieved from https://news.gallup.com/businessjournal/191831/engaged-workplaces-safer-employees.aspx

Schwantes, Marcel. (2017). Why Do Employees Really Quit Their Jobs? Research Says It Comes Down to These Top 8 Reasons – this is how to stop the bleeding. Inc. Retrieved from https://www.inc.com/why-do-employees-really-quit-their-jobs-research-says-it-comes-down-to-these-top-8-reasons.html

Troyer, Drew. (2010). How Clear Communication Improves Maintenance and Reliability. Machinery Lubrication. Retrieved from https://www.machinerylubrication.com/Read/22920/clear-communication-reliability

Upkeep. (2019). Predictive and Preventive Maintenance Statistics. Retrieved from https://www.onupkeep.com/learning/maintenance-metrics/maintenance-statistics

About Infraspeak

Infraspeak is an Intelligent Maintenance Management Platform (IMMP) that brings outstanding connectivity, flexibility and intelligence to your operation.

Gain full control and the flexibility to build your own, custom, maintenance management solution capable of answering your own operational challenges.

Online. Offline. Behind a desk or in the field. Infraspeak connects your team to your plans, your plans to your goals, and your goals to the intelligent maintenance you need to take your operation into the future.

Talk to our team of specialists and enter enter a world of data, intelligence and automation

Intelligent maintenance starts here.

Learn more