

# Estimate of the Situation

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## **“What we have here is a failure to communicate!”**

Communication-related issues rank high on the list of impediments to optimum performance. This is a huge issue because the efficient exchange of quality information is essential to the quality of patient care and effective management.

Here are some “rules of thumb” to help you evaluate how communication methods are currently being used in your hospital or department.

### Meetings

Meetings are very popular and when used appropriately they can be an effective means of communication. Unfortunately, meetings require all participants to be in the same place at the same time for extended periods. If meetings are used when another means of communication would accomplish the same or better results, they can be productivity killers. Only use meetings when the following applies:

- Immediate interaction or feedback is required.
- Team building is among the primary meeting objectives.
- The subject matter is new, not routine, or is sensitive and subject to misinterpretation.
- Multiple internal entities will be affected by the meeting or the information that is to be communicated.
- It is an absolute regulatory or JCAHO requirement.

### Memoranda

Memoranda and other written communication should be used when it is necessary to communicate detailed information and memorialize its transmission (as in meeting minutes). Written communication should not be used to initially communicate “bad news” or announce unilateral changes affecting others.

### e-mail or Text Messaging

e-Mail and text messaging should not be used as primary means of communicating sensitive or very important information. They should only be used when the first consideration is speed.

### Telephone Calls

These are best for rapid and direct transmission of routine information. Verbal communication should never be the primary and/or only choice when it comes to the transmission of important information.

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