Handling an Instruction That Staff Do Not Understand or Disagree With

1. Purpose and scope

Every instruction from head office or a manager reaches the staff in a form they understand and gives them a safe way to say when it does not fit. This SOP sets the steps so that a doubtful instruction is clarified on day one and not ignored for a month.

Item	Detail
Applies to	Companies where instructions travel between head office and local staff
Done by	Manager, local team lead and staff
Owner	Country manager or head of operations
Time target	Reply within a set time, usually one working day
Review	Every 6 months and after any instruction that was misunderstood

2. The steps

1. **Write the instruction in one place.** State the task, the date and the owner in one short message. Avoid long chains of messages.
2. **Give the reason.** Add one line on why the instruction is given. Staff who know the reason make better choices when something changes.
3. **Use plain words and the language staff follow.** Use short sentences and local-language words where they help. Avoid slang and company jargon that new staff may not know.
4. **Ask the staff to repeat it back.** Ask the team lead to say in their own words what they will do and by when. A nod is not a check.
5. **Give a safe way to raise doubt.** Name the person to go to and the channel to use. Say that a question on day one is welcome.
6. **Listen to the objection.** When staff disagree, write down the reason. Often they see a local problem the sender could not see.
7. **Decide and reply in writing.** Within the set time the manager confirms the instruction, changes it or withdraws it and says why.
8. **Tell everyone who got the first version.** If the instruction changes, every person who received the first version hears about the new one the same day.
9. **Review monthly.** Once a month list the instructions that were questioned and look for a pattern, such as one channel or one type of task.

3. Instruction checklist

Print this, keep it on the shared page and tick it for every instruction during the first month.

- ☐ Instruction written in one place with owner and date
- ☐ Reason given in one line
- ☐ Plain words used in the language staff follow
- ☐ Staff repeated the instruction back
- ☐ Person and channel for doubts named
- ☐ Objections written down
- ☐ Reply given within the set time
- ☐ Everyone told about any change the same day
- ☐ Questioned instructions listed monthly
- ☐ Pattern looked at and one fix chosen

4. Where this can break

Any SOP template lists the steps. These are the points where a busy team can slip, with a simple fix for each.

Where it breaks	What happens	The fix
Instruction given by phone only	Each person remembers a different version.	Follow every call with a short written message.
No reason given	Staff do the task but drop it when things change.	Add one line on why.
Staff nod and say yes	The instruction was not understood and nobody says so.	Ask them to repeat it in their own words.
Objection treated as defiance	Staff stop raising problems.	Thank the person and write down the reason.
Changes not passed on	Some staff follow the old instruction.	Tell everyone who got the first version.
No review	The same misunderstanding repeats.	Look at the questioned instructions once a month.

5. How to roll it out in 3 days

A new SOP fails when it is just handed over. This order gets the manager and the team leads using it within a week.

Day	What happens	Who
Day 1	30-minute meeting with the manager and the team leads, using 3 recent instructions that were misunderstood. Ask where each one went wrong.	Country manager
Day 2	Send the next real instruction in this format and ask for a repeat back. Fix the two biggest gaps, using Section 4.	Country manager
Day 3	Format and checklist go on a shared page. At the end of the month, the manager checks the questioned instructions against them.	Manager and team leads

After that, a 5-minute look at the month’s questioned instructions is enough to keep it working.

6. BEYOND the Checklist

This SOP works on the day it is introduced. Three months later, a new team lead has joined and learned how instructions are given from whoever was free. Teams change over time, so a written SOP needs three things it can’t do by itself:

- **A 2-minute training video** of the instruction steps, in the language staff speak, so every new joiner learns the same way on day one.
- **A local-language version** of the checklist.
- **A weekly 5-minute check** that someone actually owns.

Your own process: if your company gives instructions to staff differently from this one, a 2-minute WhatsApp voice note on how it works today is enough. A written SOP in this same format comes back within 48 hours, at no cost. WhatsApp: +91 98101 41173 (India) | +250 799 524 457 (Rwanda)

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