



# Managing Communication on a Project

## Learning Outcomes

**By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:**

- ✓ Recognise the importance of communication in a project
- ✓ Explain the processes involved in project communication management
- ✓ Discuss how the project communication plan is created

# Managing Communication on a Project

## Introduction

The Project Communications Management knowledge area is made up of processes that are as follows: Communications Planning, Information Distribution, Performance Reporting, and Administrative Closure. Although, the processes in the Project Communications knowledge area can be related to general communication skills, they aren't the same thing. Communication skills are considered general management skills, which are utilized by the project manager on a daily basis. Communications knowledge area has processes which seek to ensure that all project information including project plans, meeting notes, risk assessments, and more is collected and documented. These processes also ensure information is distributed and shared with project members and appropriate stakeholders. The information is archived at the closing of the project, and used as a reference for future projects. We refer to this as historical information in several project processes.



Fig: 6.1 Project communications Management

Project Communications Management centers on determining who needs what information and when—and then produces the plan to provide the needed information. Project Communications Management includes generating, storing, collecting, and disseminating communication. Successful communication is required for Successful projects. Communication is the key link between people, information and ideas. Project Communications Management includes four processes, which may overlap each other and other knowledge areas. The four processes are:

- **Performance Reporting** Project manager rely on EVM and other performance measurement to create status reports, forecast project conditions and measure performance.
- **Administrative Closure** Project managers need a routine of documentation, communication, and information distribution to close out a phase or project.

- **Communication Planning** Project managers need to identify the stakeholders and their communication needs and determine how to fulfill their requirements.
- **Information Distribution** Project managers need to get the correct information on the correct schedule to the appropriate stakeholders.

## Communications Planning

It's essential for project managers to provide adequate planning for communication because they spend so much of their time invested in communications. Such planning focuses on who needs what information and when they need it. Identifying the stakeholders' requirements for communication, determining what information is actually needed, and then planning to deliver the needed information on a preset schedule or based on project conditions is the job for the project manager.

Typically, Communications planning is completed early in the project. The modality of the communications is documented as part of this planning. Some stakeholders may prefer a hard copy document rather than an email. These needs can change later in the project. Throughout the project, the needs of the stakeholders, the type of information requested, and the modality of the information should be reviewed for accuracy—and updated if needed.

## Identifying Communication Requirements

Stakeholders need different types of information which depends on their interest in the project and the priority of the project. The project manager needs to complete an analysis of the identified stakeholders to determine what information they actually need—and how often the information is needed.

Expending resources on generating information, reports, and analyses for stakeholders who have no interest in the information has no value. An accurate assessment of stakeholders' needs for information is required early in the project planning processes. As a rule of thumb, information should be provided when its presence will contribute to success or when a lack of information will contribute to failure.

The project manager and the project team can identify the demand for communications on the basis of the following requirements:

- Project structure within the performing organization
- Departments and disciplines involved with the project work
- Number of individuals involved in the project and their locale
- Number and type of external communication needs (media, community, or customers)
- Stakeholder responsibility.

## Exploring Communication Modalities

The project manager should identify all of the required and approved methods of communicating as part of the communications planning. Some projects may be very sensitive and contain classified information. All stakeholders must not be privy to it. Other projects may contain information that's open for anyone to

explore. Whatever the case, the project manager should identify what requirements exist, if any, for the communication modalities. Communication modalities can also include reports, memos, emails, meetings, and so on. The preferred methods of communicating must be identified by the project manager, based on the conditions of the message to be communicated. Consider the following, which may have an effect on the communication plan:

- **Information schedule** Regularly scheduled reports and updates may be required by stakeholders, such as management and the project customer. If conditions within the project affect the project success, immediate communications may be expected.
- **Technology** There may be technology changes needed to fulfill the project request. Because of the demands of the project. For example, the project may require an internal web site that details project progress. If such a web site does not exist, then time and money will need to be invested into this communication requirement.
- **Project length** The length of the project can have an influence on the project technology. A long-term project's communication model may be replaced due to advances in technology. A short-term project may not have the same technology requirements as a long-term project but could nevertheless benefit from the successful model a larger project uses.
- **Project staffing** The project manager should evaluate the abilities of the project team. This is to determine if appropriate levels of competency exist in the team, needed to fulfill the communication requirements or if training will be required for the project team.

## Evaluating the Project Constraints and Assumptions

Every project has constraints and assumptions. Constraints are any force that limits the project's options. A project constraint, such as contractual obligations, may require extensive communications. The requirements of the contract should be evaluated against the demands of the project staff to determine if extra resources will be needed to handle the communications.

Communications can be affected by assumptions. Consider a project operating under the assumption that communications with management can happen only through email. Whereas, the management expects the project manager to provide formal status reports and daily updates via memos and also needs staffing updates from each of the project team members. Time demands can be imposed by this false assumption which the project manager had not expected.

## Creating the Communications Plan

The project manager and the project team can determine what communications are needed based on stakeholder analysis. There's no advantage to supplying stakeholders with information that is not desired or needed. Time spent delivering and creating unneeded information is a waste of resources. A Communications Management Plan can organize and document the process, types, and expectations of communications.

It provides:

- Specifics on how the information to be distributed should be organized, the level of expected detail for the types of communication, and the terminology expected within the communications.
- A system to gather, organize, store, and disseminate appropriate information to the appropriate people. The system includes procedures for correcting and updating incorrect information that may have been distributed.
- Details on how needed information flows through the project to the correct individuals. The communication structure documents where the information will originate, to whom the information will be sent, and in what modality the information is acceptable.
- Schedules of when the various types of communication should occur. Some communication, such as status meetings, should happen on a regular schedule; other communications may be prompted by conditions within the project.
- Methods to retrieve information as needed.
- Instructions on how the Communications Management Plan can be updated as the project progresses.

## Information Distribution

The process of ensuring that the appropriate stakeholders get the appropriate information when and how they need it is called Information distribution. Essentially, Information distribution is the implementation of the Communications Management Plan. The Communications Management Plan contains details about how the information is to be created and dispersed, and also how the dispersed information is archived. There are three elements that serve as inputs to information distribution:

- **Work results** Work results, good or bad, serve as inputs to communication because they show quality issues, progress (or lack of progress), and other relevant information.
- **Communications Management Plan** This plan serves as the guide on how to communicate on project issues within the performing organization.
- **Project plan** The comprehensive project may have information, requirements, or described conditions that are integrated with communications.

## Examining Communication Skills

If you're told that communication skills are used to send and receive information. That would sound easy, right? But, if communication was so easy, then why are there so many problems on projects stemming from misunderstandings, failure to communicate, miscommunications, and similar communication failings? All models have a sender, a message, and a recipient, regardless of the technology involved. Several additional elements can be included Depending on the communication model. Here's a summary of all the different parts of communication models:

- **Sender** is the person or group sending the message to the receiver
- **Encoder** is the device or technology that encodes the message to travel over the medium. For example, a telephone encodes the sender's voice to travel over the medium, the telephone wires.
- **Decoder** is the inverse of the encoder. If a message is encoded, a decoder translates it back to usable format. For example, the sender's message is encoded to travel the telephone wires, and the receiver's phone system translates the message back to a usable format.
- **Receiver** this is, of course, the recipient of the message.
- **Medium** is the path the message takes from the sender to the receiver. This is the modality in which the communication travels and typically refers to an electronic model, such as email or telephone.

## Creating Successful Communications

Verbal communication is the most common type of communication between a sender and a receiver. The project manager should remember that half of communication is listening when verbal communications are involved. This means the project manager must confirm the receiver understands the message being sent. The confirmation of the sent message can be seen in the recipient's feedback, body language, and verbal confirmation of the sent message. Five terms describe the process of communicating:

- **Para lingual** is the pitch, tone, and inflections in the sender's voice that affect the message being sent.
- **Feedback** is the confirmation by the sender that the receiver understands the message. This can be done by directly asking for a response, questions for clarification, or other confirmation of the sent message.
- **Active listening** is when the receiver confirms the message is being received through feedback, prompts for clarity, questions, and other signs of confirmation of the received message.
- **Nonverbal** Approximately 55 percent of communication is nonverbal. Hand gestures, facial expressions, and body language contribute to the message.
- **Effective listening** is when the receiver is involved in the listening experience by paying attention to visual clues from the speaker and para lingual characteristics and by asking relevant questions.

The words in an oral message actually account for seven percent of the message only, while 38 percent of the message is accounted by its tonality. The remaining 55 percent of the message is body language. A person talking to a dog is a classic example. The dog will likely be receptive, if the person has a friendly voice and posture. However, if the person has a mean voice and guarded posture, the dog may feel threatened and on guard. When talking with stakeholders, the project managers must be aware of their body language and posture—not just the words they are communicating.

The medium in communication can help or hinder the message. For example, when a project manager talks to a stakeholder in person, the stakeholder has the advantage not only of hearing the message and tone but also of seeing the body language. The message is interpreted by just the words and tonality if we take out body language in a conversation. Always be aware of the downsides of the various non-direct communication modalities: reports, memos, email, and letters.

## Distributing Information

The project manager, the project sponsor, the project team, and other stakeholders need and supply information to one another throughout the project management. There are different methods for distributing information. The best modality is the one that's most appropriate to the information being conveyed. For example, an email may not be the correct format to share variance information on project costs. Information can be distributed through the following methods. There are other methods as well, which can be selected according to project demands and as technology provides:

- Project meetings
- Hard-copy documentation
- Videoconferences
- A project web site
- Databases
- Faxes
- Email
- Telephone calls

## Examining the Results of Information Distribution

Information distribution results in the following:

- **Project records** are vital to the project team. Project records are the correspondence, emails, memos, and any other project-relevant information. Securing and organizing this information throughout the project for future reference is important to. This information should be stored as part of the project archives.
- **Project presentations** are useful in providing information to the project team, customers, stakeholders, and other management. The degree of formality of the presentation and delivery and should be appropriate for the conditions and information being delivered within the project.
- **Project reports** are formal communications on project status, activities, and conditions. Customers, management, and policies within the performing organization may have requirements for when reports are required that are different from each other.

## Reporting Project Performance

Customers and other stakeholders are going to need updates on the project performance throughout the project management. The process of collecting, organizing, and disseminating information on how the project resources are being used to complete the project objectives is called Performance reporting. In other words, the people footing the bill and affected by the outcome of the project need some confirmation that things are going as promised by the project manager.

Though cost and schedule are the most common concerns, Performance reporting covers more than just these two. Another huge concern is the influence of risks on the project success. The project team and the project manager must continue to monitor and evaluate risks, including pending risks and their impact on the project success. Finally, the level of quality is another major issue with reporting. If the quality of the work is unacceptable, no one will praise the project manager and the project team for completing the project on time and on budget. In fact, the project team would have to redo the work, business could be lost, or individuals could even be harmed as a result of the poor quality of the project work, or the project could be declared a failure and cancelled as a result of poor quality. Performance reporting involves six things:

- **Status reports** How is the project progress right now?
- **Progress reports** How complete is the project? How much more work remains?
- **Scope** How is the project meeting the project scope?
- **Quality** What are the results of quality testing, analysis, and audit?
- **Risks** What risks have come into the project and what has been their effect on the project?
- **Forecasting** Will this project end on schedule? Will the project be on budget? How much longer will this project take? And how much more money will this project need to finish?

## Preparing for Performance Reporting

One of the key inputs to performance reporting is the project plan. It contains the WBS, the project scope and requirements, and other documentation that can be used to measure project performance and progress. Work results are other inputs to performance reporting. Work results can be examined and measured for quality, monies required to complete the work results and the time spent completing the work. The work results can be measured against the estimates and expectations to reveal variances, just like progress reports or completion-of-work results. The Communications Management Plan will detail how values are measured, for example EVM, and at what point variances call for communications to the appropriate stakeholders.

The last inputs to performance reporting are other project records. These can be memos, product description, and other information relevant to the project. For example, a project may have multiple vendors whose contracts require differing levels and types of reporting from the project staff. Or a customer may request project status updates every quarter, regardless of where the project is in its timeline. This is a communication requirement that would be in the Communications Management Plan.

## Reviewing Project Performance

To ascertain the progress and level of success the project team is having with the project work, the project manager will host performance review meetings. Performance review meetings focus on the work that has been completed and how the work results are living up to the cost and time estimates. In addition, to protect the project from change and creep, the project manager and the project team will evaluate the project scope. The project manager and the project team will also examine quality and its effect on the project as a whole. Finally, a discussion on pending or past risks and determining any new risks and overall risk likelihood and impact on the project's success should be led by the project manager.

## Analyzing Project Variances

The only tools the project manager uses to assess project performance are not just Performance review meetings. Prior to the performance reviews, or spurred by a performance review, the project manager needs to examine the scope, quality, time, and cost variances within the project. The project manager will examine the estimates supplied for the time and cost of activities and then compare them to the time and cost actually experienced.

The goals of analyzing project variances are:

- Preventing future variances
- Determining the root cause of variances
- Determining if the variances are within a predetermine acceptable range, such as negative ten percent or plus five percent
- Determining if the variances can be expected on future project work
- Determining if the variances are an anomaly or if the estimates were flawed.

In addition to examining the common factors of time and cost variances, the project manager must also examine any scope, resource, and quality variances. A change in the scope can skew time and cost predictions. A variance in resources can alter the project schedule and even the predicted costs of a project. Quality variances may result in rework, lost time, lost monies, and even rejection of the project product.

## Completing Administrative Closure

The end of the project and the end of each project phase need *administrative closure*. Administrative closure is the documenting of the project results and the acceptance of the product by the project sponsor or the customer. Administrative closure is also needed if a project needs to be terminated. Administrative closure includes the following:

- Documentation of the project work
- Analysis of project success or failure
- Analysis of the effectiveness of the project management process

- Lesson Learned documentation
- Confirmation that the product is in alignment with requirements and specifications

Administrative closure should happen at the end of each phase and at the end of the project. Important information can be lost, if the project manager waits too long to complete administrative closure. The resource pool description should also be updated. This reflects any new skills learned by the project team members as part of the project.

## Preparing for Administrative Closure

Any documentation used throughout the project phases that demonstrates project performance should be organized. As part of these performance measurement documents, the performance measurements set in the project plan should be included. As the administrative closure happens, the project manager can refer to the original performance measurement goals and compare these to the experienced performance measurements. This comparison will reveal any variances and show overall project or phase performance. In addition to the performance measurement documentation, the project manager will need all other documentation as well. These will include the project plans, technical documentation, drawings, product specifications, and any other information relevant to the final product or the project or phase. These documents allow the project manager, the project sponsor and the customer to inspect the project product to confirm that the deliverable of the phase is in alignment with what was planned for.

## Completing Administrative Closure

Armed with the project information, the project manager can document, confirm, and close the project or phase. The end result of the project or phase includes the following

- **Project archives** All of the documentation of the project should be organized, structured, and indexed for fast and accurate reference. Additionally, any database which contains project information should be updated to reflect the completion of the project. If we fail to update the databases and project archives, it can mislead future projects attempting to emulate the current project.
- **Project closure** The customer or the project sponsor should confirm that the project has met all of the requirements of the project scope. Once the requirements have been met, the project manager may have to perform additional activities, which may be required by the performing organization. The project manager may need to sign-off of the project deliverable, to complete any financial records, and to complete a final project summary for management and employee evaluations.
- **Procurement issues** if a project includes procurement issues at any time, then it is advised to index all contracts, invoices, warranties, purchase orders, and any other financial related documentation, so that they can be archived for future reference.

- **Lessons Learned** The project manager and the project team should complete the Lesson Learned for future reference as the project proceeds through its various phases. For future reference, the Lesson Learned documentation should be archived as well at the end of the project closure

### Further Reading:

- ✓ *Ralph L. Kliem, PMP, (2008), Effective Communications for Project Management*
- ✓ *Carl L. Pritchard, (2004), The Project Management Communications Toolkit*
- ✓ *Michael CAMPBELL PMP, (2009), Communications Skills for Project Managers*