CAI

PROJECT COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT

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Communication within projects is challenging. Many individuals are involved in the communication process at all stages of the project. Roles determine the level and frequency of communications within a project, the phase of the project, and the degree of involvement of the stakeholder all play a pivotal part in the communication process.

The challenge to project communications is to communicate effectively and efficiently while not distracting from the activities which get the project completed. .

INTRODUCTION

While we realize the importance of regular communications for our stakeholders, practicality is essential. One goal as project managers is to manage how we share with our stakeholders, focusing on communicating in a way that works best while managing all aspects of the project. We all absorb information differently.

BACKGROUND/PROBLEM STATEMENT

Stakeholders prefer different forms of communication. Visual, kinesthetic, and lecture, to mention a few. When we limit communication methods, we risk not reaching everyone.

Once a project becomes more complex, communications must be more nuanced to reach all individuals involved. When communications strategies are planned upfront, the following should be accounted for:

- Definiing frequency and quality of communication
- Keeping stakeholders engaged through open communications
- Enabling for more effective two-way conversations

There are two roles in the communication process. There is a sender of the message and a receiver with acknowledgment between the two. As a best practice, I periodically check with stakeholders to ensure communications about the project meet their expectations and meet my goals as the project manager. By doing this, a project manager must ask three questions:

1. What is working regarding communication?
2. What is not effective regarding communications?
3. Where can we improve communication transmissions?

Feedback is a gift. These questions may be addressed on a scheduled basis. Monthly, bimonthly, or beginning, middle, and end of the project. The rhythm is primarily determined by the needs of the stakeholder and the pace of the project.

SOLUTION

Project Impacts due to Poor Communications

By communicating poorly with our stakeholders or within our project team, we potentially can impact the success of our project. Poor communications produce:

Poor Team Communications	Poor Stakeholder Communications
- Misunderstanding around project goals and objectives - Missed deadlines - Non-value movements of team members - Decreased productivity on the project risking increased timelines and exceeding budgets - Lack of commitment from team members in work completion	- Limited buy-in and commitment to the project - Misunderstanding stakeholder expectations toward project success - Conflicts between the project team and stakeholders, or between stakeholders groups - Failed projects

Sometimes poor communications are due to feeling overwhelmed by the project or being unable to manage a conflict effectively. When a challenging stakeholder finds fault in all we do in managing the project, we may find ourselves avoiding the situation. It is easier to focus on other, more agreeable parts of the project.

However, it doesn't solve the problem of a disengaged stakeholder who can cause damage to the project through being non-responsive or communicating negatively about the project to others.

On the other side, poor communication is also caused by excessive contact. If we overcommunicate consistently, we will lose the audience and engagement of the stakeholder. To avoid the disruption, work to determine:

- Who needs to know what information?
- Frequency of data to be communicated/shared?
- What means/methods will information be communicated?

Basic Communication Plan Concept

A simple communication plan should capture the following elements:

- With whom to communicate
- What will be communicated
- When you will communicate
- Format and delivery for your communications

Detailed Communication Plan Concept

A detailed communication plan should include more information about stakeholders and communications to include guidelines for distributing project information and how the information will be received.

More detailed communication plans include:

- List of all stakeholders and contact information

- A RACI Chart to ensure clear communication and efficient workflows across all teams

- Stakeholder information requirements by group

- Protocols to how the information will be distributed include:
    - What will be communicated
    - Due dates for communications
    - Audience of communications
    - Team member responsible for the communication
    - How you will spread the information

- Requirements of information collection and reporting, including:
    - What information is needed from stakeholders
    - Team member responsible for collecting and reporting the information
    - Stakeholder responsible for communicating/disseminating the information
    - Target due dates

- Guidelines for gathering and distributing information
    - Storage of project information
    - Approved communications methods and technologies

Communication Modes

There are a variety of communication modes and delivery methods. Methods are based on individual preferences for communicating and receiving communications.

Modes, or methods, for communicating may include:

- One-on-one meetings
- Small group or department meetings
- Internal websites or portals
- Email
- Chat technology
- Virtual meetings
- Conference calls/videoconference calls

The more methods used to communicate about the project, the more likely a project manager is to achieve the highest engagement of stakeholders.

Communication Involving Virtual Teams

Working with virtual teams is probable, and the early establishment of rules and guidelines is essential for effective communications. Likewise, it is imperative to manage stakeholder communications to enable more efficient and effective communications.

When developing a communication plan, consider the following components:

- What needs to be communicated and when
- How communications will flow
- What communication modes will be used for communications
- Communication response times
- Communication status
- Timing of regular communications

CONCLUSION

Project Managers who do not plan for communications with stakeholders early in the project run the risk of either spending too little time on communications or overcommunicating. Planning for communications means that time is taken to understand stakeholders' preferences to engage them in the project and get what we need to meet the project's goals.

When working with virtual stakeholders, an understanding of their communication needs and expectations is essential for success. Use a variety of communication modes to capture the most significant number of stakeholders, keeping them engaged and communicating in a way that works for them. The more effectively you communicate with your stakeholders, the more involved and committed to the project, increasing success.

For more information or support in developing your Communication Management Program, please contact **Patrick.Hayes@cagents.com**

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES/REFERENCES

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Serving as an Associate Director of Program and Project Management at CAI, Patrick Hayes works with a team of experienced professionals in bringing integrated services to the client. A former Coast Guard Officer, Patrick specialized in human performance technology, focusing on international training and development to allied and developing countries. Patrick has over 22 years of experience planning and executing capital projects, with significant experience in the pharmaceutical industry. Patrick has a comprehensive understanding of the various workstreams and efforts necessary to achieve Operational Readiness in a manufacturing facility. Patrick has a BS in Business and Organizational Development, MBA in Organizational Operations Management, a Certified Six Sigma Black Belt, and multiple Project Management Certifications.