

What do the Experts Say About Project Communications?

According to the Project Management Institute (PMI®) and the Project Management Book of Knowledge Guide (PMBOK®), “project communications is a key knowledge area with processes that provide the critical links among people and information that are necessary for successful communications.”

Communication ranks high in the list of causes for project failures. In fact, according to the 1998 Bull Survey, the leading cause (57%) of project failures was “bad communications between relevant parties.”¹

Gannthead.com, a key resource for project managers, states that “in today’s world, communications management is fundamental to project management in managing expectations. Since change is constant in an agile project, constant communication is the only means of maintaining the connections between all the participants.”

What are the Steps to Planning Project Communications?

Once you have determined the goals for your project communications, you can follow four simple steps to develop your plan. You can expand each of these steps to support the level of complexity of each project.

Step 1. Identify your project stakeholders – anyone who is involved in the project, affected by the project, or affected by the outcome of the project.

Step 2. Analyze the needs and expectations of your stakeholders.

Step 3. Identify existing and possible new communications vehicles or opportunities and choose the appropriate vehicles for your stakeholders.

Step 4. Develop, document, and monitor your communications plan.

What are Communications Goals?

Communication goals convey what we are trying to accomplish from an information standpoint. Explicitly stating these goals helps to focus your project communication efforts. Following are some typical project communications goals:

- ◆ To ensure that all essential information gets to the required parties at the right time, quickly and efficiently.
- ◆ To identify and raise potential problems via scheduled, consistent status reporting.
- ◆ To generate excitement and enthusiasm for a project.
- ◆ To facilitate decision-making, approvals and change control.
- ◆ To provide a specific process for feedback and conflict resolution.
- ◆ To ensure appropriate transition upon project closure.
- ◆ To enhance and facilitate teamwork, cooperation, and collaboration.

How Much is Too Much Communication?

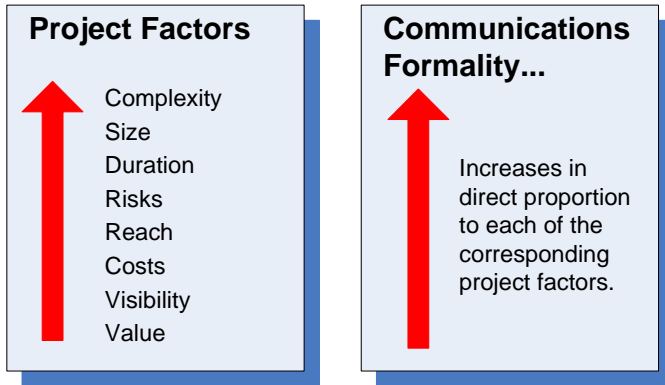
In theory, you can never have too much communication. However, as a practical matter, communication needs will and do vary according to project size and complexity. When misapplied, even the most well intentioned communications strategy can backfire.

Communication planning provides the basis upon which information flows through a project, allowing for action, decisions, changes, and execution.

On a small project, overly formal communication practices can quickly become an administrative burden, interfering with productivity and schedule progression.

¹ This survey was carried out in 1998 for the French computer manufacturer BULL by the independent research company Spikes Cavell.

On a large project, informal, ad-hoc communication practices can quickly turn success into disaster as important issues and opportunities are missed through lax procedures.



The diagram above illustrates that the amount of communications planning and formality increases directly in proportion to the size and complexity of the project.

What's Next?

Since knowledge is power, sharing knowledge empowers everyone who is involved in or affected by the project or the outcome of the project. Project communications is both a strategy and a tactic when planning your project.

In Part Two of this series, we will provide you with proven tools to help you determine and analyze your project stakeholders.

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