Chapter 10: Project Communications Management

Information Technology Project Management, Seventh Edition

Information Technology PROJECT MANAGEMENT | 7e

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Note: See the text itself for full citations.

Learning Objectives

▸ Understand the importance of good communications on projects and the need to develop soft skills, especially for IT project managers and their teams

▸ Review key concepts related to communications

▸ Explain the elements of planning project communications and how to create a communications management plan

▸ Describe how to manage communications, including communication technologies, media, and performance reporting

Learning Objectives (cont'd)

- Discuss methods for controlling communications to ensure that information needs are met throughout the life of the project

- List various methods for improving project communications, such as running effective meetings, using various technologies effectively, and using templates

- Describe how software can enhance project communications management

Importance of Good Communications

- The greatest threat to many projects is a failure to communicate

- Our culture does not portray IT professionals as being good communicators

- Research shows that IT professionals must be able to communicate effectively to succeed in their positions

- Strong verbal and non-technical skills are a key factor in career advancement for IT professionals

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Project Communications Management Processes

- **Planning communications management**: Determining the information and communications needs of the stakeholders

- **Managing communications:** Creating, distributing, storing, retrieving, and disposing of project communications based on the communications management plan

- **Controlling communications**: Monitoring and controlling project communications to ensure that stakeholder communication needs are met

Figure 10-1. Project Communications Management Summary

Planning
Process: **Plan communications management**
Outputs: Communications management plan, project documents updates

Executing
Process: **Manage communications**
Outputs: Project communications, project documents updates, project
         management plan updates, and organizational process assets
         updates

Monitoring and Controlling
Process: **Control communications**
Outputs: Work performance information, change requests, project
         documents updates, and organizational process assets updates

Project Start   **Project Finish**

Keys to Good Communications

- Project managers say they spend as much as 90 percent of their time communicating
- Need to focus on group and individual communication needs
- Use formal and informal methods for communicating
- Distribute important information in an effective and timely manner
- Set the stage for communicating bad news
- Determine the number of communication channels

Understanding Group and Individual Communication Needs

▸ People are not interchangeable parts

▸ As illustrated in Brooks' book *The Mythical Man-Month*, you cannot assume that a task originally scheduled to take two months of one person's time can be done in one month by two people

▸ Nine women cannot produce a baby in one month!

Importance of Face-to-Face Communication

- Research says that in a face-to-face interaction:
  - 58 percent of communication is through body language.
  - 35 percent of communication is through how the words are said
  - 7 percent of communication is through the content or words that are spoken
- Pay attention to more than just the actual words someone is saying
- A person's tone of voice and body language say a lot about how he or she really feels

Personal Preferences Affect Communication Needs

▸ Introverts like more private communications, while extroverts like to discuss things in public

▸ Intuitive people like to understand the big picture, while sensing people need step-by-step details

▸ Thinkers want to know the logic behind decisions, while feeling people want to know how something affects them personally

▸ Judging people are driven to meet deadlines while perceiving people need more help in developing and following plans

Encouraging More Face-to-Face Interactions

- Short, frequent meetings are often very effective in IT projects

- Stand-up meetings force people to focus on what they really need to communicate

- Some companies have policies preventing the use of e-mail between certain hours or even entire days of the week

What Went Wrong?

Amusing examples of miscommunications are common, especially when they involve the use of new technologies. For example, I was teaching an introductory course in information systems several years ago. Other instructors would often sit in on the course to learn how to use the latest software applications. One day, students were learning how to adjust settings and use short cuts on their computers. I would tell the students to "right-click" and then select Properties, or "right-click" and then select Copy. At the end of the class, an instructor quietly approached, waited until the other students were gone, and then said, "I don't know what I'm doing wrong." She held up a piece of paper on which she had written the word "click" about a dozen times. In other words, she literally did write "click" when told to do so instead of right-clicking. I asked, "Are you a Mac user?" Macintosh computers do not normally have a mouse with two buttons, so users never have to right-click. I showed the instructor how to right-click a mouse, and in future classes made sure to point out operations that were different on PCs than Macs.

Distributing Information in an Effective and Timely Manner

- Don't bury crucial information

- Don't be afraid to report bad information

- Oral communication via meetings and informal talks helps bring important information—good and bad—out into the open

Other Communication Considerations

▸ Rarely does the receiver interpret a message exactly as the sender intended

▸ Geographic location and cultural background affect the complexity of project communications

◦ Different working hours

◦ Language barriers

◦ Different cultural norms

Setting the Stage for Communicating Bad News

Dear Mom and Dad, or should I say Grandma & Grandpa,

Yes, I am pregnant. No, I'm not married yet since Larry, my boyfriend, is out of a job. Larry's employers just don't seem to appreciate the skills he has learned since he quit high school. Larry looks much younger than you, Dad, even though he is three years older. I'm quitting college and getting a job so we can get an apartment before the baby is born. I found a beautiful apartment above a 24-hour auto repair garage with good insulation so the exhaust fumes and noise won't bother us.

I'm very happy. I thought you would be too.

Love, Ashley

P.S. There is no Larry. I'm not pregnant. I'm not getting married. I'm not quitting school, but I am getting a "D" in Chemistry. I just wanted you to have some perspective.

Determining the Number of Communications Channels

- As the number of people involved increases, the complexity of communications increases because there are more communications channels or pathways through which people can communicate.
- Number of communications channels = $\dfrac{n(n-1)}{2}$

  where n is the number of people involved

Figure 10-2. The Impact of the Number of People on Communications Channels
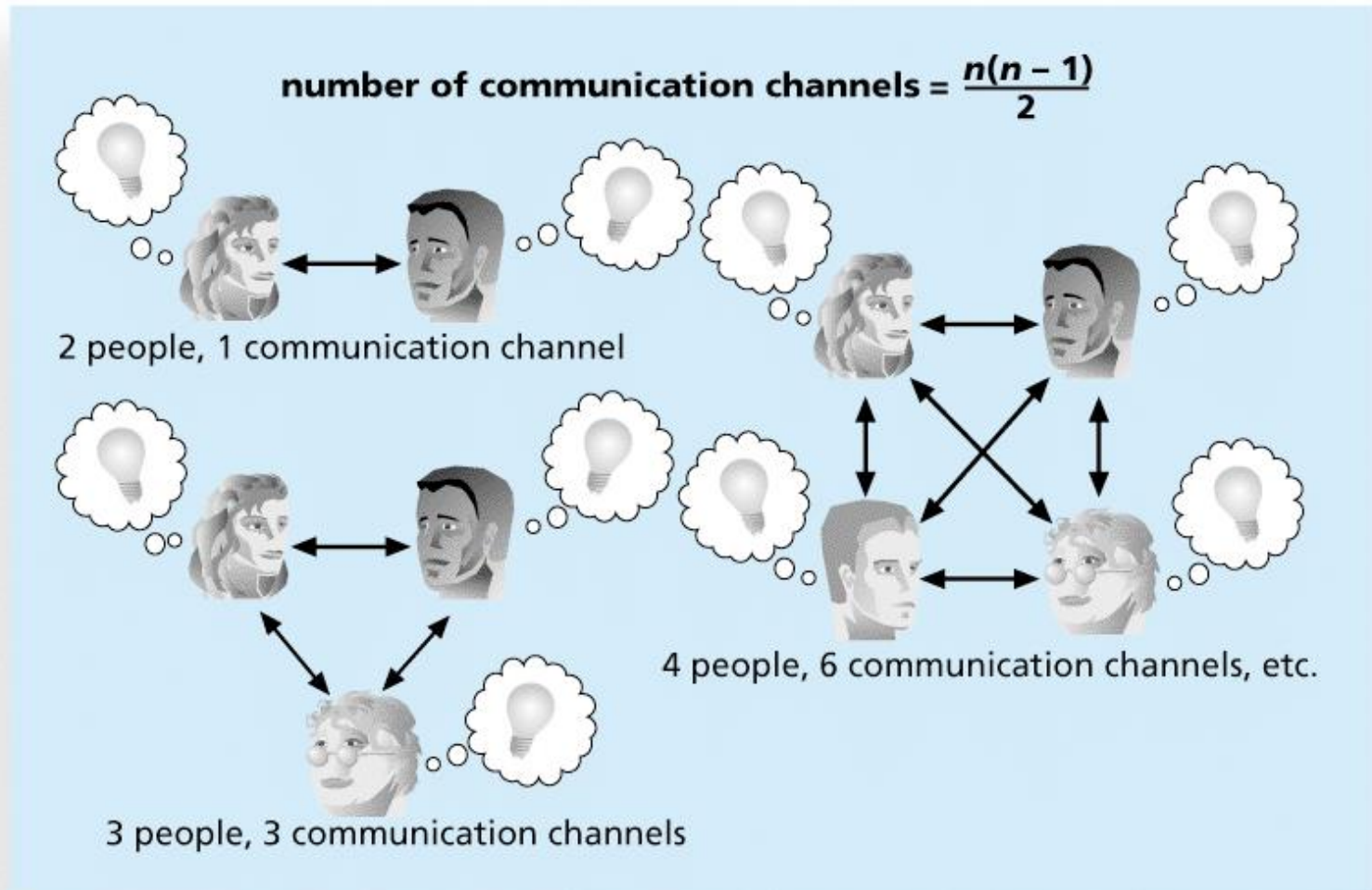
Planning Communications Management

- Every project should include some type of **communications management** plan, a document that guides project communications
- The communications management plan varies with the needs of the project, but some type of written plan should always be prepared
- For small projects, the communications management plan can be part of the team contract
- For large projects, it should be a separate document

Communications Management Plan Contents

1. Stakeholder communications requirements

2. Information to be communicated, including format, content, and level of detail

3. Who will receive the information and who will produce it

4. Suggested methods or technologies for conveying the information

5. Frequency of communication

6. Escalation procedures for resolving issues

7. Revision procedures for updating the communications management plan

8. A glossary of common terminology

Table 10-1. Sample Stakeholder Analysis for Project Communications

Stakeholders	Document Name	Document Format	Contact Person	Due
Customer management	Monthly status report	Hard copy and meeting	Tina Erndt, Tom Silva	First of month
Customer business staff	Monthly status report	Hard copy	Julie Grant, Sergey Cristobal	First of month
Customer technical staff	Monthly status report	E-mail	Li Chau, Nancy Michaels	First of month
Internal management	Monthly status report	Hard copy and meeting	Bob Thomson	First of month
Internal business and technical staff	Monthly status report	Intranet	Angie Liu	First of month
Training subcontractor	Training plan	Hard copy	Jonathan Kraus	November 1
Software subcontractor	Software implementation plan	E-mail	Najwa Gates	June 1

Comments: Put the titles and dates of documents in e-mail headings and have recipients acknowledge receipt.

Managing Communications

- Managing communications is a large part of a project manager's job

- Getting project information to the right people at the right time and in a useful format is just as important as developing the information in the first place

- Important considerations include the use of technology, the appropriate methods and media to use, and performance reporting

Using Technology to Enhance Creation and Distribution

- Technology can facilitate the process of creating and distributing information, when used properly
- It is important to select the appropriate communication method and media

Global Issues

▸ Natural disasters often disrupt communications around the world. For example, the scale of the damage to Japan's communications infrastructure after a 9.0 magnitude earthquake in March 2011 was unprecedented. Fortunately, thousands of employees from NTT East worked around the clock to restore communications. As a result of their efforts, 4.75 million public phone calls were made on the day after the disaster.

Classifications for Communication Methods

- *Interactive communication*: Two or more people interact to exchange information via meetings, phone calls, or video conferencing. Most effective way to ensure common understanding

- *Push communication*: Information is sent or pushed to recipients without their request via reports, e-mails, faxes, voice mails, and other means. Ensures that the information is distributed, but does not ensure that it was received or understood

- *Pull communication*: Information is sent to recipients at their request via Web sites, bulletin boards, e-learning, knowledge repositories like blogs, and other means

Table 10-2. Media Choice Table

KEY: 1 = EXCELLENT	2 = ADEQUATE		3 = INAPPROPRIATE			
HOW WELL MEDIUM IS SUITED TO:	HARD COPY	TELEPHONE CALL	VOICE MAIL	E-MAIL	MEETING	WEB SITE
Assessing commitment	3	2	3	3	1	3
Building consensus	3	2	3	3	1	3
Mediating a conflict	3	2	3	3	1	3
Resolving a misunderstanding	3	1	3	3	2	3
Addressing negative behavior	3	2	3	2	1	3
Expressing support/appreciation	1	2	2	1	2	3
Encouraging creative thinking	2	3	3	1	3	3
Making an ironic statement	3	2	2	3	1	3
Conveying a reference document	1	3	3	3	3	1
Reinforcing one s authority	1	2	3	3	1	2
Providing a permanent record	1	3	3	1	3	1
Maintaining confidentiality	2	1	2	3	1	3
Conveying simple information	3	2	1	1	2	3
Asking an informational question	3	2	1	1	3	3
Making a simple request	3	3	1	1	3	3
Giving complex instructions	3	3	3	2	1	2
Addressing many people	2	3	3 or 1*	2	3	1

Galati, Tess. Email Composition and Communication (EmC2) Practical Communications, Inc. (www.praccom.com) (2001).
*Depends on system functionality

What Went Right?

- Collaboration is a key driver of overall performance of companies around the world
- Of all the collaboration technologies that were studied, three were more commonly present in high-performing companies than in low-performing ones: Web conferencing, audio conferencing, and meeting-scheduler technologies
- "This study reveals a powerful new metric business leaders can use to more successfully manage their companies and achieve competitive advantage," said Brian Cotton, a vice president at Frost & Sullivan*
- The study also showed that there are regional differences in how people in various countries prefer to communicate with one another

*Frost & Sullivan, "New Research Reveals Collaboration Is a Key Driver of Business Performance Around the World," Microsoft PressPass (June 5, 2006).

Reporting Performance

Performance reporting keeps stakeholders informed about how resources are being used to achieve project objectives

- **Status reports** describe where the project stands at a specific point in time

- **Progress reports** describe what the project team has accomplished during a certain period of time

- **Forecasts** predict future project status and progress based on past information and trends

Controlling Communications

- The main goal of controlling communications is to ensure the optimal flow of information throughout the entire project life cycle
- The project manager and project team should use their various reporting systems, expert judgment, and meetings to assess how well communications are working. If problems exist, the project manager and team need to take action, which often requires changes to the earlier processes of planning and managing project communications
- It is often beneficial to have a facilitator from outside the project team assess how well communications are working

Suggestions for Improving Project Communications

▸ Develop better communication skills

▸ Run effective meetings

▸ Use e-mail and other technologies effectively

▸ Use templates for project communications

Developing Better Communication Skills

- Most companies spend a lot of money on technical training for their employees, even when employees might benefit more from communications training
- Individual employees are also more likely to enroll voluntarily in classes to learn the latest technology than in classes that develop soft skills
- As organizations become more global, they realize they must invest in ways to improve communication with people from different countries and cultures
- It takes leadership to improve communication

Media Snapshot

▸ Communications technology, such as using e-mail and searching the Web, should help improve project communications, but it can also cause conflict

▸ How? Cyberslackers are people who should be working, but instead spend their time online doing non-work-related activities, such as annoying friends or co-workers by sending unimportant e-mails

▸ A study by Websense suggested that employees are using the Web more and more for personal reasons, and it is costing U.S. companies $178 billion annually, or $5,000 per employee

▸ A 2008 survey found that more than a quarter of U.S. employers have fired workers for misusing e-mail and one-third have fired workers for misusing the Internet on the job

Running Effective Meetings

- Determine if a meeting can be avoided
- Define the purpose and intended outcome of the meeting
- Determine who should attend the meeting
- Provide an agenda to participants before the meeting
- Prepare handouts and visual aids, and make logistical arrangements ahead of time
- Run the meeting professionally
- Set the ground rules for the meeting
- Build relationships

Using E-Mail, Instant Messaging, Texting, and Collaborative Tools Effectively

- Make sure that e-mail, instant messaging, texting, or collaborative tools are an appropriate medium for what you want to communicate
- Be sure to send information to the right people
- Use meaningful subject lines and limit the content of emails to one main subject, and be as clear and concise as possible
- Be sure to authorize the right people to share and edit your collaborative documents

Sample Collaborative Tools

- A **SharePoint portal** allows users to create custom Web sites to access documents and applications stored on shared devices
- **Google Docs** allow users to create, share, and edit documents, spreadsheets, and presentations online
- A **wiki** is a Web site designed to enable anyone who accesses it to contribute or modify Web page content

Best Practice

- Alaska Airlines uses secure project wikis to facilitate project communications and collaborations
- Benefits include:
  - Better documentation
  - Improved trust and information sharing
  - Sustained growth
- The Alaska Airlines IT department even created a "Mother of All Wikis" to serve as an index for all the known project wikis

Using Templates for Project Communications

▸ Many technical people are afraid to ask for help

▸ Providing examples and templates for project communications saves time and money

▸ Organizations can develop their own templates, use some provided by outside organizations, or use samples from textbooks

▸ Recall that research shows that companies that excel in project management make effective use of templates

Figure 10-3. Sample Template for a Project Description (corrected from p. 427)

Project X Descripton

Objective: Describe the objective of the project in one or two sentences. Focus on the business benefits of doing the project.

Scope: Briefly describe the scope of the project. What business functions are involved, and what are the main products the project will produce?

Assumptions: Summarize the most critical assumptions for the project.

Cost: Provide the total estimated cost of the project. If desired, list the total cost each year.

Schedule: Provide summary information from the project's Gantt chart, as shown. Focus on summary tasks and milestones.

Task Name	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April
Start Project	◆6/1								
+ Main Task 1									
Deliverable 1			◆ 7/26						
+ Main Task 2									
Deliverable 2						◆ 10/18			
+ Main Task 3									
Deliverable 3								◆ 12/27	
End Project								▶◆ 12/27	
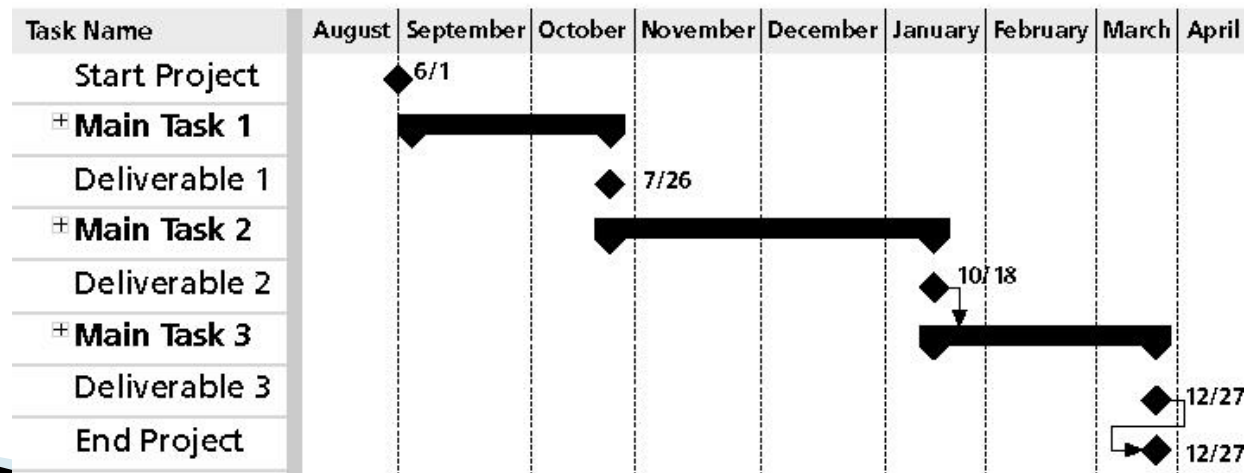
Table 10-3. Sample Template for a Monthly Progress Report

I. **Accomplishments for Month of January (or appropriate month):**
- Describe most important accomplishments. Relate to project's Gantt chart.
- Describe other important accomplishments, one bullet for each. If any issues were resolved from the previous month, list them as accomplishments.

II. **Plans for February (or following month):**
- Describe most important items to be accomplished in the next month. Again, relate tothe project's Gantt chart.
- Describe other important items to accomplish, one bullet for each.

III. **Issues:** Briefly list important issues that surfaced or are still important. Managers hate surprises and want to help the project succeed, so be sure to list issues.

IV. **Project Changes (Date and Description):** List any approved or requested changes to the project. Include the date of the change and a brief description.

Table 10-4. Final Project Documentation Items

I.	Project description
II.	Project proposal and backup data (request for proposal, statement of work, proposal correspondence, and so on)
III.	Original and revised contract information and client acceptance documents
IV.	Original and revised project plans and schedules (WBS, Gantt charts and network diagrams, cost estimates, communications management plan, etc.)
V.	Design documents
VI.	Final project report
VII.	Deliverables, as appropriate
VIII.	Audit reports
IX.	Lessons-learned reports
X.	Copies of all status reports, meeting minutes, change notices, and other written and electronic communications

Lessons Learned Reports

▸ The project manager and project team members should each prepare a **lessons-learned report**

  ◦ A reflective statement that documents important things an individual learned from working on the project

▸ The project manager often combines information from all of the lessons-learned reports into a project summary report

▸ See template and sample in Chapter 3

Project Archives

- It is also important to organize and prepare project archives
- **Project archives** are a complete set of organized project records that provide an accurate history of the project
- These archives can provide valuable information for future projects as well

Project Web Sites

- Many project teams create a project Web site to store important product documents and other information

- Can create the site using various types of software, such as enterprise project management software

Figure 10-4. Microsoft's Project Web Application Master Project Summary Screen

Using Software to Assist in Project Communications

- There are many software tools to aid in project communications

- Today many people telecommute or work remotely at least part-time. TechCast at George Washington University forecasts that by 2019, 30 percent of U.S. private-sector workers could work from home

- Project management software includes new capabilities to enhance virtual communications

- While technology can aid in the communications process, it is not the most important. Far more important is improving an organization's ability to communicate, which often involves cultural change

Chapter Summary

▸ The goal of project communications management is to ensure timely and appropriate generation, collection, dissemination, storage, and disposition of project information

▸ Main process include:

  ◦ Plan communications management

  ◦ Manage communications

  ◦ Control communications