

IT PROJECT MANAGEMENT

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Part II: Planning Your Software Project

Chapter 4: Planning for Communications

Chapter 5: Planning for Software Project Risks

Chapter 6: Planning for Software Quality

Chapter 7: Building the Project Team

Chapter 8: Creating Project Time Estimates

Chapter 9: Building Your Project Budget

Planning for Communications

Understanding the demand of communications

Building an effective communication management plan

Determining which stakeholders need communication

Defining the communications modality

The Importance of Communicating Effectively

Ensuring accurate communication

- Everyone, from members of the project team to project stakeholders, must communicate openly and accurately.

How do you ensure accurate communication? Here are some tips:

- **Document your conversations in e-mails, memos, or meeting minutes.** If you put the conversation points in writing, the party with whom you're communicating has an opportunity to clarify various points if there are any misunderstandings.
- **Scope statement:** This document defines all the parameters of the project work — and only the project work — needed to satisfy the stakeholders' objectives.
- **Scope changes:** Any changes to the scope that are approved or declined should be signed by you and the requesting party.

Ensuring accurate communication

- **Budget:** You and the project sponsor both need to sign off on the budget for the project. Signing off acknowledges the budget and any range of variances that may be permitted.
- **Schedule:** The project schedule must be signed by the project manager and the project sponsor. Agreement on the schedule is essential for acknowledging the project resources, identifying when the resources will be needed, and showing when the project work will be completed.
- **Document scope, time, or cost compromises.** As your project progresses, you'll have issues, delays, problems with vendors, problems with your project team, and more excitement. For each of these issues, you're likely to arrive at some compromise to find a solution. Document these solutions so you don't face consequences downstream in the project.

Ensuring accurate communication

- **Set an agenda.** You should create an agenda before every meeting that you're facilitating. An agenda sets the direction of the meeting and prevents other nonrelevant issues from creeping into the discussion. An agenda also helps you and the project team prepare for the meeting by bringing the appropriate files, status reports, and other pertinent information. Agendas are a must.
- **Take minutes.** No one, at least no one we've met, likes to take minutes at meetings. But we've met plenty of project managers who wish they had taken better notes. Minutes document the business of the meeting,
 - Making people accountable for what they promise.
 - Prompting team members to follow through. If the participants know that their words and promises are being documented, they're more likely to follow through.
 - Making it easier to recall what was discussed in meetings weeks, months, or even years later. Hate taking minutes as much as we do? Here's a solution: Delegate this task. Better yet, rotate the task among the team. By forcing others to take minutes, you not only save yourself from the task, but you also build team ownership.

How not to communicate

Linda,

I need a project team member who knows what Java is all about. You are smart, talented, on time, and savvy. Team members who are not like you admit to knowing nothing about Java. Our project is horrible when you're away. This project is going great.

Best,

Your favorite Project Manager

Linda sounds pretty good, eh? But what if the project manager's writing was so awful that he actually meant to tell Linda this instead:

Linda,

I need a project team member who knows what Java is. All about you are smart, talented, on time, and savvy team members who are not like you. Admit to knowing nothing about Java! Our project is horrible. When you're away, this project is going great.

Best,

Your favorite Project Manager

How not to communicate

- Take time to proofread and edit your e-mails before sending them out to the world.
- If you're not much of a writer, try to keep your missives short and simple.
- Only send e-mail when you absolutely have to or if no other form communication will work.
- Never put into an e-mail what you wouldn't say to someone's face. Performance evaluations — even compliments — should always be communicated verbally.
- If you're interested in more information about face-to-face communication, especially when discussing bad news.

Care and Feeding of Nerds

We have a theory when it comes to programmers: They're not nerds, so don't treat them that way. Programmers are a different breed.

- **They are smart people.**
- **They are creative.**
- **They can understand intangible things.**
- **They often communicate in absolutes.**
- **They are proud of their work.**
- **They're often in demand.**

Taking charge with programmers

If you want to communicate with a programmer, you have to take charge. Programmers are a tricky bunch sometimes. But you, not the programmer, are in charge of the project. Although the programmer is in charge of a large portion of the project work, you're the one responsible if the project fails.

You must establish dominance without being too aggressive. Establish five things through your early communications:

- ✓ **Leadership:** Leadership is focused on motivating, aligning objectives, and moving your project team to a destination. Assume that you're leading the project and that your project team will follow.
- ✓ **Management:** Management is focused on getting results. As a project manager, your core focus is on getting the project successfully completed. Management of a group of programmers means you must see results.
- ✓ **Discipline:** When your programmers aren't getting their work done as promised, don't hesitate to discipline according to your human resources guidelines.
Be careful about making snap judgments, thought. First, find out why they aren't completing the work. Were your instructions unclear? Was there a miscommunication on your end? The problem could be yours and not the programmers'.
- ✓ **Organization:** Your ability to communicate, lead, manage, and discipline your project team centers on your organizational skills. Be organized and your project team will respect you for having everything on the ball.
- ✓ **Balance:** In all your decisions you must be fair. Your team of programmers will respect you even more if you show balance and fairness in all of your work assignments and disciplinary actions. Don't play favorites.