

10: Project Communications Management

IT4306– IT Project Management

Level II - Semester 4

Intended Learning Outcomes

- At the end of this lesson, you will be able to;
 - Appreciate the communication skills and social skills
 - Describe the main processes in project communication management
 - Explain main elements in the communications management plan
 - Perform a stakeholder communications analysis
 - Describe various methods for distributing project information and the advantages and disadvantages of each
 - Explain how stakeholders can be kept informed about project status and resolve any issues
 - List various methods for improving project communications, such as managing conflicts, running effective meetings, using e-mail and other technologies effectively

10.1. 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 skills are a key factor in career advancement for IT professionals.

Project Communications Management Processes

- **Communications planning:** Determining the information and communications needs of the stakeholders.
- **Information distribution:** Making needed information available to project stakeholders in a timely manner.
- **Performance reporting:** Collecting and disseminating performance information, including status reports, progress measurement, and forecasting.
- **Managing stakeholders:** Managing communications to satisfy the needs and expectations of project stakeholders and to resolve issues.

10.2. Communications Planning

- Every project should include some type of **communications management** plan, a document that guides project communications.
- Creating a stakeholder analysis for project communications also aids in communications planning.

Communications Management Plan Contents

- Stakeholder communications requirements.
- Information to be communicated, including format, content, and level of detail.
- The people who will receive the information and who will produce it.
- Suggested methods or technologies for conveying the information.
- Frequency of communication.
- Escalation procedures for resolving issues.
- Revision procedures for updating the communications management plan.
- A glossary of common terminology.

Sample Stakeholder Analysis for Project Communications

STAKEHOLDERS	DOCUMENT NAME	DOCUMENT FORMAT	CONTACT PERSON	DUE
Customer management	Monthly status report	Hard copy	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	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	11/1/2006
Software subcontractor	Software implementation plan	E-mail	Najwa Gates	6/1/2006

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

10.3. Information Distribution

- Getting the right 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:
 - Using technology to enhance information distribution.
 - Formal and informal methods for distributing information.

What Went Wrong?

- A well-publicized example of misuse of e-mail comes from the 1998 Justice Department's high profile, antitrust suit against Microsoft. E-mail emerged as a star witness in the case. Many executives sent messages that should never have been put in writing. The court used e-mail as evidence, even though the senders of the notes said the information was being interpreted out of context.*
- See the example that describes the misunderstanding of the phrase "pedagogical approach" on page 392.

*Harmon, Amy, "E-mail Comes Back to Haunt Companies," *Minneapolis Star Tribune* (from the *New York Times*) (November 29, 1998).

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.

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.

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.

Media Choice Table

KEY: 1 = EXCELLENT HOW WELL MEDIUM IS SUITED TO:	2 = ADEQUATE		3 = INAPPROPRIATE			
	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.pracom.com) (2001).

*Depends on system functionality

Media Snapshot

- Live video is a modern medium for sending information.
- Microsoft says that one in every five face-to-face meetings can be replaced with Web conferencing tools, and they estimate it will save \$70 million in reduced travel in one year alone.*
- The medium can backfire, as in the case with the Janet Jackson wardrobe malfunction during the 2004 Super Bowl half-time show.

*Lohr, Steve, "Ambitious Package to Raise Productivity (and Microsoft's Profit)," *The New York Times* (August 16, 2004).

10.4. Performance Reporting

- 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.

10.5. Suggestions for Improving Project Communications

- Manage conflicts effectively.
- Develop better communication skills.
- Run effective meetings.
- Use e-mail effectively.
- Use templates for project communications.

Conflict Handling Modes

1. **Confrontation:** Directly face a conflict using a problem-solving approach.
2. **Compromise:** Use a give-and-take approach.
3. **Smoothing:** De-emphasize areas of difference and emphasize areas of agreement.
4. **Forcing:** The win-lose approach.
5. **Withdrawal:** Retreat or withdraw from an actual or potential disagreement.

Conflict Can Be Good

- Conflict often produces important results, such as new ideas, better alternatives, and motivation to work harder and more collaboratively.
- **Groupthink:** Conformance to the values or ethical standards of a group. Groupthink can develop if there are no conflicting viewpoints.
- Research suggests that task-related conflict often improves team performance, but emotional conflict often depresses team performance.

Developing Better Communication Skills

- Companies and formal degree programs for IT professionals often neglect the importance of speaking, writing, and listening 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.

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.
- Build relationships.

Using E-Mail Effectively

- Make sure that e-mail is an appropriate medium for what you want to communicate.
- Be sure to send the e-mail to the right people.
- Use meaningful subject lines.
- Limit the content to one main subject, and be as clear and concise as possible.

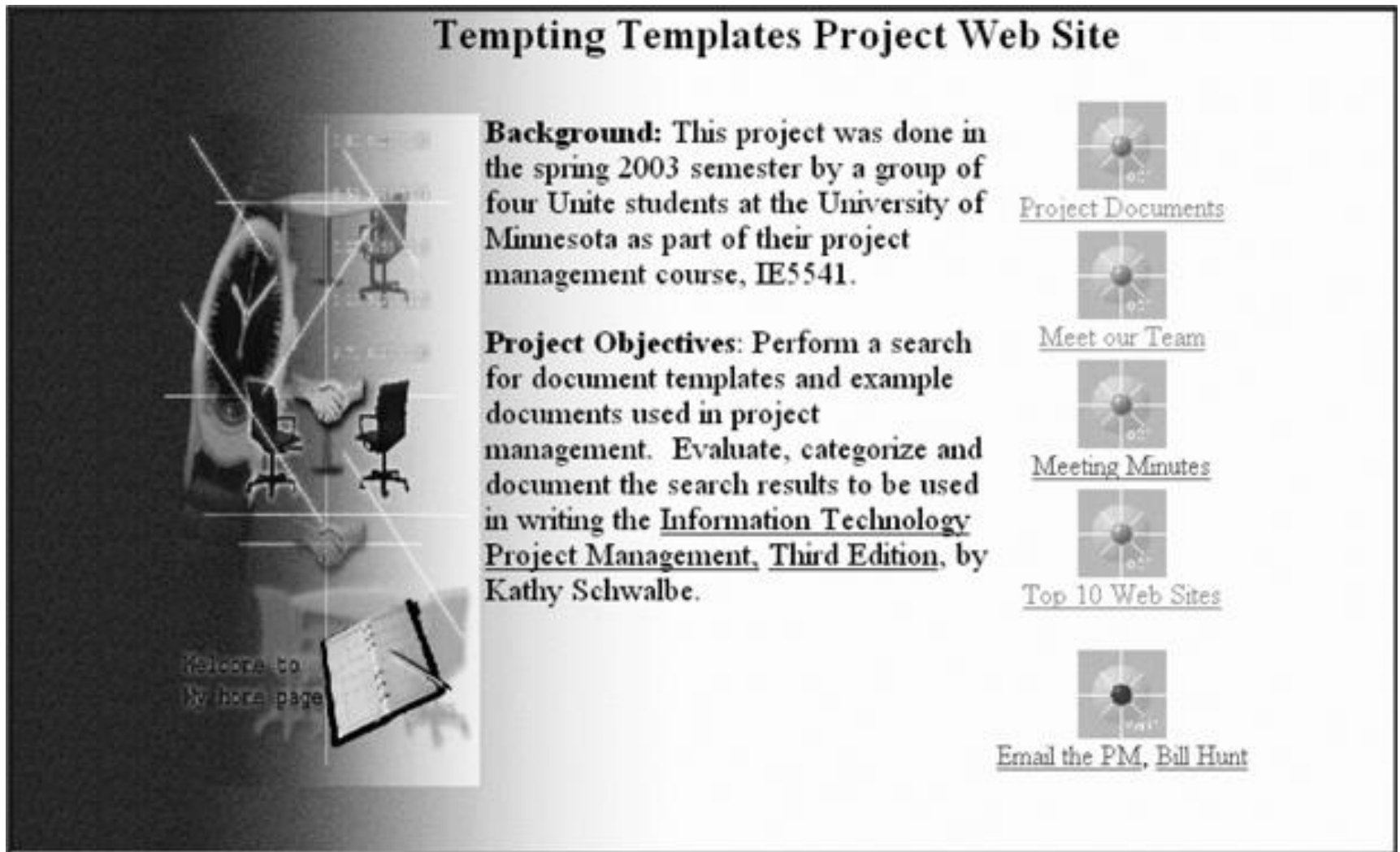
Using E-Mail Effectively (cont.)

- Limit the number and size of attachments.
- Delete e-mail you don't need, and don't open e-mail if you question the source.
- Make sure your virus software is current.
- Respond to and file e-mails quickly.
- Learn how to use important features.

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.

Figure 10-3. Sample Project Web Site



Using Software to Assist in Project Communications

- There are many software tools to aid in project communications.
- Today more than 37 percent of people telecommute or work remotely at least part-time.
- Project management software includes new capabilities to enhance virtual communications.
- New tools, such as instant messaging and blogs, can enhance project communications.

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:
 - Communications planning
 - Information distribution
 - Performance reporting
 - Managing stakeholders