

Software Project Communication & Conflict Management



Communication

Is the way we
interact
with fellow humans

Communication

- The way we interact with fellow humans, the way we get our message across.
 - We communicate with our eyes, faces and bodies as well as our words and voices.
 - “Poor” communication is the cause of feuds and fights.
 - “Good” communication and the ability to manage conflict effectively is a **skill**—one that all of us can learn—and that we must learn if we are to be effective Managers.
- The ability to **interact** successfully and “get along with” people is a critical ingredient to excellence in “people skills.”

The Role of Perception

- Difference of understanding in regular communication.
 - Even after explanation, the other person cannot see or accept our viewpoint.
- Perception has a critical role in our interpretation of any given situation.
 - Has considerable influence over our reactions to the situation.
 - Perception develops, through a variety of influences
 - such as our family background, our ethnic background, our age, work experiences, values, and spiritual outlook.
 - Almost everything affects our perception.

We see things:

not as **they** are
but as **we** are



Perception



Perception

- A significant factor in improving our communication, reducing conflict and understanding the other person's point of view, is the recognition that our perceptions are always **incomplete** to some extent, and perhaps even **inaccurate**.
- **Our Perception of Reality is Not Necessarily Reality**
 - Recognizing our **limitations** is the basis for taking responsibility for how we think.

Listen well so the
message sent
and the
message received
are what you want



Communication styles

- We each develop a particular **style** of communication.
 - **Recognizing** different styles of communication will help us interact and communicate with people who have very different styles of communication from our own.
 - Communication styles can be divided into several different groups. Consider these brief descriptions:



The Director



The Accountant



The Stabiliser



The Party Person

Communication styles

- **The Director:**

- You know this type of person, they are:
 - Impatient, they want everything done yesterday.
 - They even speak quickly, often using short forms of language such as “ASAP” .
 - They are direct in their communication and are often to be found in leadership positions.
- Keep in mind that this person thinks in terms of projects that need to be completed
- “The Director” often does without even being aware that they may be hurting or stepping on someone.

Communication styles

- **The Party Person**

- These people are friendly, optimistic and informal.
- They enjoy life and they communicate clearly.
- They are energetic and creative—give them opportunity to establish their goals and visions and don't dampen their enthusiasm.

Communication styles

- **The Stabilizer.**

- A quieter person; shy, but friendly.
- A wonderful support person, loyal and caring—they have difficulty in saying no.
- Give them space to speak and don't interrupt. Because they are quiet don't ignore them or assume they have nothing to contribute. Involve them with requests for comments or their help.

Communication styles

- **The Accountant**

- Every team needs this quiet, meticulous person.
 - They are systematic and attend to the details involved with finances and filing. As with the stabilizer, involve this person and give them the opportunity to share their knowledge and ideas.
 - This person will respond best when they can sense that there is structure and framework to what you are trying to accomplish.

THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

- Research says in a face-to-face interaction
 - 7% VERBAL—What you said (the message itself)
 - 38% VOCAL—How you said it (the intonation, projection and resonance of the voice...)
 - 55% VISUAL—body language / non verbal
 - A motto that many specialists in communication use: **It's not what you say – it's how you say it!**
- 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 they really feel
 - Short, frequent meetings are often very effective on IT projects
 - Stand-up meetings force people to focus on what they really need to communicate

Importance of Good Communications

- The greatest threat to many projects is a failure to communicate
- 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
- Most project managers would admit that around eighty percent of their time is spent communicating in one form or another with the various members and groups within the project team.
 - Related issue have to be addressed is:
 - the screening of communications
 - Collection and distribution of information

Project communications management

- It is about appropriate **generation**, **collection**, **storage** and **distribution** of project information.
 - During the project planning it requires determining the information and communications needs of **stakeholders**
 - During execution it is about distributing the information in a timely manner, doing status reporting and progress measurement,
 - During closure it is about gathering information to formalize project completion.
- Project communications management needs to be planned for:
 - Who needs what project information?
 - When do they need it?
 - How will the information be given?
 - By whom?
 - How will information be distributed?

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

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
 - Stakeholder communications requirements
 - Information to be communicated, including format, content, and level of detail
 - 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

Table 1. The most frequently used communication tools (Cegielski et al, 2006)

Tool	Effectiveness	Coverage
1 to 1 meetings	High	Low
Workshops	High	Medium
Large presentations	Medium	High
Cascade briefings	Medium	High
Newsletters	Low	High
Intranet Portals	High	High
Moderated discussion groups	Medium	High
Articles	Medium	High
Video	Medium	Medium
Formal letters	Medium	High
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)	Low	High

Internal call centre	Low	Medium
Interactive Voice Response messages	Low	Medium
Suggestion box	Low	Low
Email	Medium	High
Notice boards	Low	Medium

Communication Blockers

- Accusing
 - Never accuse or blame unless it is highly required
- Judging
 - if one person is suspecting that you judge him, he will not open up to you
- Insulting
 - takes you nowhere in communication
- Diagnosis
 - other person maybe reluctant to provide you all the information he/she has.
- Sarcasms
 - show respect to others. If you show no respect, you get no information.
- Globalizing
 - Do not use words such as "always" or "never".
- Threats or Orders
 - Overpowering rather than understanding the other person, has many negative consequences
- Interrupting
 - people interrupt another person to express their own views and to oppose what has been said.

Conflict

- Dictionary :
 - To come into collision or disagreement;
 - be contradictory, or in opposition;
 - clash: The account of one eyewitness conflicted with that of the other.
- **Conflict management** is the process of limiting the negative aspects of conflict while increasing the positive aspects of conflict.
 - The aim of conflict management is to enhance learning and group outcomes, including effectiveness or performance in organizational setting (Rahim, 2002, p. 208).

Reducing Conflict

- Overview
 - **Lose-lose methods:**
 - parties to the conflict episode do not get what they want
 - **Win-lose methods:**
 - one party a clear winner; other party a clear loser
 - **Win-win methods:**
 - each party to the conflict episode gets what he or she wants

Reducing Conflict

- Lose-lose methods
 - **Avoidance**
 - Withdraw, stay away
 - Does not permanently reduce conflict
 - **Compromise**
 - Bargain, negotiate
 - Each loses something valued
 - **Smoothing**: find similarities

Reducing Conflict

- Win-lose methods
 - **Dominance – Forcing**
 - Overwhelm other party
 - **Authoritative command:** decision by person in authority
 - **Majority rule:** voting
 - This is when you force the issue to get the decision you want, usually for safety or ethical/ moral/legal issues.
 - Sometimes it is a good strategic move to ask the group to go away and think about the decision, and then meet again to make the decision.

Reducing Conflict

- Win-win methods
 - **Problem solving**: find root causes
 - **Integration**: meet interests and desires of all parties
 - **Superordinate goal**: desired by all but not reachable alone

- Summary
 - Lose-lose methods: **compromise**
 - Win-lose methods: **dominance**
 - Win-win methods: **problem solving**

Reducing Conflict (Yet another)

- Avoid → Wait & See
 - When the issues are trivial, or circumstances dictate that a solution is better left until later.
 - Maybe until you or the other people have calmed down, or reinforcements have arrived.
 - Perhaps it is better to avoid decision making when you are so tired / stressed that your judgment may not be sound
 - When moral or safety issues are involved.
 - Not to be used just because you are afraid to deal with conflict! Issues will only build up and become more complicated.

Managing Conflict - STAR

In situations of crisis and potential conflict always remember star
S T A R

We need to: **STOP** (Don't panic – don't react!)

THINK (gather information)

ANALYSE (using gathered information decide how you can best empathize with this person)

RESPOND (respectfully communicate your understanding of the situation and what would work for you)

Conflict Handling Modes, in Preference Order

- **Confrontation** or problem-solving: directly face a conflict
- **Compromise**: use a give-and-take approach
- **Smoothing**: de-emphasize areas of differences and emphasize areas of agreement
- **Forcing**: the win-lose approach
- **Withdrawal**: retreat or withdraw from an actual or potential disagreement