

# Communicating Effectively

Project work is undertaken by people. People are individuals and have different information and communications requirements. Successful project managers must communicate with their stakeholders in an appropriate, effective and timely manner.

The art of communicating is a broad subject and involves a substantial body of knowledge. It includes oral communication models, written communications, as well as more technology oriented communications such as email, videoconferencing, and internet meetings.

# Communicating Effectively

Every communication method involves has advantages and disadvantages. The project manager must decide which method to choose based upon the situation and the needs of the stakeholders.

Thee project manager must have skills in presentation techniques, managing meetings, as well as other interpersonal communications. These techniques are applied in order to disseminate information to the project stakeholders.

The project manager should consider:

- Who needs the information?
- What type of information is needed?
- When do they need the information?
- How will the information be delivered to them?
- Who will deliver the information?

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**Urgency:** If the need for information is urgent then the communication must be frequent, accurate and timely.

**Technology:** If the mode of communication relies upon technology then the project team must ensure that the technology systems are in place, that they are appropriate and well understood to be used effectively.

**Project Staffing:** The communications strategy used must be compatible with the experience and expertise of the project participants.

**Project Environment:** Virtual teams will communicate differently as opposed to teams that meet and operate in a face-to-face environment. Teams that are made up of people from various cultures who speak different languages or who are located in separate countries will obviously communicate in different ways.

The project manager will spend 80%-90% of his or her time communicating.

# Communicating Effectively

Understand the requirements of the project stakeholders. Define the type of information that is required. Determine the format of the information to be presented. Select communications strategies and document them in a **Communications Management Plan**:

- Describe the stakeholder communications requirements.
- Describe the formatting, content and level of detailed information to be communicated.
- Identify the people responsible for communication and the people who will receive the information.
- Identify the methods, tools or technologies that will be used to convey the information.
- Specify the frequency of each communication type.
- Describe escalation planning and guidelines when issues need to be elevated for resolution.
- Outline the communication plan change management approach.
- Define a glossary of common project terminology.

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The **Project Control Book** is a compendium of project information that is maintained in paper or in electronic format. It contains a repository of information about the project which is determined by the project manager.

The project control book will typically contain:

- The project business case.
- The project plan including scope, schedule, and budget information
- Problem and change control.
- Copies of all project performance reports.
- Copies of all meeting minutes.

During the project authorized people can determine the current state of the project by referring to the project control book. After a project has been completed and closed, the project control book can be used to determine what took place during a project and may be used to support requests as diverse as providing input into new projects or supporting litigation for one that went wrong.

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**Project meetings** may include the project team, the customers, and the project steering committee or they may be held with another group of stakeholders. Meetings may be formally scheduled in the communications management plan or may occur as required with little notice or warning.

Have regular team meetings to ensure that everyone on the team is committed to and understands project progress.

Meetings should be held only if there is a good reason to hold them. An agenda should be sent out in advance so that everyone has an idea of what will be discussed and what is expected of them. The information discussed during the meeting are recorded as the meeting minutes which are then distributed to all key stakeholders.

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A **project status report** is a regular report that contains information describing how the project is tracking to its plan. It describes:

- Issues, problems, opportunities, and pending decisions related to the project.
- Accomplishments in the previous reporting period.
- Expected accomplishments in the upcoming the reporting period.
- Variance analysis comparing what was planned to what has actually been achieved. Note that project scope, schedule and budget are the three most common elements reported in the variance analysis.
- Information about project resources.

By reviewing the project status report the project stakeholders are able to see how the project is performing quickly and with a minimum amount of effort.



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## Presentations

The project manager must communicate effectively with the project stakeholders to ensure that they understand the status of the project and are able to help resolve issues that arise within the project.

It is important to understand the needs of the audience. Understanding where their interests lie and whether they are technical or non-technical will make it easier to develop an effective presentation.

Presentations have an opening, body and closing. The opening sets the tone for the rest of the presentation and gets things started off on the right foot. The body conveys the important information and the closing defines the commitments made.

**Plan.** A planned presentation is normally an effective presentation.

# Communicating Effectively

Presentation skills can easily be developed and enhanced. There are many books, organizations and courses available aimed at improving these face-to-face skills. It is important for project managers and key team members to become effective communicators using whatever means possible.

A few important techniques to remember when delivering a presentation are:

- Make eye contact.
- Use appropriate gestures to amplify information in your presentation.
- Vary the pitch, tone and modulation of your voice.
- Make use of visual tools wherever possible.

Practice! Practice!. Practice!