Chapter 10: Project Communications Management

Information Technology Project Management, Sixth Edition

Note: See the text itself for full citations.
Learning Objectives

- Understand the importance of good communications in projects
- Discuss the process of identifying stakeholders and how to create a stakeholder register and stakeholder management strategy
- Explain the elements of project communications planning and how to create a communications management plan
- Describe various methods for distributing project information and the advantages and disadvantages of each, discuss the importance of addressing individual communication needs, and calculate the number of communications channels in a project
Learning Objectives (continued)

- Recognize the importance of managing stakeholder expectations
- Understand how performance reporting helps stakeholders stay informed about project resources
- List various methods for improving project communications, such as managing conflicts, running effective meetings, using e-mail and other 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 skills are a key factor in career advancement for IT professionals
Project Communications Management Processes

- **Identifying stakeholders**: identifying everyone involved in or affected by the project and determining the best ways to manage relationships with them
- **Planning communications**: determining the information and communications needs of the stakeholders
- **Distributing information**: making needed information available to project stakeholders in a timely manner
- **Managing stakeholder expectations**: managing communications to satisfy the needs and expectations of project stakeholders and to resolve issues
- **Reporting performance**: collecting and disseminating performance information, including status reports, progress measurement, and forecasting
Figure 10-1. Project Communications Management Summary

Initiating
Process: Identify stakeholders
Outputs: Stakeholder register, stakeholder management strategy

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

Executing
Process: Distribute information
Outputs: Organizational process assets updates

Process: Manage stakeholder expectations
Outputs: Organizational process assets updates, change requests, project management plan updates, project document updates

Monitoring and Controlling
Process: Report performance
Outputs: Performance reports, organizational process assets updates, change requests
Identifying Stakeholders

Recall that the ultimate goal of project management is to meet or exceed stakeholder needs and expectations from a project, so you must first identify who your particular project stakeholders are.

Two key outputs of this process include:

- **Stakeholder register**: a public document that includes details related to the identified project stakeholders (see Table 3-4 for an example).
- **Stakeholder management strategy**: an approach to help increase the support of stakeholders throughout the project; often includes sensitive information.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Internal/External</th>
<th>Level of interest</th>
<th>Level of influence</th>
<th>Potential management strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John Huntz</td>
<td>Project Manager for largest project under Peter</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>John does a great job, but he often upsets other PMs with his harsh approach. Keep him in line and remind him he is part of a bigger team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carolyn Morris</td>
<td>VP Telecommunications, Peter's boss</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Carolyn is the first woman VP at our company and still likes to prove herself. Keep her informed of key issues and never surprise her!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subbu Thangir</td>
<td>Dept. Head State of Oregon</td>
<td>External</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Subbu is in charge of a lot of state issues, like getting permits to install fiber-optic lines. He has a lot on his plate, but he doesn’t seem concerned with our projects. Schedule a short, special meeting with him to increase visibility and discuss key issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom Morgan</td>
<td>CEO of major Telecomm. Customer</td>
<td>External</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Tom is the sponsor of several of our projects. Give him the status on all of them at once to use his time efficiently.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Planning Communications

- 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 (see Table 10-2 for an example).
Table 10-2. Sample Stakeholder Analysis for Project Communications

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

Comments: Put the titles and dates of documents in e-mail headings and have recipients acknowledge receipt.
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
Communications Management Plan Contents (continued)

- Frequency of communication
- Escalation procedures for resolving issues
- Revision procedures for updating the communications management plan
- A glossary of common terminology
Distributing Information

- 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?

- Telecommunications throughout Asia were severely disrupted on December 26, 2006, after earthquakes off Taiwan damaged undersea cables, slowing Internet services and hindering financial transactions, particularly in the currency market.

- International telephone traffic was restricted from some countries, and Internet access slowed to a crawl.
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
### Table 10-3. Media Choice Table

**KEY:** 1 = EXCELLENT  
2 = ADEQUATE  
3 = INAPPROPRIATE  

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

*Depends on system functionality*
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.

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!
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.
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.
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 = \( \frac{n(n-1)}{2} \)

where \( n \) is the number of people involved.
Figure 10-2. The Impact of the Number of People on Communications Channels

\[
\text{number of communications channels} = \frac{n(n-1)}{2}
\]

2 people, 1 communications channel

3 people, 3 communications channels

4 people, 6 communications channels, etc.

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Managing Stakeholders

- Project managers must understand and work with various stakeholders
- Need to devise a way to identify and resolve issues
- An expectations management matrix can help clarify expectations
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>MEASURE OF SUCCESS</strong></th>
<th><strong>PRIORITY</strong></th>
<th><strong>EXPECTATIONS</strong></th>
<th><strong>GUIDELINES</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scope</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>The scope statement clearly defines mandatory requirements and optional requirements.</td>
<td>Focus on meeting mandatory requirements before considering optional ones.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>There is no give in the project completion date. Every major deadline must be met, and the schedule is very realistic.</td>
<td>The project sponsor and program manager must be alerted if there are any issues that might affect meeting schedule goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>This project is crucial to the organization. If you can clearly justify the need for more funds, they can be made available.</td>
<td>There are strict rules for project expenditures and escalation procedures. Cost is very important, but it takes a back seat to meeting schedule and then scope goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Quality is important, and the expectation is that we follow our well-established processes for testing this system.</td>
<td>All new personnel are required to complete several in-house courses to make sure they understand our quality processes. All corporate quality standards must be followed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Satisfaction</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Our customer expects us to act professionally, answer questions in a timely manner, and work</td>
<td>All presentations and formal documents provided to the customer must be edited by a tech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROI Projections</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>The business case for this project projected an ROI of 40% within two years after implementation.</td>
<td>Our finance department will work with the customer to measure the ROI. Meeting/exceeding this projection will help us bring in future business with this and other customers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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
Suggestions for Improving Project Communications

- Manage conflicts effectively
- Develop better communication skills
- Run effective meetings
- Use e-mail and other technologies 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

6. **Collaborating**: decision makers incorporate different viewpoints and insights to develop consensus and commitment
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.
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 recent 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
- Build relationships
Using E-Mail, Instant Messaging, and Collaborative Tools Effectively

- Make sure that e-mail, instant messaging, 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, limit the content of e-mails 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

**Project X Description**

**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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task Name</th>
<th>August</th>
<th>September</th>
<th>October</th>
<th>November</th>
<th>December</th>
<th>January</th>
<th>February</th>
<th>March</th>
<th>April</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Start Project</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Main Task 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliverable 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Main Task 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliverable 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Main Task 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliverable 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>End Project</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Table 10-5. 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 to the 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 10-6. Final Project Documentation Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I.</th>
<th>Project description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>II.</td>
<td>Project proposal and backup data (request for proposal, statement of work, proposal correspondence, and so on)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.</td>
<td>Original and revised contract information and client acceptance documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.</td>
<td>Original and revised project plans and schedules (WBS, Gantt charts and network diagrams, cost estimates, communications management plan, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.</td>
<td>Design documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI.</td>
<td>Final project report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII.</td>
<td>Deliverables, as appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII.</td>
<td>Audit reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX.</td>
<td>Lessons-learned reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X.</td>
<td>Copies of all status reports, meeting minutes, change notices, and other written and electronic communications</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 Office Enterprise Project Management (EPM) Solution
There are many software tools to aid in project communications

Today many 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
Chapter Summary

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

- Main processes include:
  - Identify stakeholders
  - Plan communications
  - Distribute information
  - Manage stakeholder expectations
  - Report performance