

## 4.5: Communications Management

Projects require teamwork, and team members must communicate with each other in a variety of ways. The documents they produce must be collected, distributed, and stored in an appropriate manner to assure timely and accurate communication between team members. This process is often assisted by a variety of technologies including computer and smartphone software programs and applications. The advent of the Internet accompanied by various ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies), and the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic by the end of 2019 accelerated the process of digitalization for people, and all organizations including the companies, multinational corporates, non-governmental organizations, governments, and international bodies. Thus, the adoption and spread of ICTs worldwide across organizations and countries increased exponentially. The utilization of global virtual teams in organizations increased to unprecedented levels. 94% of the respondents of CultureWizard's Global Virtual Work Survey indicated that employees want to continue working from home—at least part time<sup>[1]</sup>. More virtual presence has brought about new challenges as detailed in the “Virtual Teams” section in this chapter.

ICTs can facilitate faster and better communication, or they can become a barrier if they are not well understood and applied appropriately. Besides, the project manager and the team should be in ongoing contact with all the stakeholders based on their power and interest levels, and other factors such as influence, involvement, support required, and interdependencies. This necessitates the manager to choose an optimal portfolio of communication technologies and methodologies. Therefore, these issues should be well-thought by the project manager while preparing the project plan and its subcomponent “Project Communications Management Plan”.

### Communication Management Plan

Communications management is about keeping everybody in the loop. The communications planning process concerns defining the types of information we will deliver, who will receive it, the format for communicating it, and the timing of its release and distribution. Hence, it is of high importance to make sure everybody gets the right message at the right time.

As is the case for all knowledge areas (e.g., scope, schedule, cost, resource, risk, communication, stakeholder), the first step is to plan so that we can delineate the guidelines that we should follow during the execution of the project activities, and while we monitor and control them. This provides us a direction based on the information needs of each stakeholder, available organizational assets, and the needs of the project<sup>[2]</sup>. All projects require a sound communication plan, but not all projects will have the same types of communication or the same methods for collecting, analyzing, and distributing the information. The communication plan documents the types of information needs the stakeholders have, when the information should be distributed, how the information will be delivered with which frequency, who will receive it, and the format and technologies we will use to communicate.

First off, we should figure out what kind of communication our stakeholders (including the project team) need so they can make good decisions and they are well-informed. This is called the communications requirements analysis. Our project will produce a lot of information, so we don't want to overwhelm the stakeholders with all of it. Our job is to figure out what they feel is valuable. Therefore, the stakeholder power/interest grid (matrix) and the stakeholder engagement assessment matrix would be very helpful to determine the priorities of each stakeholder, and how we can communicate with each of them. Communicating valuable information doesn't mean we always paint a rosy picture. Communications to stakeholders may consist of either good news or bad news. The point is that we don't want to bury stakeholders in too much information but we do want to give them enough so that they're informed and can make appropriate decisions. ICTs have a major impact on how we keep people in the loop. Therefore, our analysis and the plan should include them.

We should answer the questions below in our communications management plan:

- What are the methods of communicating that we need to consider? Which methods can we choose to transfer information?
  - It can take many forms, such as written reports, conversations, email, formal status reports, meetings, online databases, online schedules, and project websites.
- How should we arrange the timing of the information exchange or need for updates? What is the reporting frequency for each stakeholder according to the expectations and concerns of stakeholders?
  - Based on the role and responsibilities of team members, and the interest and power levels of stakeholders, methods, and frequency should be identified for each stakeholder.
- Who is the person responsible for communicating the information? Who authorizes the release of confidential information? Who receives the information according to their needs, expectations, and concerns?

- Do we need to procure new technology or systems, or are there systems already in place that will work?
  - This is also a part of enterprise environmental factors and organizational process assets to take into consideration while planning any knowledge areas in project management<sup>[3]</sup>.
  - The technologies available to us help plan how we will keep everyone notified of project status and issues.
- What is the experience of our staff with the technology? Are there project team members and stakeholders experienced at using this technology, or should we need to train them?
- How does the project team function? Are they located together or spread out across several locations in a country or the world?
- What are the resources, time, and budget allocated for communication activities?

The answers to these questions should be documented in the communication plan. Keep in mind that all the components of a project management plan are interrelated. A communication plan cannot be prepared independently of other components such as the plans for the scope, schedule, cost, risk, and stakeholders. For example, concerning ICTs, we should consider if the technology we are choosing would work throughout the life of the project or we should upgrade or update it at some point.

The types of information we will communicate typically include project status, project scope statements and updates, project baseline information, risks, action items, performance measures, project acceptance, and so on. We should also consider the language, format, content, and level of detail. The information needs of the stakeholders must be determined as early in the planning phase of the project management life cycle as possible so that as we develop project planning documents, we already know who should receive copies of them and how they should be delivered.

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1. CultureWizard. 2020 Trends in Global Virtual Work: Metamorphosis of the Global Workplace. 2020. <https://www.rw-3.com/virtual-teams-exec-report-2020>↵
  2. PMBOK 6th edition. ↵
  3. Project Management Institute. (2017). A guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK guide) (6th ed.). Project Management Institute. ↵
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