

4.9: Communication Types

The communication management plan should address the needs, expectations, and concerns of the project team and the stakeholders by considering the communication types. Completing a complex project successfully requires good communication among team members. If those team members work in the same building, they can arrange regular meetings, simply stop by each other's office space to get a quick answer, or even discuss a project informally at other places like meeting rooms and even in the kitchen and next to the coffee machine. Many projects are performed by teams that interact primarily through electronic communication and are, therefore, called virtual teams. However, virtual interaction has been exponentially prevalent for many organizations and collocated project teams. To avoid miscommunication that can harm trust and to include team members in a project culture, the project team needs a plan for communicating reliably and in a timely manner. This planning begins with understanding two major categories of communication – synchronous and asynchronous.

Synchronous Communications

If all the parties to the communication are taking part in the exchange at the same time, the communication is synchronous. The following are examples of synchronous communications:

- In-person meetings: This is the traditional meeting method utilized by collocated teams. Some virtual teams may also prefer in-person meetings several times (e.g., kick-off and closing meetings) during the project life cycle to socialize and build trust.
- One-on-one and conference phone (audio) calls: These calls would be effective if there is an urgent need to meet, and participants are not available for video calls.
- Video conferences: These meetings have prevailed with the widespread utilization of virtual teams and the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Online tools such as Skype, Zoom, Google Meet, and WhatsApp are used for video conferences.
- Integrated solutions such as Microsoft Teams: Teams can use synchronous communication tools such as video conferences and instant messaging, and they can share the files with other team members (asynchronous).
- IM (instant messaging): Team members can exchange text or voice messages on computers and mobile devices. They can also have group pages on which more than two members can chat and share documents, pictures, and videos. IM may not be synchronous all the time, and it provides an opportunity for the team members to reply later, and keep the records of the chat logs.

Asynchronous Communications

Getting a team together at the same time can be a challenge—especially if they are spread out across time zones. Many types of communication do not require that the parties are present at the same time. This type of communication is asynchronous. There are several choices of asynchronous communications such as mails and faxes. Recently, asynchronous communication has also been transferred mostly to online communication. In many projects, there is a need to deliver mails and packages to other team members or sub-teams, and stakeholders in different locations. Physical signatures can be still demanded to comply with the legal requirements. However, online tools have been allowing people to sign electronically, which is also legally acceptable (e.g., Adobe Acrobat, DocuSign). Therefore, this provides time and cost-saving opportunities to the project teams. Electronic mail (email) is widely used to coordinate projects and for the communication and collaboration between team members and with stakeholders. Emails have several valuable characteristics for project management. Information can be sent to a list of team members. Messages can be saved to document the process in case of a misunderstanding or miscommunication. Files can be attached and distributed.

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