

1.5.15: Tools for Communicating with Groups

Learning Objectives

- Discuss digital tools for communicating with groups

Technology is rapidly changing the ways we communicate in a variety of contexts, and group communication is no exception. Many organizations use computers and cell phones as a primary way to keep groups connected given their ease of use, low cost, and asynchronous nature. In today's work place, you can use Google Docs, chat online, transfer documents back and forth, and form messages to achieve the group's goals—all without ever having to meet in person. You'll likely find yourself participating in virtual groups with people who have been brought together from a variety of geographical locations.

When groups communicate through email, threads, discussion forums, text messaging, and other asynchronous methods, they lose the ability to provide immediate feedback to other members. Also, using asynchronous communication technologies takes a great deal more time for a group to achieve its goals. In this module, as we think of groups and collaboration, we think more of two-way communication and related tools.

Nevertheless, technology is changing the ways we understand groups and participate in them. We have yet to work out all of the new standards for group participation introduced by technology. Used well, technology opens the door for new avenues of working in groups to achieve goals. Used poorly, technology can add to the many frustrations people often experience working in groups and teams.

Meeting Scheduling

Have you ever watched an email addressed to more than five people rapidly fill your email box? Probably. Imagine the one with the subject line "Can you meet Tuesday at 10? or when?" This message for internal, external or a mix of meeting attendees will rapidly fill everyone's email box and possibly use more attendee time in reading and scheduling the meeting than the meeting may actually take. In Module 9: Communicating through Technology, we discussed a variety of tools available to streamline this interaction including Doodle and Calendly.

Quick Conversations

Groups may or may not be co-located. Throughout the work day, questions come up that need simple responses and may be somewhat flexible in the time the response is needed. These tools may be one-on-one tools or group tools (i.e. text, group text). This software typically provides ways for users to chat in real time, so projects can be completed faster because users don't have to wait for other users to respond by asynchronous means like email. Do check company policy on the use of these tools. There may be issues related to intellectual property, security, and customer relations. Tools that may suit this need are tools such as or similar to the following:

- Slack
- Google Hangouts
- Webex
- MicroSoft Teams

Email

Certainly email remains an excellent tool because large numbers of people may receive the same message. Make sure you check company use of these tools, particularly when sharing sensitive information. Email was discussed further in Module 3: Written Communication.

Conferencing

Conferencing has come a long way from bridged voice calls to expensive video bridges. Now most personal computers, tablets and phones offer users voice, video and text communication. This leads to richer communications through video conferences.

In Module 9: Communicating through Technology, we discussed a variety of tools available to for audio, video, and web conferencing.

Project Management

Project management is no longer only for massive construction projects. Many tracking and coordination skills are used in group communication. These management tools help keep all parties involved in a project on the same page. These tools also reduce the amount of incoming and outgoing communications, since team members have access to the status of each person's work.

MS Project is a project management software product, developed and sold by Microsoft. It is designed to assist a project manager in developing a plan, assigning resources to tasks, tracking progress, managing the budget, and analyzing workloads. The price for this software may set some back, but it is the industry standard.

Here are a few other examples of project management tools. Keep in mind that each tool has its own quirks, and it may take some trial and error to figure out what works best for your team:

- BaseCamp
- Trello
- Clubhouse
- Asana
- Teamwork

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