Reflection Paper

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Abstract

During the course of the nine weeks of study involving project management communication, there were many fundamental and valuable lessons. Communication needs and expectations of the project are defined by the Communication Management Plan. This document also determines methodology and format; when and how communications are initiated; and responsible authority of those communications. (Project Management Institute, 2008) We expanded on this idea thoroughly to incorporate the concept of communication, tools to communicate and improve communication efficiency, challenges and conflict resolution, and ways to identify and troubleshoot communication issues. The Dow and Taylor text (in majority) helped us fold these ideas into the initiating, planning, executing, and monitoring process groups of the project management strategy. We also explored the effects of leadership and management strategies to transfigure poor communication practices into effective communication tools. Some self-exploration was influential on the outcomes of these lessons. The following text addresses the concepts of personality, global communication considerations, and the effect and considerations needed for project success.

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Speaking or writing does not define communication alone. Data is transmitted over a medium, and a person can receive that data, but not until the information is *understood* by both parties will communication have occurred. Communication in project management plays a critical role. The stakeholders of a project will have specific desires that must be considered during decisions and briefings to give them the assurance that their needs are being met. Project managers must convey the status and needs of the project from detailed analysis of the schedule and provide that data in a meaningful and efficient manner for the stakeholders to use. They must also take into consideration the stakeholder point of view and the amount of influence that particular stakeholders may hold on the project. The hierarchy of stakeholders may bring conflict in principle and in practice that must be calculated to bring about the best possible result.

While all of these actions and interactions are taking place, the Project Manager must do his or her best to represent the ethical standards of the Project Management Institute on the two scales of mandated compliance and aspiration goals. The internal compass of the Project Manager must be trustworthy, reliable, efficient, and communicate very effectively to win the confidence of the stakeholders. (Project Management Institute, 2013)

**Personality Effects in Communication**

**Personality of the Lead**

Leaders and managers are two different things, but their skills are not altogether conflictive. Managers are, by definition, knowledgeable on policies and procedures and can influence productivity at the workspace by manipulating schedules, personnel, and day-to-day operations. The operation of a manager is more aligned with the “hard” skills of paperwork shuffling, data handling, resource allocation, and disciplinary guidelines to develop an efficient work center. (Lussier & Achua, 2013)

Leadership involves incorporation of the “soft” skills, which are harder to define, but can be explained as the efficient manner to inspire workers to accomplish their tasking. Leaders can use motivation theory, team-building skills, reinforcement of behavioral learning concepts to influence their workers. The biggest differentiation is that leaders require a larger amount of Emotional Intelligence (EI) to perform effectively. (Lussier & Achua, 2013)

Both leadership skills and management skills are required in varying degrees by project application. Repetitive and straightforward project goals require good management skills. Projects that require innovation and obstacle navigation require good leadership skills. It is common for projects to have periods of management interrupted by the need for leadership skills to overcome conflict and confusion. The ability to be a good leader will motivate the workers to overcome the obstacles more effectively and permit them to continue their managed work more effectively, but without leadership, a project that comes to obstacles will need more outside influence and additional resources to overcome challenges. (Lussier & Achua, 2013)

Leadership skills take lots of time to develop. In some people, the skills are natural, adhering to the “great man philosophy”, but the approaches to develop the skills can be taught using the understanding of several important concepts and forced interaction training.

Personality of the Workers

Motivation is the single largest influence on workers to perform operations. The *modus operandi* for handling motivation is to determine individual needs according to how to reward good behavior (power, recognition, or affiliation), and then utilize a reward system to encourage good behavior. These tools can take time to develop, because everyone’s needs are different, and the rewards may take some resources. It is also very hard to follow through with a developed system. Another thing that may happen with any team is the ability for members to exclude workers. An understanding of in-group and out-group phenomena will allow effective leaders to identify and combat the development of this polarization. Out-group workers will focus more on their social conflict than providing efficient or quality work. (Lussier & Achua, 2013)

In all, team dynamics are needed for project success, especially for members to understand effective communication means that employ professionalism and collaboration efficiency. The ground rules for these communications will need to be set in forward so that conflict can be handled appropriately. One of the many “hats” that a Project Manager will have to wear is for the role of the mediator. Project Managers must understand that conflict is not all bad, but productive conflict only arises from structured and forward-focused communication. Escalation should be avoided, and the understanding of emotions (EI) is imperative in guiding conflict.

Project Managers have the tools of cooperative problem solving, competitive conflict resolution, compromise, accommodation, and avoidance of conflict to handle these interactions. Avoiding is the worst approach, but all of the others can be employed on a case-by-case basis. Over-utilization of any of these approaches can give poor reputation to a leader. It is very important that the activities of conflict resolution be capitalized on for project benefit, and can be documented for future efficiencies in such tools as lessons learned, or documented decision databases. (Dow & Taylor, 2008)

**Communication for Project Success**

In one way, communications success can be measured by the rate at which projects are unsuccessful because of improper communication. According to Dow and Taylor, communication issues (in general) can account for 90% of the failures of projects, in which the rest of failures result from technical definition of requirements and resource complications (2008). In specific, communication issues attribute directly to 14% failure of all projects as measure by ESI International, Inc. (Dow & Taylor, 2008)

The best practice for communication handling is to organize the confusion before it happens. This is done in the Project Master document via the Communication Plan. A well-defined plan to handle communication methods and procedures can be the difference between having a design meeting pass along without incidence, and having a design team, an integration team, and stakeholders escalating voices in emotional conflict during a meeting. Communication does play a role in every project interaction between people. Once this is recognized, and a plan is put to handle these interactions, the next things to do are to execute and monitor communications. (Dow & Taylor, 2008) As with anything in project management, the plan develops the baseline to which all consequent values are measured by.

The plan should incorporate things such as risk, assumptions, and communication responsibilities. If these items are handled appropriately, conflict should be short; risks should be understood and removed from the surprise and emotions of stakeholders; and communication will not occur *post-facto*. Routine communication will set the rhythm of the project, and the cadence can bring confidence between departments. Organizational charts will provide the preferred channels of communication, and will provide Project Managers with the ability to quickly troubleshoot and fix communication inefficiencies. It is not to say that projects that have great communications will not have any problems, it is clear to state that effective communication strategies will give faster resolution to communication problems, and will eliminate surprise from stakeholders.

Stakeholders will measure project success based on three aspects of cost, schedule, and performance. Project Managers must understand this, and provide substantial confidence to the stakeholders that these measures are being met (through Earned Value Management or EVM-based reporting, for example). When the project is in duress, it may take the influence of these stakeholders to rectify the issue. When the help of these powerful professionals is needed, it should already be understood that their influence would cover their own interests in the project to achieve the objectives. (Larson & Gray, 2011)

Cost and Schedule reporting involves the measurement of the current performance against the plan of the performance. EVM will utilize the reporting of Cost Performance Index (CPI) and Schedule Performance Index (SPI), which encapsulates the efforts of the team to remain on budget and schedule (respectively). If a project is eating more resources than was projected, then the Estimate At Completion (EAC) will suffer accordingly. Although these identified problems may be overcome, the stakeholders will formulate their own opinion if it is achievable or not. By communicating the plan and current performance adequately to the stakeholders, they can make informed decisions on to proceed and add resources to a project, or if they should cancel a project. (Larson & Gray, 2011)

Just as EVM formulates a baseline to measure the progress against, the communication plan will identify a baseline that acknowledges issues and complications, and provides probable avenues to avoid or handle these situations. Generally, making the identified parameters of cost, schedule, and performance will constitute success. If the stakeholders did not understand how the bottom line ended up within budget, or what complications were overcome to make the proposed schedule, then credit was not given to the efforts of the team.

**Global Communication Problems and Strategy**

In today’s environment, most large-scale projects will utilize a team that spans across continents. This approach brings several benefits, but can also make several organizational and communication obstacles that need identified and handled appropriately. The use of technology has given this capability to the global marketplace, and without properly taking advantage of these technologies, Project Managers will find that they are trying to do an international job with a national communication concept. This, of course proves to everyone that only through these new technologies are these distanced enterprises made profitable. Given that a company can have continual production using three eight-hour shifts on different continents, it leans on great communication planning to make sure that the handoff of the production between these shifts is effective.

Global Issues

Enterprises will find that international law will provide some barriers to bring people, products, and pursuits together, but communication has the additional barrier of cultural difference. It is not good enough, anymore, to know how to speak a different language. Translations of non-verbal communication, understanding of cultural identity and customs of gender role and negotiation traditions can influence business meetings existentially.

Even just the matter of communication across distance within culture can be hard enough. When Americans in Europe communicate with a home-based team, they must convey ideas effectively and simply enough so that the ideas are conveyed without variance. This handoff of information can be downfall of any project because the next shift can potentially undo all of the work performed by the previous team if they do not understand the work needed to be performed.

Global Strategy

It needs to be understood in the planning, that communication will have to be a deliberate portion of every workday. A beginning of shift and end of shift pass down will be required to let the next team what is expected, and what has been done. These meetings need to be documented, and monitored by designated team leads. The Project Manager must be able to account for how work is being accomplished, and the schedule should reflect the performance at any given shift change. This Daily Progress Report can identify problems, maintain accountability, and track performance. (Dow & Taylor, 2008)

For international communication, it is effective to maintain on-line databases for information exchange and collaboration. Web-ex meetings and SharePoint services can make sure that versions are handled appropriately, and duplicate work is not being performed. A dashboard is one of the newest tools available to a Project Manager to make sure that the project health is reflecting appropriately for the accomplishment of tasks. These on-line communication tools can provide efficient handoffs from workers that just accomplished work to other workers that need to know what was accomplished, and what is expected to complete the task. (Dow & Taylor, 2008)

Real-time reporting software for project management, such as Microsoft Project 2010 will allow workers to communicate their performance and gauge resources and time effectively. This is much more important over a three-shift work enterprise that brings an update three times a day to a schedule. Project Managers must make sure that they can handle all of this information appropriately to avoid misrepresentation on the Gantt chart and cost reporting values. (Microsoft Corporation, 2012)

Cultural differences must be handled up-front in the planning stage. It may be appropriate to designate proper channels that utilize personalities and leadership that understands what cultural interpretations may occur with certain business movements. This spokesperson must have alignment with the project that can only be built with routine and effective communication. It is also very important to have a well-defined organizational communication strategy that can take advantage of departments that need to share resources that may not be available to every shift, or ways to foresee the decisions that can halt production until the proper resources are available. By understanding these challenges, Project Managers can avoid some of these international complexities and establish communication tools that address these issues up-front.

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