WBS 2.2 : Blog Communication Tools and Techniques

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The assignment is to ponder chapters 2 & 3 of the Project Management Communications Bible and answer the following questions.

- What communication techniques have you used with success?
- What new communications tools might you consider using and how would you use them?
- What tips and techniques do you find to be most helpful, in preparing a presentation
- With regard to communication overload, what are the two biggest problem areas in your work environment? And what could you do to mitigate these problems?
- When working as a team, what are some activities, tools and techniques that you can use to your benefit? How could; you best utilize these tools.

To start off the text doesn't identify anything specifically as a "communication tool." The index under tools lists lots of information about communication but still doesn't define what the author would consider "communication tools." Therefor the subject of "communication tools" is subjective with regards to the text. My definition of a communication tool would fall under a mechanism for communications, for example, telephone, email, documents, reports, verbal communication and visual communications. Techniques on the other hand would be strategies to use these types of tools effectively. The book specifically uses the word technique when discussing the "best practice technique" of documenting lessons learned throughout the project instead of waiting until the end. This is a strategy to accumulate the most accurate lessons learned and document them as they happen. Now I have identified what I understand as tools and techniques let's press on with the assignment.

I have used just about every communications tool discussed in the text verbal, written, nonverbal, and electronic, all with varying degrees of success. As an Air Traffic Controller my day is filled with verbal communications, using radio to issue instructions and receive feedback from the pilots. Some of the biggest detractors we have during these communications are radio interference, language barriers, and preconceived reactions to instructions. Radio interference can be normal static from weather phenomena or equipment malfunction or radio congestion because of high levels of use on a frequency. At time a message must be delivered more than once to get through to the receiver. At our airbase we have a contingent of pilots from Singapore stationed there. This causes a language barrier which is complicated by the fact that Air Traffic Control (ATC) has its own jargon outside of normal English. Pilots also have certain phrases which can cause confusion when trying to communicate. Lastly because of the rapid and mostly repetitive nature of the operations receivers, either pilot of controller, often hear what they expect to hear and miss out on what is actually being communicated. Like reading your own paper you miss out on the mistakes because you know what you what the expected communication is. To overcome all of these difficulties a good communications technique is to solicit feedback.

Feedback is the only way to confirm the communication process has taken place. We know the communicator and the receiver are part of the process. If the message is sent and the receiver receives it differently than the communicator intended we have a failure to communicate. There are certain requirements for pilots and controllers to restate the instructions or information given in order to provide feedback. Restating is one of many ways to obtain feedback.

Visually see someone react to instructions is another form of feedback. If someone is told to turn a certain direction or develop a report or build a chart, you know that communication

has taken place with those processes start. You can apply visual communication to feedback with other forms of communication. Depending on the task visual feedback can be immediate or long term. If the feedback will be a long term process then visual feedback is least effective and you will need something else.

That is when status reporting becomes a form of feedback. When a status reports are generated you can see the progression of a long term response to a communicated needs. If the reports show a trend counter to the desired intent you can provide further guidance or corrective action. Often time people see status reports as unnecessary paper work. But they are the best way to provide feedback to management which may be removed from the processes.

Soliciting or providing adequate feedback is a communication technique that improves the communication process by completing the communication. Project Managers and team members alike should use to ensure the accuracy and gauge progression of their communication. Like a sentence without punctuation communication without feedback is incomplete and confusing.

The next part of the assignment was to state a techniques that is most helpful in preparing a presentation. From the text I'd like to discuss two that I think are equally important. The first is "know your audience" followed by, "practice, practice, practice." (Dow &Taylor, 2008)

When developing a presentation how are you going to connect with the audience if you don't know what they need to hear from you? Part of the academic experience is making presentations. Too often we see this as a necessary and put out a slide show with a bunch of words from our latest assignment to fill in the square. In a corporate environment there is a reason for you to be making this communication. Someone is paying a lot of money to make this

happen for a reason. You need to know what that reason is and how to get the communication through to the person or people you are presenting to. If you are presenting to board meeting of senior executives, they will not want to know the finer details of the points you are trying to make; they want to hear how what your doing will affect the bottom line. Whereas if your discussing the same process to a group of engineers they will want to know how you are going to overcome stumbling blocks in the development process to make the project happen. You can see how knowing the audience is critical to not only how your present but the material you present. The how you present falls in line with my next point.

"Practice, Practice, Practice;" (Dow &Taylor, 2008) no matter what the material or audience is you will fail to communicate effectively if you fail to practice your presentation. Remember no matter how much material you present if it's not done in a way that draws the audience in you will not effectively get across all your points. I presenter must appear confident and knowledgeable and willing to answer questions. That doesn't mean you will know them all, but by practicing you can make smooth transition into obtaining information for after the presentation and getting back to the individual. Many people are uncomfortable presenting. Practice can help you feel less anxious. It also allows you to try different techniques or phrases to get your point across. When a presenter hasn't practiced enough the typically rely on reading the slides or notes which can be a huge distraction. One way not be invited back to present at the corporate level is to read your presentation. Which goes back to my first point and why I feel these two are interconnected?

In talking about the next subject, communication overload and the two biggest problem areas in my work environment, and possible mitigation of the problems; for controllers there have been studies and regulatory guidance written to combat information overload. The biggest

part of our job keep aircraft separated and there are lots of rules how to do this. There are altitude separations, lateral separations, separation from airspace, and separation from weather, visual separation rules and non-radar separation rules. With all of these rules and the various ways they apply we have to deal with the information provided by pilots on the type of aircraft, altitudes, speed, and communications limitation so on and so forth. The FAA has tried to reduce information overload by automating much of the information we need. New digital radar displays will indicate airspeed and altitudes on most aircraft and for aircraft on a filed flight plan you can get the aircraft type and destination to also appear on the computer. They figure if they can display the information you need then you will not have to remember it reducing the information accumulation. Writing things down for later use is a good technique for anyone. I find that in my everyday life if I write things down I am essentially doing what the FAA does by allowing me to not have to concentrate on that piece of information until it's needed.

Another process I use to combat information overload is once a task is complete put it aside ant take on the next task. Too often people try to multi-task finding that they get their wires crossed and confuse some of the information. If there is something that needs redressing in a previous task wait for an appropriate time to address it. Another good technique is to be proactive with your projects. Get done what you can as soon as you have time. If you wait until the last minute then everything will become a priority and you will have to deal everything at the same time which will cause information overload. These last two paragraphs have included the problems and the mitigated response so I'll press on to the final subject.

When working with teams all of the subject discussed above with regards to communication are critical. Overcoming communications barriers by soliciting and providing feedback will help to ensure points are communicated accurately. I would add that one has to be

willing to allow others the opportunity to communicate their concerns as well. I have found that when working with teams sometimes you have to leave your ego at the door and allow others to do things their way. I had written a portion of a project when during the review process was change dramatically. At first I was ill at ease but realized that what was written was not better or worse than what I had written. So I decided not to fight the changes. It's ok to let someone have their way if it pushes the project forward with less conflict. At the same time when things were changed that were inaccurate, I responded with the information to correct the correction.

Also being proactive is a huge part of successful teams. Everyone can't wait for everyone else or nothing will get done. Team member need to be on top of posts, responses and assignments and provide feedback on estimated completion times. People are counting on us and we need to help reduce their information overload by completing our part in a timely manner.

Reference

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