Effective Strategies for Managing Communication in a Project

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ABSTRACT

This paper evaluates the effectiveness of using strategic approaches for managing communication in project, especially when the communication is required between top-level managers and lower-level employees. The gap of communication could be resolved by implementing strategic approaches of communication management that are thorough to include all personnel in the organization. To overcome any commination problem, the author uses the most effective strategies for managing communication in a project. The author believes that the most effective strategies are four, which are PMI communication strategy, six main steps of communication strategy, understanding the direction of communication strategy, and choosing the right communication channel strategy.

KEYWORDS

Communication Management, Communication Strategy, Project Management

OBJECTIVE AND ORIGINALITY

The objective of this study is to examine most effective strategies for managing communication in a project. Our approach to managing communication is distinguished where we address four communication strategies that have comprehensive guidelines for a project team to implement smoothly.

CONTRIBUTIONS

This study will allow project team to communicate effectively in both directions upward and downward and at different level of communications using virous types of channels and at right level of information which will lead to the project success.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The field of this study is purely about communication management and its effective strategies. We organize our search to be based on publications that have a focus on communication management in a project-based environment. We selected six publications that presents critical factors to enhance

communication such human performance, corporate communications, stakeholder management and project management.

LITERATURE

According to Neves & Eisenberger (2012), the literature of communication management has stated that communication management is key factor for the firm's success. Furthermore, Ramsing (2009) claimed that in recent years most of project managers have different educational background but with limited background in communication management. Communication management is defined as the skills required to move information which include speaking, listening, writing, and procedures of critical thinking with good knowledge and constructive feedback (ORourke, 2013). Good communication management in terms of accuracy, openness, and frequency of information about polices are positively linked to employee performance (Neves & Eisenberger, 2012). In contrast, poor communication can lead the firm to not meeting the organizational expectation as well as customer satisfaction (Ramsing, 2009).

Another perspective of communication management is the concept of choosing the best communication channels and implementing them during the project lifecycle. Researchers have established the theory of media richness which is related to the different communication media such as memos, phone and email and to which level the organization uses amount of data that could be communicated (Byrne & LeMay, 2006). Furthermore, PMI (2017) considers communication management as a knowledge area in project management.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study provides four effective strategies that support this significant knowledge area of communication management.

Effective Strategies 1: PMI (2017) Communication Strategy

An effective strategy for communication can be following the processes of communication management that are provided by Project Management Institute. PMI (2017) provides three main processes for communication management which are explained in Table 1.

For the plan communication process, a project manager must state all the communication approaches that will be used during the project. Stakeholders may be internal or external to the company. So, the project manager must identify them and share the communication plan with them to ensure that all the elements of the communication plan are understood prior to the start of the project. In the second process, all stakeholders must be included to communicate, collect and share data with others and make sure the messages that being communicated are well understood. For the last step, the project team must keep watching and monitoring the communication activities during the project lifecycle.

Table 1. Communication management processes

#	Process	Definition
1	Plan communication	Finding the best approach for planning communication that are based on stakeholders wants and requirements
2	Manage communication	It focuses in how to collect, store, retrieve, distribute and create the right project information that aligned with initial communication plan
3	Control communication	The main duties in this process are to monitor and control communication throughout the project lifecycle and to ensure that the stakeholder needs are met

Going back to our main focus, we need to use these processes to enhance communication management between upper-level and lower-level employee. To do that successfully, we need to use some tools and techniques that lead to better communication. According to PMI (2017), the best communication tools are using communication requirement analysis, communication technology, communication models, communication methods, meetings, information management system, reporting and expert judgment.

To successfully implement the communication processes, we need to use these effective tools and techniques. PMI (2017) provides details in this regard, and they are explained in Table 2.

Lower-level employees could use organizational charts and stakeholder information to communicate important information to the right stakeholder. Also, they need to select the right communication channels that are being addressed in the communication plan. Based on the communication channel selected, they need to have background information from the status report and the progress of the project. On the other hand, upper-level employees could use the same communication channel to provide constructive feedback to the lower-level employees. Upper-level employees who have good experience in communication management must perform the consultant activities. In addition. Upper-level employees must be qualified to use communication models and methods to ensure that the lower-level employees are in the right track in term of communication.

Effective Strategies 2: Six Main Steps of Communication Strategy

According to ORourke (2013), a strategic communication must involve six steps. Firstly, the message must be aligned with the company vision and goals. Secondly, attract the attention of the intended audience. Thirdly, explain the message to a level that the audience accept and understand. Fourthly, motivate the audience to accept and understand. Fifthly, protect audience form contrary messages. The last step is to manage the expectation of audience. These steps must be applicable to both directions of communication between the upper and lower level employees.

Table 2. Communication tools and techniques

Tools and Techniques Used in Communication Management		
#	Tools and Techniques	Description
1	Communication Requirements Analysis	The required sources are organizational charts, stakeholder information and logistics information
2	Communication Technology	Determining the urgency, format and frequency of the information are key factors to formulate the required technology. The required technology should be available, easy to use and secure for sensitive data.
3	Communication Models	Basic model must define the sender, receiver, message and medium of communication.
4	Communication Methods	It could be interactive communication, push communication or pull communication
5	Meetings	It includes casual discussions or formal meetings
6	Information Management Systems	It includes hard-copy document, electronic communications and electronic tools.
7	Performance Reporting	It includes status reports, progress of project as well as forecasts for future action
8	Expert Judgment	It includes consultant activities to ensure the communicated messages are understood.

Effective Strategies 3: Understanding the Direction of Communication Strategy

To overcome the communication issues between upper-level and lower-level employees, we need to emphasize on the directions of the communication. There should be upward communication where lower-level employees can communicate the internal issues for the firm to the upper-level employees and downward communication where upper-level employees can communicate new policies and feedback to lower-level employees (Neves & Eisenberger, 2012).

After understanding the two directions of communication both upward and downward communications, we need to shed the light to the concept of interpersonal communication. The best definition of interpersonal communication is the personal interaction that takes place between upper-level managers and lower-level employees in a project which could be in the form of formal or non-formal communication (Ramsing, 2009). Some project teams include employees from different department where those could deal with different line managers (Ramsing, 2009). We could see that the authority and power may not play role in the communication. So, we need to utilize effectively the interpersonal communication in its two forms the formal and the non-formal communication.

To eliminate the authority and interpersonal communication barriers, we need to break down the internal communication to its basic dimensions. Welch & Jackson (2007) provides four dimensions for internal communication which are internal line manager communication such as appraisal discussions; internal team communication such as task discussions; internal project communication such as project issues; and internal corporate communication such as corporate issues. By understanding the directions of communication and interpersonal communication, we could eliminate the issues between upper-level managers and lower-level employees in a project.

Effective Strategies 4: Choosing the Right Communication Channel Strategy

A study conducted by Byrne & LeMay (2006) that explains the effectiveness of various type of communication channel which are summarized as follows:

- **High-level communication channels:** Face-to-face meetings, departmental meetings and phone conversations are the best communication channel to drive the employee satisfaction about the information received for their job.
- **Low-level communication channels:** Quarterly meetings, written memos, the employee newsletter and notices are weak communication channel that reduce the level of the employee satisfaction regarding the information received by these channels.
- **Moderate-level communication channels:** Email and intranet are moderate communication channels that are between the high and low level employees which will support the employee satisfaction to an acceptable level.

Upper-level employees must use the high-level communication channels, especially with the new lower-level employees. Low and moderate level communication channel could be used with lower-level employees who has experience in the projects that are the firm runs. On the other side, low-level employees must use high-level communication channels with upper level employees as much as possible to ensure the messages are being well understood.

CONCLUSION

Running a successful project needs various effective strategies for managing communication between upper and lower level employees. The four strategies we provided complement each other to give guidelines for project managers to manage communication. These strategies include key aspects of

communication in terms of personnel, information, models, channels, reports, directions, authority, information management system, expert judgment, and stakeholders. The provided strategies must be used at the beginning of project and continue using them till the end of the project. Updating the communication management plan throughout the project lifecycle will play a key role toward the success of the project.

NOTICE OF REPUBLICATION

This article was retracted and replaced on January 17, 2024 due to unethical conduct. The article has been corrected to display the correct author (Murtadha Albuali) and reflect the author's original work.

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