

COMMUNICATION: A KEY DRIVER FOR PROJECT SUCCESS

How to raise project standards and reduce project failures
through effective project communication



Communication: A key driver for project success

KEY FACTS:

- PEOPLE NEED COMMUNICATION - THEY NEED TO KNOW WHY THEY ARE DOING SOMETHING, WHAT THE BENEFITS ARE AND HOW THIS RELATES TO DELIVERY.
- YOUR PROJECT TEAM NEED TO HEAR ON A REGULAR BASIS, WHERE THE PROJECT IS UP TO, WHAT IS THE STATUS, WHATS ARE THE WINS, YOU NEED THEM TO SEE AND UNDERSTAND EVERY SUCCESSFUL DELIVERABLE AND EVERY COMPLETED STEP ALONG THE WAY.
- REMAINING IN CONTROL OF PROJECT DELIVERY IS AS MUCH ABOUT RETAINING EXECUTIVE AUTHORITY AS IT IS AROUND EFFECTIVE PLANNING, COMMUNICATION IS KEY TO RETAINING THIS RELATIONSHIP.

How to raise project standards and reduce project failures through effective project communication

We all know how important communication is in relation to project management. At least we've all heard how important it is. But what does good communication actually mean? What should we communicate? With who? When and how often?

Almost as challenging as what to communicate, is how to communicate. Changes in the way people manage their lives brought about by social media is having an impact in the workplace and projects are at the forefront of this change. It is no longer acceptable for individuals to rely on emails and self-contained information sources, it's now the age of knowledge sharing and collaborative innovation, organizations need to bridge the gap between social technology and process requirement utilizing social technology such as timelines, newsfeeds and collaboration tools that change the way you think about communicate with project stakeholders and team members.

Adopting any kind of formal solution and methodology to control your business starts this change. For many utilizing SharePoint or a knowledge management solution is the start point – one version of the truth and no more emailing large documents around.

For many the next step is automating the mechanics of project management, from integrating execution management – assigning tasks and capturing progress and expenditure, through to standardising the more complex processes of resource capability planning, budgeting and forecasting, planning, scheduling, and risk and issues management.

What's left is the softer stuff – informing and engaging the team; getting buy in from the wider business; keeping the board up to speed and on side; managing the noise and making sure people have relevant and up to date information about what is really going on. This is where effective communication really pays – and can have a significant impact on the effectiveness of your project delivery.

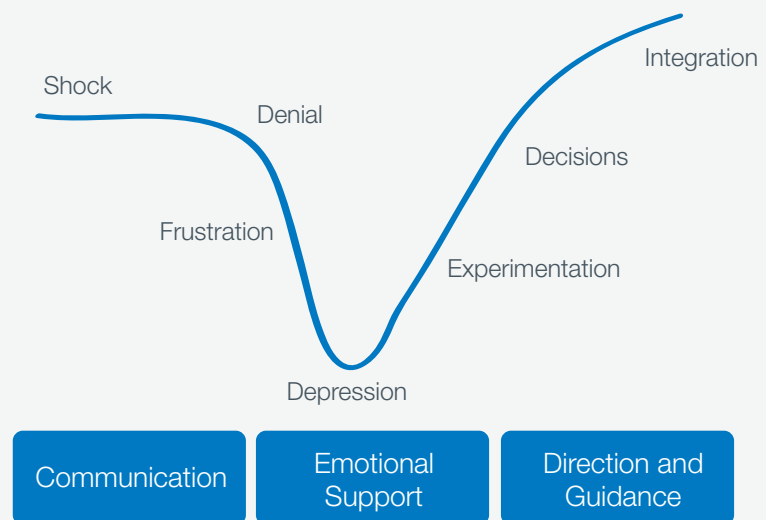
Using communication to minimize the impact of change

Projects are always a challenge. Usually they are created to enact or deliver some kind of change, a transformation from one state to another. In some instances this might be focused around a single system or process, in other instances it may be universal and have far reaching effects on everyone in the business.

KEY FACTS:

- WHERE COMMUNICATION IS POOR, OR SPORADIC, IT IS HUMAN NATURE TO FILL THE VOID WITH CONJECTURE, RUMOR AND OPINION.

One thing is for certain, you won't please all of the people all of the time and at every stage in a project lifecycle you will have people at different stages of the acceptance curve.



The challenge is that whilst the second half of the curve is all about providing solid direction and supporting the team on their acceptance, the first half, the fall into helplessness, requires strong and clear communication. With different members of the team passing along the curve at different rates (and starting at different times) communication is key throughout the entire lifecycle of the project. This is all about visibility – making sure everyone can see what's happening and understands why.

People need communication – they need to know why they are doing something, what the benefits will be to them and how we are doing in terms of delivery. They need to hear, on a regular basis, where the project is up to and you need them to see and understand every win, every successful deliverable and every completed step along the way.

Where communication is poor, or sporadic, it is human nature to fill the void with conjecture, rumor and opinion. This is what we call “noise” on a project. The challenge here is that often senior management will make decisions based as much on volume as content. Where communication on a project is poor and noise is allowed to build up and amplify, even with projects that are actually delivering perfectly well, executives have been known to swap out project managers or even cancel projects because the general noise level got too loud.

KEY FACTS:

- UNDERSTANDING WHAT TO COMMUNICATE TO WHOM, AT WHAT LEVEL OF DETAIL AND AT WHICH POINT IN THE PROCESS CAN BE CHALLENGING.

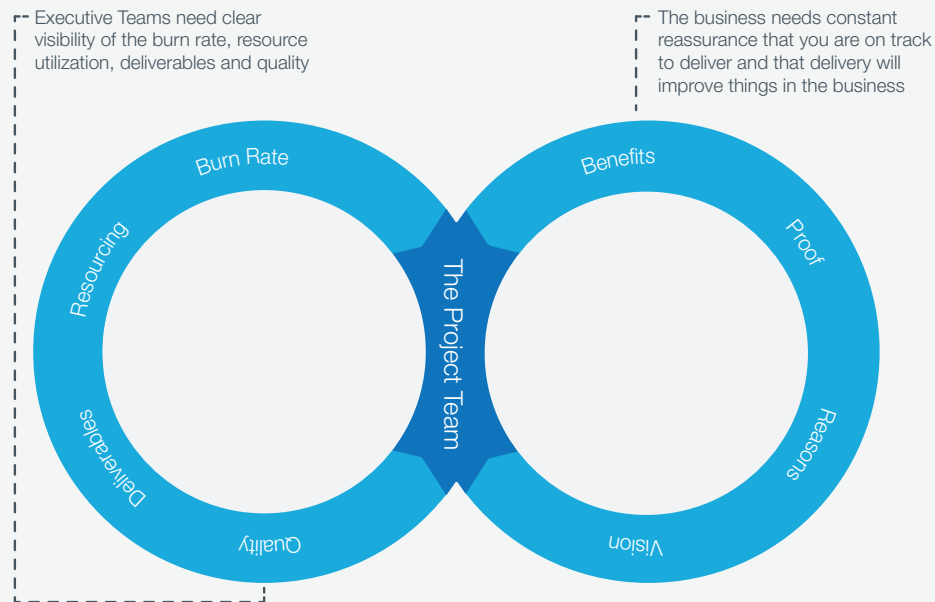
In order to avoid this noise building up, you need to constantly re-enforce why the changes are necessary; demonstrate delivery against the plan; prove the value in the changes; show the future benefits the business will receive by going through the pain now. Most importantly you need to constantly re-paint the vision. Adding color, contrast, depth and detail as the picture unfolds.

Where you have issues, face them openly, address any impact on the business case and then restate the cost, effort and benefit analysis so that it is clear that in spite of the expected challenges, this is something worthwhile, something vital for the future success of the business.

Building an effective communication strategy

Understanding what to communicate to whom, at what level of detail and at which point in the process can be challenging. It helps to have an overarching communication strategy running with clear deliverables and focused messaging.

Effective Stakeholder Communication



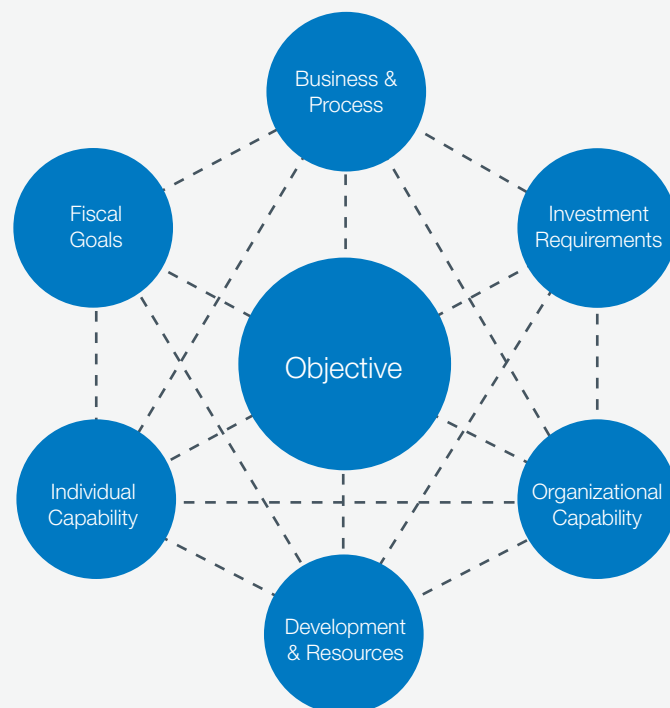
When it comes to breaking down the messaging for the relevant audiences, its often worthwhile looking at some of the more traditional strategic management tools. Tools like balanced scorecard were originally designed to look at performance management and strategy implementation. The communication elements of these

KEY FACTS:

- BY ENSURING THAT EVERYONE UNDERSTANDS THE RULES OF THE GAME; YOU GET THE OPPORTUNITY TO CHEERLEAD THE WIDER BUSINESS INTO POSITIVELY SUPPORTING AND ENCOURAGING THE PROJECT TEAM TO DELIVER SOMETHING THAT THE ORGANIZATION CAN SEE CLEAR VALUE IN.

tools are as relevant for project delivery as they are for generating buy in to changes in strategy.

The balanced scorecard breaks a strategy down into what it means for key groups within the business, traditionally from an investor, financial, process and people development perspective. At Keyedin™ Solutions we broaden this out into a 7 Step model which breaks down objectives into deliverables – following this process, you can also break down project objectives into relevant, easily understood, focused communications.



The language used is also important. Different audiences need the information expressed in different ways. The 7 step process allows you to define the message, the language and the nuances for communicating the vision and reasons to the wider business.

This ensures that right from the outset you have buy in because people understand why the project is worthwhile; you get to share the goals and values that your project will deliver. By ensuring that everyone understands the rules of the game; you get the opportunity to cheerlead the wider business into positively supporting

KEY FACTS:

- WITH A SOLID PLAN, AND A DEFINED PROCESS FOR COMMUNICATION, GETTING YOUR MESSAGE OUT AND STAYING IN CONTROL IS NOT ROCKET SCIENCE.

and encouraging the project team to deliver something that the organization can see clear value in.

Alongside the continual re-enforcement of why the business is doing this, you need to constantly inform the project community of any improvements, delivery successes and issues which have been resolved. This is all about transparency – building trust and buy in to the project, as well as driving the continual improvement of project management processes.

To do this you need to have a very clear understanding of the status of all of the key project deliverables. You will need to demonstrate that you are utilizing the resources allocated to the project effectively and that the impact on the business is within the tolerances agreed at the outset. You need to be able to show that your cash burn is in line with achieved deliveries and that the overall quality of what has been delivered is as expected.

All of this builds to a compelling and positive communication strategy, tailored to the relevant audiences and providing all with the clarity, comfort and visibility they need to stay engaged and bought into the change program.

Retaining control through executive buy in

The final piece in the communication jigsaw is all about Control. Remaining in control is as much about retaining the authority from the executive as it is directing the staff – and often this is harder to achieve than you might think. Many people blame lack of executive support for the failure of projects but how many times is that due to frustration or a lack of trust between the project manager and the executive involved.

Maintaining this trust is about making sure your stakeholders have the information they need, when they need it, in a way that they can draw on and use should they have reason to do so. The very best way to make sure this is the case is through technology. Executive dashboards fed directly from the Project Portfolio Management solution ensure executives have real time visibility into project and program status . Done well, this ensures that your stakeholders have up to the minute access to the key management metrics around the project (people utilization, spend, delivery and benefits realization). It can also ensure that they are able to defend the project – and your performance – should they be challenged unexpectedly.

Conclusions

Communication is one of the most difficult parts of a project to get right – but at its simplest it's about telling your story, in the right language, at the right amount of detail, to the right audience. Access to information is obviously key – but it is what you do with this information, and how well you tell the story, that really makes the difference.

With a solid plan, and a defined process for communication, getting your message out and staying in control is not rocket science. By utilizing Project Portfolio Management software to streamline and standardize project progress reporting you can quickly become proficient in the art of project communication, ensuring visibility, transparency and control are the driving principles behind your approach to project management.



About KeyedIn™ Solutions

KeyedIn is an agile Cloud-based software company focused on delivering powerful results in critical areas like project management and custom manufacturing to specialized vertical markets. Solutions include project portfolio management (PPM), professional services automation (PSA) and enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems that are offered in several editions to support the needs of both small-medium size businesses and large multi-national corporations. And KeyedIn Flex, the company's rapid application development platform, allows custom applications to be developed faster and more affordably than ever before.

With the needs of today's businesses in mind, KeyedIn offers a true SaaS model for a more flexible, scalable and affordable means to solve complex problems and deliver business results faster.

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