PLANNING PROJECT COMMUNICATIONS: HOW IT WORKS?

OLENA LYS
Abstract

With an increasing complexity of projects, communication becomes a critical factor for prosperous project management. Effective communication is commonly recognized as a key for projects success. Careful communications planning and development of profound Project communications management plan are claimed to be necessary to ensure high quality of project communication.

This study aimed to investigate the project communications planning process from theoretical perspective and answer the question, how is this process performed in practice. The literature research was done to build a theoretical framework for the communications planning process. Then the web-based self-administrated survey was held to explore project communications management planning experience of practicing Project managers. The research data was analyzed and compared to the literature findings.

The analysis showed that majority of Project managers agree that planning project communications is inevitable for the project success and mostly follow the theoretical framework. The research revealed main differences in theoretical and practically used approaches to the communications planning process. It also showed that part of the managers do not plan communications for their projects.

Therefore, Project managers should give more attention to the communications planning to insure effective communication for their projects; and project communications planning process needs to be investigated deeper, for example in the context of project type, to develop more businesslike approach.

Key words: project communications, communication management, planning project communications, Communications management plan.
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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Project Communication is a critical core competency to all organizations, which develops a bridge between the project team, other stakeholders and project goals, strategies and actions. These components should be shared and understood by all the stakeholders to eliminate potential communications-related risks (PMI, 2013). Successful projects require successful communication (PMP).

Effective Project Communication Management is considered to be a key success factor by both authors and managers. The Forbes 2011 Insights Strategic Initiatives Study revealed that around ninety percent of CEOs recognize communications as crucially important to their strategic initiatives achievement (Forbes, 2011). As reported by PMI’s 2013 Pulse of the Profession, 55 percent of project managers admit that effective communication to all stakeholders is the critical factor in project management (PMI, 2013).

Obikunle asserts that “communication is the soul of project management“, and that the “vacuum created by the lack of communication is quickly filled by rumors and erroneous interpretation” (Obikunle, 2001). The project management surveys corroborate this view. They indicate that up to one of each five projects fail to meet its original goals due to reasons, related to communication problems (PMI, 2013; William Dow, 2008). Some authors argue that in reality ineffective communication is the cause of fail of at least ninety percent of unsuccessful projects (William Dow, 2008). Even more, Baker claims that poor communication accounts for 95 percent of all project problems (Baker, 2007).

With the increasing of projects’ size and complexity, the number of stakeholders, needed information, enlarges rapidly, thus sophisticating project communication. Therefore, the last has to be organized with the time spent on thorough planning. Making an early investment in stakeholder analysis and communication planning will help the Project manager to have a solid approach for managing the information between these parts (Wills, 2010). One of the keys to the project success is providing the team members and all other stakeholders with the comprehensive Communications management plan (Dinsmore, 2014). Planning communications is essential for the Project manager to handle communication-related issues. It also gives the stakeholders’ understanding, which is vital for effective communications (Shankar, 2010).

The PMI reports that high performing organizations tend to use standardized practices three times more often, than those with weak projects outcomes. Project communications management plan is one of the standard practices, though adjusted to each project. The report also shows that high performing organizations create formal Communication plan for almost seventy percent of their projects, on the contrary to forty percent by low performers (PMI, 2013). These findings support the statement of communications planning importance.
1.2. Problem statement

The essential role of effective communication for project success is undeniable. However, a lot of organizations do not endeavor much to improvement project communication. The research shows that only one quarter of organizations can be defined as highly-effective communicators (PMI, 2013). Hence, there is a huge room for perfection.

Different contributors investigate, what does build up project communication's effectiveness. Most of the researches on the topic concentrate on project communications execution, delivery of communications and Project manager's communication skills, as components of communications effectiveness. But the stepping stone of communications management – planning – remains greatly uncovered.

Each author states that Communications management plan has to be developed early in the project. However, there is no much information about how this plan is developed in practice and how important is it for communication effectiveness. Consequently, this paper aims to investigate the process of planning project communications in action.

1.3. Research question

The study seeks to address the following questions:

How is the process of planning project communications management performed in practice?

1.4. Research goals

The primary goal of the study is to produce literature in specified research area and can be broken down as follows:

- Conduct an extensive literature research and explore theoretical background, methods and tools for effective project communications management planning.
- Carry out an empirical research on how project communications planning is performed by different Project managers.
- Compare results from empirical study to theoretical background and suggest possible areas of improvement project communications management planning.

1.5. Research scope

The study is exploring the process of planning project communications.

In Scope

Following aspects are in scope of the study:

Aim of the research: investigation of current state and suggestions based on theoretical background.

Area of Project Management: communication management, planning process.
Out of Scope

Following aspects are out of scope of the study:

Determination of efficiency and effectiveness of existing and suggested practices, detection of causation relations for the current state, forecasting.

Other Project management areas, except communication management.

Other Communication management processes, than communications planning, such as communications management and control.

2. Research method

This section will identify and explain the choice of methodology used for the research. The aim of the study is to find out the possible areas of improvement of project communications planning process. For this purpose, first, the grounded review of the existing literature on the topic was done. This allowed generalizing offered theoretical methodologies of project communications management, based on previous studies and experiences.

Then the descriptive both qualitative and quantitative survey research was conducted. The survey was held in the form of online questionnaire with Project managers as target audience. This research results gave the broad picture on how the planning project communications process is organized in practice.

Finally, the analysis of the empirical findings against the literature review was conducted and recommendations on potential areas of improvement on planning communications process were developed.

2.1. Research design

This study introduces a fact-finding investigation – descriptive research, known as "what is" research (Best & Kahn, 2000). This type of investigation is used to answer the "How" and "What" research questions. This enquiry gathers descriptive information about current state of project communications planning process in Project managers’ practices, which may be used for formation of more complex studies. In descriptive interpretation the factual relationships, opinions, processes and effects are shown. However, the causes of current situation cannot be defined (Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad, 2010).

According to the research goals the deductive approach was chosen for this study. In this approach the research strategy is developed to test the theoretical findings using actual data. The data is generalized from the general to the specific. Deductive enquiry assumes early literature review to define ideas and theories to be tested further (Saunders, et al., 2012).

Literature review provided the author with an information, what is already known about planning project communications and theoretical suggestions, how this process should be performed. The results of literature review developed a basis for further research and framework for comparison the real-world practices with suggested in the literature (Cresswell, 2007). At this phase secondary literature sources, such as books, articles, reports, were used.
The **survey** was chosen as a research strategy. Survey is a common tool for answering the "How" and "What" research questions for descriptive study with deductive approach (Saunders, et al., 2012). This research strategy aims at gathering facts, opinions, attitudes and other descriptive information. Survey allowed gathering relatively standardized information from the sample of our targeted population (Hackett, 1981).

The web-based self-administered **questionnaire** was used as a technique to perform the survey research. The questionnaire was developed on the online surveys platform Google Forms and the link to the online questionnaire was sent to the respondents.

This technique has distinctive advantages: convenience for the responder (can be filled in at any time and place) increases the return rate and quality of answers; larger sample can be investigated in the same time period, than using other techniques; no interviewer's bias may have place. However, problems, which may influence the research results, can occur: respondents interpret the questions differently from the investigator; hard to perform validity check, if the answers are fair; unanswered questions (Saunders, et al., 2012; Hackett, 1981).

For the purpose of the study the **mixed method** research, which combines both qualitative and quantitative aspects, was chosen. Quantitative part allowed collecting information in terms of quantity – average scores, percentage of managers using some practices et cetera. Qualitative approach, which is the common method for the descriptive study, gave narrative descriptions of the communications planning process by the managers' meanings (Saunders, et al., 2012; S. K. Mangal, 2013). Therefore, most of the questions in the form were close-ended with an opportunity to add a comment or individual answer. Some open-ended questions were also included in the form.

**2.2. Data collection**

The targeted audience for the survey to answer the questions about the current project communications planning practices was Project managers from different companies, areas of business, with different levels of seniority and years of experience.

The **non-probability** sampling was chosen to use for the study. The choice was made, considering the following reasons: there is no available list of all targeted population for the study; the inquiry does not have a goal to generalize the results to all population; the budget and access to the sample representatives are limited (Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad, 2010).

The research sample was developed using the **snow-ball sampling** method. In this method the sample is built up as a network of connected people, who fit the research criteria, starting from the representatives in the investigator's network. The sample, created using this approach, is not considered as representative to generalize the findings, as usually it evolves subjective choice of the participants and hard to reach large samples (Saunders, et al., 2012). However, the snow-ball sample in case of this study can provide clear picture of actual processes. The sample was developed using connections in professional network linkedin.com with the minimum subjective influence on the respondents’ choice.
The satisfactory non-probability sample size for heterogeneous population is 25-30 participants. However, in order to draw analogies and comparison the larger sample size is needed (Saunders, et al., 2012).

2.3. Research quality

Yin claims that the quality of research can be assessed by its reliability and validity. The last has three aspects: internal, external and construct (Yin, 2009).

Research reliability defines to which extend the finding are consistent and stable over time. Reliability of the study is guaranteed in two ways: research methodology, data collection and analysis techniques are described in this paper in detail, ensuring an opportunity to replicate the analogic study; all the responses are recorded accurately to ensure providing the real picture. Reliability of quantitative part of research should be tested statistically, however sample of the current research is too small to drive conclusions from statistical methods (Phelan & Wren, 2006).

Research validity generally refers to the study or measures accuracy. Internal validity depends on the quality and scientific adequacy of the research design and evaluates to which extend the causal relationships revealed are consistent (S. K. Mangal, 2013). As this study does not aim to detect any causal relationships, this measure is not applicable for it.

External validity assesses if the research findings can be generalized to make conclusions about the entire population. The level of external validity depends on representativeness and accuracy of the sample (Trochim, 2006). Taking into account, that a non-probability sampling method was used for the study, its external validity can be described as low. However, the accuracy of the sample is high, as only targeted audience – currently practicing Project managers – has taken part in the survey.
**Construct validity** shows to which extend the measurement questions and variables in fact measure the existence of the construct, which was planned to measure (Saunders, et al., 2012). All the questions in the survey for this study were developed based on the literature review. Each question addresses a specific data to contribute to answering the research question. Moreover, all the respondents have answered the survey voluntary and only if interested in the fair research results. Therefore, this investigation can be claimed to have construct validity.

### 2.4. Data analysis

Mixed quantitative and qualitative research method was used for this paper. Therefore, the research data was analyzed using different approaches for the qualitative and quantitative data.

**Quantitative data analysis**

Part of the research data was received in the **categorical** data type. Values of this type are not measured in numbers, but can be categorized based on the variable’s characteristics or positioned in the ranking order. Both descriptive and ranked categorical data was presented in the research. Descriptive data refers to those which cannot be expressed numerically, but shows the frequency of occurrence of specific category (for instance, the use of specific communication tools). Ranked data shows the cases’ relative positions within the data set (for example, the importance of communications planning for the project success). Part of data was presented in the results in the **numerical** interval discreet data type – when data can be compared only for a particular variable and can take the value among a finite range (for instance, the percentage of project executed with the use of Communication plan) (Berman Brown, 2008).

**Exploratory data analysis** was one of the approaches used to analyze received data for this descriptive study. This method implies using diagrams to investigate and understand the data (Tukey, 1977). Aspects covered in the analysis depend on the research question and goals, as well as research theoretical background. Specific values, relationships between variables, frequency and proportion of occurrence of specific categories were described in this study (Sparrow, 1989). Bar charts were used to show the number of occurrence of categories or values; pie charts were used to describe the proportion of occurrence; cross tabulation – to compare relationship between two variables (Saunders, et al., 2012).

Descriptive statistics approach was used to describe the data numerically. A general perception of the values was displayed in the study through the **central tendency** measuring. The most frequently occurring value (mode) was used to show the central tendencies in this research, because this is the only measure, which can explain the descriptive data with the reasonable accuracy (Saunders, et al., 2012).

**Qualitative data analysis**

The survey contained open-ended questions which provided the research with qualitative data. Qualitative analysis allows to develop explanatory theories or to test predefined theories or patterns. This research was based on the theoretical framework and aimed to test it: to reveal its practicality and real issues from the empirical findings. This means, that deductive approaches to the qualitative data analysis were used in the study.
The **generic approach** for qualitative data analysis was used in this paper. This method implies the following steps (Saunders, et al., 2012):

- categorizing the data using the specific codes;
- data integration to the applicable categories and codes;
- categories analysis to reveal patterns and relations;
- rising propositions on the patterns and relations;
- drawing an inference.

Therefore, the qualitative data was categorized based on the theme (specific question) with the use of concept driven (grounded on the theoretical patterns) and data driven (drawn from the empirical data) codes. The key themes, patterns and relationships between categories were explored. Then these themes and patterns were analyzed following the theoretical background. The comparison was made between the theoretically suggested practices and those used by respondents. New propositions and uncovered in the theory practices were drawn from the data. In the end, the conclusions on the empirical findings analysis and predefined theory were made.

Overall the data analysis was designed respectively the research question and goals. The data analysis was structured to test the theoretical findings and reveal undefined practical patterns. The analysis allowed: to define common points and differences between theoretical suggestions and real practices; to develop recommendations on how to improve the practice of planning project communications; and to formulate suggestions on further studies.

### 3. Literature research – Communications Management Planning

Project Management Institute identifies **Project Communications Management** as a series of processes essential for planning, generating, collection, allocation, storage, retrieval, management, control, monitoring, and the final disposition of project information well-timed and in respective way (PMBOK, 2013). Communication is considered as one of the most important skills a project manager has. Project managers spend almost all the time during the project communicating (PMP, n.d.).

Kerzner defines Communications management as a process of supervising information transfer in all directions (upward, downward, horizontally or diagonally), which may be formal or informal. He also states that project performance directly depends on Project manager’s competence in managing communications (Kerzner, 2009).

Authors claim that “Effective communication creates a bridge between diverse stakeholders involved in a project, connecting various cultural and organizational backgrounds, different levels of expertise, and various perspectives and interests in the project execution or outcome” (PMBOK, 2013).

Effective project communications suppose that the right information is transformed to the proper addressee cost-effectively at the appropriate time. These prerequisites are imperative for the project success (Kerzner, 2009). Efficient project communications mean delivering only needed information (PMBOK, 2013).
**Project communication** is understood as an exchange of information in order to build coherence between project stakeholders (Nangoli, 2012). The term “project communication” stands for all aspects of communication in a project: both external and internal communication, written and interpersonal, scheduled and non-scheduled communication (Ramsing, 2009).

According to the PMBOK, **Project Communications Management processes** are:

- Plan Communications Management – elaborate a plan of project information flow according to the stakeholders’ needs, considering organizational assets;
- Manage Communications – generate, collect, allocate, transfer, store and retrieve project information based on the plan;
- Control Communications – monitor and control project communications to ensure their effectiveness and efficiency (PMBOK, 2013).

![Project Communications Management Overview](image)

The scope of this paper is concentrated on the first process – Communications Management Planning. **Planning project communications** is a process of development the methodology for project communications and creation of Communications management plan. The later documents the most effective and efficient approach for information flow throughout the project (PMBOK, 2013). Communications planning process centers on identifying the stakeholders, what information they need and when, and then planning how to fulfill their communication needs (PMP).

PMBOK recognizes the great importance of good communications planning. The authors claim that improper planning may cause problems as message transfer delay, communicating information to the wrong stakeholders, misunderstanding or misconception on the message
Communications planning has to be performed on the very early stage of the Planning phase (Heldman, 2013). This approach helps to allocate necessary resources for Communications management (PMBOK, 2013).

According to the PMBOK, the inputs to the Plan Communications Management process are: Organizational process assets, Enterprise environmental factors, Stakeholder register and Project management plan (PMBOK, 2013).

When developing Project communication plan, Project manager has to consider Organizational process assets – company’s standardized practices and knowledge bases. These assets may include templates, company policies, processes, procedures, schedules, risks data, lessons learned, historical information et cetera. Organizational process assets also contain information about company specific communications requirements, such as technologies accessible, approved media, security policies and so on (PMBOK, 2013). Some companies establish standards for communication tools, such as communication plans, status reports, information transfer timing et cetera. Project managers have to know about existing standards and develop Communication plan according to company’s process assets (William Dow, 2008).

Enterprise environmental factors should also be taken into account for effective communications planning. These factors comprise organizational structure, corporate culture, available resources, market conditions, established communication networks, project management information system (PMIS – automated systems and tools to serve project management practices) (PMBOK, 2013). PMIS is worth careful analysis in planning communications. It shows Project manager existing opportunities for information generation and distribution, such as scheduling and resourcing tools, databases, web interfaces to other online systems and others (PMBOK, 2013).

When developing Project communications plan Project manager has to answer the following questions (Anon., 2006; Dow, 2013):

**Who** needs the information?

**What** type of project information do they need?

**How** the information will be communicated?

**When** do they need it? How frequently?

**Why** do they need this information?

**How** do you know your plan is working?

Answer for question one Project manager can find in a Stakeholder register. To answer questions two – five the stakeholders’ communication needs and requirements have to be gathered. Based on these requirements the best communication practices have to be defined and involved in the project communications management. To answer sixth question the communications performance measures have to be established.
3.1. Who needs the information - Stakeholder register

The first and very significant step in planning project communications process is **identification of stakeholders** and their communication needs and requirements. Project manager has to identify all individuals, companies or organizations which might be influenced by or can affect the project execution and outcomes. Stakeholders may be involved in the project directly or indirectly, have passive or active role, and it is important to know the role of each stakeholder (Heldman, 2013; Kerzner, 2009).

Stakeholders’ identification might be challenging for complex projects, when Project manager deals with a lot of stakeholders in different countries and functional areas, on various management levels and from diverse cultures (Kerzner, 2009). Stakeholder identification is done by the Project manager with the project team. Better performance of this process may need support from the senior management, project sponsor or functional departments (Heldman, 2013).

The next step in communications planning is **stakeholder analysis**. The Project manager needs to analyze all identified stakeholders by their authority, interest in the project, possible influence on the project outcomes and other factors. Stakeholders’ needs for project information and demands for data type, frequency et cetera has to be defined too (Heldman, 2013). All the information about the stakeholders is gathered in the **Stakeholder register** (PMBOK, 2013).

The typical questions to ask for stakeholders’ analysis are (Kerzner, 2009):

- Who are powerful and who are not?
- Who will have or require direct or indirect involvement?
- Who has the power to kill the project?
- What is the urgency of the deliverables?
- Who may require more or less information than others?

To identify the way to communicate with each stakeholder the **Stakeholders mapping** tool is used. Stakeholders map is a grid with marked place for each stakeholder based on their characteristics.

According to PMBOK there are four categories of stakeholders depending on their power and level of interest in the project. This approach is shown on the Figure 3. When considering stakeholders’ power, the Project manager has to take into account their both formal and informal authority (Sharma, 2010). Some authors suggest comparing stakeholders by their influence (level of stakeholder’s involvement) and impact (capability to deliver a preferred change). The same four types of stakeholders are result of this perspective (Figure 3) (Sharma, 2010).

Shown classification defines how the Project manager should manage each stakeholder. The proposed **managing techniques** are (PMBOK, 2013; Kerzner & Belack, 2010; Kerzner, 2009; Sharma, 2010):

- Manage closely: high-power, interested people or influencing stakeholders with high level of impact. These stakeholders can affect the project success or failure greatly. The project manager has to concentrate maximum effort to fulfill these stakeholders’ communication needs.
● Keep satisfied: high-power, less interested people or influencing stakeholders with low level of impact. These stakeholders have a huge affection on the project flow too. The Project manager should make some effort to satisfy their needs. However, delivered information has to be not too much detailed.

● Keep informed: people with limited power but with a keen interest in the project or not influencing stakeholders with high level of impact. This group can act as a prevention problems system and may assist in technical issues.

● Monitor only: people with limited power and may not be interested in the project or not influencing stakeholders with low level of impact. The Project manager should provide them with some information but not too much detailed.

Project managers have to concentrate their efforts on communicating with the key stakeholders – more powerful and interested in the project. However, the stakeholder’s role can change rapidly throughout the project life cycle. Therefore, it is important to manage carefully all the stakeholders. This also means that Stakeholders register is a living document and has to be reviewed regularly (Kerzner, 2009).

Another model for Stakeholders assessment was suggested by Mitchell. It is based on evaluating stakeholders by three attributes:

- Power: when “one social actor, A, can get another social actor, B, to do something that B would not have otherwise done” (Ronald K. Mitchell, 1997).

- Legitimacy: when actions of a stakeholder are proper, suitable, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of standards, values, definitions.

- Urgency: the degree to which stakeholder demands instant consideration.

The way to manage stakeholders depends on their silence. Salience is a degree of priority to the stakeholder needs. Stakeholders with the low silence possess only one attribute. Moderately silent stakeholders – two attributes. Highly silent stakeholders combine all three attributes. The stakeholders map for this approach is shown on the Figure 4.

Depending on the possession of the mentioned attributes, the following types of stakeholders are defined (Ronald K. Mitchell, 1997):
- **Dormant stakeholders** (possess one attribute – power). Aim to use power to influence on the project, but without other attributes cannot use it. They have little or no interface with the project. However, the Project manager should be aware of such stakeholders, as they may obtain a second attribute.

- **Discretionary stakeholders** (possess one attribute - legitimacy). Without power and urgency, they cannot force Project manager to an active relationship, but the manager may decide to do so.

![Figure 4 Stakeholders' analysis map by Mitchell (Ronald K. Mitchell, 1997)](image)

- **Demanding stakeholders** (possess one attribute - urgency). They have urgent claims but have neither power nor legitimacy to fulfill them.

- **Expectant Stakeholders** – two-attribute moderate silence stakeholders. Play more active role in the project, increasing Project manager’s responsiveness to their needs.

- **Dominant stakeholders** (two attributes – power and legitimacy). Have certain impact on the project, as have ability to act on their claims due to possessed attributes. This group should receive much attention from the Project manager.

- **Dependent stakeholders** (two attributes – urgency and legitimacy). Depend on somebody’s power to get done their claim; are managed with the protection of other stakeholders.

- **Dangerous stakeholders** (two attributes – urgency and power). Are coercive and can be dangerous for the project. Examples include strikes, employee sabotage et cetera.

- **Definitive Stakeholders** (all three attributes – power, legitimacy, and urgency). They have high silence. The Project manager has to give priority to Definitive stakeholders. Any of the Expectant stakeholder may become a Definitive if possesses the third attribute.

Important aspect to consider for stakeholders’ analysis is their **levels of Risk tolerance** – readiness to take certain level of risks. Each stakeholder has different Risk tolerance level, what may be a reason for communication problems. Stakeholders with high Risk tolerance level
should receive high-level information and less frequently, than other. Stakeholders with a low Risk tolerance level need very detailed project information very often. The Project manager has to evaluate stakeholders’ Risk tolerance level on the first meeting by having a talk about the project risks. Stakeholder’s Risk tolerance level can vary for different project areas (William Dow, 2008).

It is vital to realize that stakeholders have different expectations from the project. Some of them may consider project success only from financial aspect, when others aim for achieving planned outcomes for any costs. The Project manager should also remember that not all stakeholders want the project to succeed, even if they seem to be supportive (Kerzner, 2009).

For effective Communications management it is of great importance to recognize stakeholders’ communication requirements. PMBOK® Guide suggests the following sources of information to determine these needs:

- Company organizational chart;
- Stakeholders accountability relations;
- All functional departments and divisions involved in the project;
- Internal organizational needs;
- External communication needs from the media, government, or industry groups.

The most reliable and specific source of information about stakeholders’ communication requirements are meetings or personal interviews. During the face-to-face conversation Project manager has an opportunity to ask directly about stakeholder’s project information needs, desired frequency of data delivery, preferred communications media and other possible claims (William Dow, 2008).

Before conducting the interview, the project manager has to find out if he or she is authorized or has the status to interface with the specific stakeholder. In some cases the project sponsor should negotiate with stakeholders, who possess higher status than the Project manager (Heldman, 2013).

**3.2. What type of project information do they need**

Based on the stakeholders needs and requirements, Project manager defines, which project information should be delivered to the specific stakeholder. As it was stated before, project communications include communication of all relevant project information. It means that all the types of information transfer should be considered on this stage. These are formal and informal communication lines, internal and external communication, and both written and verbal communication.

Project information is transferred with the use of project communication tools. These tools include certain type of information, needed by the stakeholder. For example, Project schedule as a communication tool delivers to the specific stakeholders’ information about project work activities timeline. Other example is Daily report, which transfers to the chosen stakeholders, usually team members, the daily snapshot of the project activities.
Communications management plan is the most important communication tool, which is developed to plan future project communications and to communicate to all stakeholders how project information will be distributed. However, there are a lot of other tools, use of which enhance communication effectiveness. These communication tools are used during the project to communicate different project information, for instance, Project status reports, Project meetings minutes, Dashboard, Earned value analysis performance and more. Choice of the tools depends on the project and stakeholders’ communication needs and requirements.

Dow and Taylor, authors of Project Management Communications Bible, suggested the checklist of recommended communication tools. They are classified according to the knowledge areas in Project management. Using these communication tools should be planned in advance and included in the Communications management plan. This list is shown hereinafter (William Dow, 2008). Not all of these tools are highly recommended to use and are critical for all projects, they are highlighted in Italics in the Table 1.

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<tr>
<th>Knowledge Area</th>
<th>Communication tools</th>
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<td>Communication Management</td>
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<td>Dashboard Report</td>
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<td>Stop Light Report</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Work Package</td>
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<td>Cost Management</td>
<td>Budget Spreadsheet</td>
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<td>Cost Estimate Report</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Estimating tool</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Earned Value Analysis Performance</td>
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<td>Human Resource Management</td>
<td>Critical Chain</td>
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<td>Histogram</td>
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<td>Human Resource Plan</td>
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<td>Resource Leveling tool</td>
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<td>Responsibility Matrix</td>
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<tr>
<td>Integration Management</td>
<td>Project Charter</td>
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<td>Project Kickoff Meeting</td>
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<td>Project Management Plan</td>
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<td>Project Meeting Minutes</td>
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<td>Project Status Meetings</td>
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<td>Project Organization</td>
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<td>Chart Project Proposal</td>
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<td>Project Status Report</td>
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<td>Team Charter</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Team Lead's Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procurement Management</td>
<td>Document Control System</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Final Report</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Formal Acceptance</td>
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<td>Document</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lessons Learned Document</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Phase Closeout</td>
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<td></td>
<td>User Acceptance Document</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Documents</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality Management</td>
<td>Comprehensive Test Plan</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Control Chart</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Delphi Method</td>
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<td>Design Specifications</td>
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<td>Flow Chart</td>
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<td>Quality Management Plan</td>
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<td>Quality Metrics</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Scatter Charts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Risk Management</td>
<td>Decision Tree Diagram</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Expected Monetary Value</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Issue List</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Risk Management Plan</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Risk Matrix tool</td>
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<td>Risk Modeling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Recommended Communication Tools
3.3. How the information will be communicated

The next aspect to consider for project communication planning is **communications technology**. Project manager has to define the information transfer method, which matches best to stakeholders’ needs. Kay Roman suggests that communication method often have a greater influence on the person than the information was sent (Roman, 2007).

To define appropriate communication vehicles for each information transfer, project team has first to identify present available methods. Second, new possible communication methods should be brainstormed. Organizational process assets and stakeholders register information has to be considered. Then Project manager has to match each message to the most favorable vehicle (Roman, 2007).

There are several **questions to consider** when determining which vehicle to use (Roman, 2007; Campbell, 2002):

- Which method will ensure that the message reaches the stakeholder?
- Which vehicle will increase the chance that the message will be received and understood?
- How much information will be included and how detailed will it be?
- Which method is most appropriate for the specific message?
- Which vehicle does the stakeholder prefer?
- What is the purpose of communication?

The most frequent **communication purposes** are: instruction – inform or teach something; inspiration – motivate to proceed in a definite way; advocating – persuading somebody in certain position; stimulation – encourage for a dispute (Campbell, 2002).

To make a communication effective, the optimal relation between **written and oral** type of information should be followed. Usually people remember 10% what they read, 20% – what they hear, 30% – what they see, and 60% all together. Thus, effective communication includes more than one delivery method (Campbell, 2002). Using graphic aids increase chance for understanding the information. It was identified by the study, that information with the use of visual aids is 43% more persuasive, than just textual (D. R. Vogel, 1986).
Standard communication vehicles include: publications, email, ad-hoc or regularly scheduled meetings at different level, reports, websites, dashboards, and others. Description of the most common communication methods are shown in the Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verbal communications</th>
<th>Face-to-face communication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Project status meetings** | Provides regular status updates and reviews of the project. Limit attendance to those who need to be there. Have a clear agenda and distribute action minutes  
**Suggested Stakeholders:** Project team members, executive steering team members, sponsors |
| + Deliver project status information  
+ Enable lots of people to express issues and opinions.  
+ Allow to discuss and resolve topics/issues in great detail | |
| **Team meetings** | Daily meetings where project team works together with a common objective and reach decisions informally by general agreement  
**Suggested Stakeholders:** Project team members  
**Think about:** Make the best possible use of this time. Uphold meeting discipline |
| + Can make communication personal and relevant to the team involved  
+ Opportunity for discussion, feedback, questioning and ideas  
+ Can help build understanding and involvement | - Success depends on leader’s skills  
- Time commitment for both manager and audience  
- Beware of content overload; other channels are more effective for information delivery  
- Some people just don’t feel comfortable offering their opinions in public |
| **Walk-about** | Involves a hands-on face-to-face approach with the project teams  
**Suggested Stakeholders:** Project team members |
| + Good for delivering bad news  
+ Fits to get feedback  
+ Builds trust and rapport | - Discussions can be later forgotten or misinterpreted |
| **Presentations** | Combining verbal and written communication  
**Suggested Stakeholders:** Project team members, executive steering team members, sponsors, other interested stakeholders |
| + Great for presenting complex status reports to all sorts of audiences  
+ Allow effective use of graphics  
+ Can have a lasting positive impression on the audience, particularly if done professionally | - Require considerable planning and skill  
- Time-consuming in production, require attendance, and can be expensive  
- Poorly presented material can negatively impact on an otherwise successful project |
| **Site visits** | **Suggested Stakeholders:** Senior level management, project sponsor, Project manager  
**Think about:** Giving leaders a good brief on site issues before they visit. Tracking issues raised and reporting back on actions |
| + Show that leaders are listening and want to see what the real issues are  
+ Keep leaders in touch with the real issues  
+ Promote dialogue and understanding  
+ Great way to see things in action  
+ Give a great impression of the tone and productivity of the team  
+ Allow to discuss lots of topics and issues in detail | - Leaders will not experience the real issues if treated as "royal visitors"  
- May do more harm than good if leaders show by what they say that they are out of touch  
- Time-consuming for senior leaders to visit multiple sites  
- You can be perceived as nosy or disruptive  
- Discussions can be later forgotten or misinterpreted  
- You have to keep the discussions focused so you do not waste everyone’s time |
| **Project road show/Events** | Provides project information to stakeholders or users and allows for feedback into the project.  
**Suggested Stakeholders:** Stakeholders outside the day-to-day implementation, end users of the project results  
**Think about:** Involve staff in setting the agenda and format, in event itself, as hosts or facilitators. Use interactive technologies to maximize audience involvement |
| + Opportunity for key people to reach mass audiences face-to-face  
+ Flexible and responsive  
+ Can include Q&A sessions, break-out groups and involve people | - Can be one way "tell" sessions  
- Agenda set by center may not be what the audience wants  
- May be expensive  
- Time consuming for organizers, presenters and |
### Distant Verbal Communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Video</th>
<th>Suggested Stakeholders:</th>
<th>Think about:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+ Can be creative and entertaining</td>
<td>Depend on the video, usually end users and other stakeholders outside the project/organization.</td>
<td>Use as part of a briefing session to stimulate debate. Use &quot;real people&quot; to talk about their experiences, not just senior executives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Shows real people talking about their experiences</td>
<td>- Potentially expensive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ The camera never lies – can show proof or progress</td>
<td>- Not interactive on its own</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Makes people and places accessible for a mass audience</td>
<td>- Can be seen as glossy corporate propaganda</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Consistent, controlled message</td>
<td>- Talking heads alone are rarely engaging</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Can be difficult for mobile workforce</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Telephone/Video conferences</th>
<th>Suggested Stakeholders:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+ Good for focused, short communications which need a personal touch</td>
<td>Project team members, project resources, vendors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Good for communications that should not be put into the written project record.</td>
<td>- Some people are just plain hard to reach, and telephone tag can last for days</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Allow you to personally reach people in remote locations at relatively low cost</td>
<td>- Telephone calls can be disruptive to the recipient if not expected in advance.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voicemail</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+ Helpful for remote workers</td>
<td>- People will hang up if the message is too long</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Opportunity to hear about issues from senior leaders</td>
<td>- Long messages can be garbled, deleted, or lost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Great for short messages that are not personal or sensitive in nature</td>
<td>- People don’t always pick up their messages on a regular basis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Allows for quick contact of those on remote sites</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Written

| E-mail                        | Allows project teams to communicate text, audio, and video files between the team members. |
|------------------------------|Use for routine and day-to-day messages or broad messages to a large audience |
| Suggested Stakeholders: | Project team members, project resources, general messages to all stakeholders |
| Think about: | State the message subject. Keep it short and simple. Limit the number of messages |
| + Can reach mass audiences fast | - Impersonal and open to misinterpretation |
| + Cost effective and simple to use | - Can result quickly in information overload |
| + Consistent and controlled message | - Cannot tell if messages have been read |
| + Reaches the recipient directly | - Does not prioritize messages |
| + Good for information, awareness or instruction | - Cannot generate dialogue or discussion |
| + The recipient can answer the message when he chooses | |

| Instant Messaging            | Allows team members to communicate real-time |
|------------------------------|Suggested Stakeholders: | |
| + Good for reaching remote workers | Project team members, executive team members | |
| + Good for crisis and quick status communication | | |
| + Can be used to direct people to further sources of information | - Will annoy people very quickly if overused | |

| Short notes                  | - Can be overlooked |
|------------------------------| - Limited to short, clear messages |
| + Great for saying thanks and giving kudos | - Work best only when people are in the same location |
| + Quick, simple, friendly, cheap | |
| + You can handwrite them yourself | |

| Knowledge Repository         | Houses all of the project documentation including meeting minutes, issues logs, risk management plans |
|------------------------------|Suggested Stakeholders: | |
| + Constant access to the project information | Project team members | |

| Paper records                | + Good for communicating procedures and updates, |
|------------------------------| - Can be easily misunderstood, particularly if message is |
**Table 2 Most common communication methods** (Melcrum, n.d.; Roman, 2007; William Dow, 2008)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication Method</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intranet, Internet boards, Project Websites et cetera</td>
<td>Formalizes communications status, progress, highlights, and objectives</td>
<td>+ Provide a permanent written record</td>
<td>- Hard to distribute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Suggested Stakeholders:</strong> All stakeholders</td>
<td><strong>Think about:</strong> Including &quot;killer content&quot; to draw people in (expenses forms, classified ads and processes people need to do their jobs)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+ Fast and consistent</td>
<td>+ Possibilities are endless, can be entertaining</td>
<td>- Not everyone may have access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+ Good for information store, reference and raising awareness</td>
<td>+ Info shares and bulletin boards good for involvement and discussion</td>
<td>- Relies on people seeking out information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+ Web stats show who is reading</td>
<td>A project dashboard provides stakeholders with a high-level visual view of the status of the project; enable to quickly look at the visuals and know how the project is proceeding relative to time, budget, and scope.</td>
<td>- People may not have time to read it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notice boards/ Dashboard</td>
<td><strong>Think about:</strong> A &quot;display until&quot; date on posters. Post in prominent places</td>
<td>+ Visible and may catch people's eye when too time pressured to read anything else</td>
<td>- May not be read</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Usually no owner – how often do you see out-of-date posters?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Lose their impact if over-used by every project in the company</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To contribute to the company’s knowledge base and improve communications performance for next projects, producing **Lessons learned** information should be planned. For this purpose the Lessons learned meetings should be scheduled. Meetings involve team members and other stakeholders, directly involved in the project. Meetings have to be conducted at least at the end of each project phase (Heldman, 2013).

However, Dow and Taylor suggest that lessons learned information should be created constantly during the project life cycle. One technique is to include lessons learned in every project status meeting agenda. At these meetings all the team members are present and can provide Project manager with fresh information about what went right and what went wrong during last week (William Dow, 2008).

### 3.4. When do they need it

Another important aspect to consider for effective communications planning is communications **timelines and frequency**. Message delivery time depends on stakeholders’ requirements and company process assets. Communication frequency and quantity needs depend on the project size and complexity (Roman, 2007). One of the problems in communications management is information overload – too much e-mails, too detailed information in reports, too much meetings et cetera (William Dow, 2008).

After Project manager has defined the time for formal information transfer, he or she has to establish a **stable rhythm** of communication. This means that project planned info, such as status reports, will be sent on the same day, at the same time. Such practice will build trustworthy and reliable relationships between the stakeholder and the Project manager (William Dow, 2008).
Efficient communications mean delivering only needed information (PMBOK, 2013). Thus, Project manager should plan messages and their frequency according to the necessary and sufficient condition.

Campbell determined four rules for communication, which might help in planning project communications time frame:

- Rule of Frequency – people remember information they hear more often;
- Rule of Primacy – people remember concept they hear or see first during the communication;
- Rule of Recency – people remember message they hear or see last during the communication;
- Rule of Emotion – people remember heartwarming or impressive idea (Campbell, 2002).

3.5. How do you know the plan is working

Although there are no suggested standard practices for communications measure in PMBOK, some authors insist on essence of measuring communications to ensure their effectiveness (Anon., 2006).

First step in measuring communications process is to define what it means for the communication to be successful. Performance indicators and evaluation measures for each communication, if possible, in the Communication management plan should be determined.

To establish measurable communication goals Project manager may use the following questions: What does this communication need to accomplish? What people should do when/after they receive the message? Examples may include meeting attendance goal or desired response rate (Siemens).

There are two main communications measuring tools:

- **Direct feedback**
  Regular feedback is a key for effective communication. Project manager has to plan obtaining feedback from as much communication activities as possible (Santarcangelo, 2012). For example, schedule questions and answers sessions after key meetings or ask to answer important e-mails and messages.

- **Surveys**
  Convey surveys, included questions about quality of project communications. Surveys target audience is the project team members and other stakeholders, involved in the project, mostly internal. These surveys should be scheduled regularly, at least once a quarter or before the Communications management plan review. Planning communication effectiveness survey after key milestone events in the project is also recommended (SnapComms). Results of the first survey will serve as baseline to compare next results and identify progress or failure in improving communications (Santarcangelo, 2012).
While each survey should be specific to the project, there is an aspect which is suggested for all surveys – audience perception. This aspect includes: per cent of the received messages remembered; type of the messages remembered; which messages seem to be appropriate/consistent/clear/reliable; which messages were understood right; is the purpose of communication of each message clear (SnapComms).

3.6. How the communication is done – communication model

The same message, delivered in the same conditions, will cause different reaction and from each separate person. This happens due to the communication model features. Generally agreed communication model is a sender-receiver model, based on Shannon and Weaver communication model. According to it, communication is a process with the following elements: sender, encoding, message, channel, noise, decoding, receiver, feedback. Sender-receiver model draws its attention to the effectiveness of communications (U.S. Office of Technology Assessment, 1990).

![Sender-receiver communication model](Mosaic, n.d.)

- Sender – a person or group who wants to communicate to the receiver some idea;
- Encode – to transform the sender’s idea into a form which can be understood by the receiver;
- Message – already encoded information, which is sent;
- Channel – the method used to communicate the message;
- Noise – different barriers which interfere the message to be understood properly;
- Decode – to translate the message by the receiver into his thoughts;
- Receiver – the message recipient;
- Feedback – reverse process for the feedback-message from the receiver (PMP, n.d.; Mosaic, n.d.).
The original idea may undergo changes on each step of the described process. Reasons for the receiver to understand delivered information differently from the original idea are: communication barriers, channel noises and other factors. The most common influencing barriers are (Kerzner, 2009):

- Perception barriers – recognizing the same message differently because of educational, behavioral or expert level;
- Personality and interests – relationships with other people, concern about message’s subject;
- Attitudes, preconceptions, emotions affect person’s ability to interpret the message;
- Receiver hears what he wants to hear – when the person is doing the same work too long that he is not listening anymore;
- Ignoring nonverbal signals.

Effectiveness of the communication depends on much more various factors, shown in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sender - Encode</th>
<th>Message</th>
<th>Decode - Receiver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication goals</td>
<td>Elements</td>
<td>Communication skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Attitudes, emotions, self-interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes, emotions, self-interest</td>
<td>Content</td>
<td>Personality and interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality and interests</td>
<td>Language (technical, ambiguous vocabulary)</td>
<td>Assumptions about sender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions (about receivers)</td>
<td>Verbal/written</td>
<td>Existing relationship with sender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existing relationships with receivers</td>
<td>Seeing</td>
<td>Evaluative tendency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs</td>
<td>Hearing</td>
<td>Preconceived ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>Touching</td>
<td>Lack of responsive feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social system, position, status</td>
<td>Smelling</td>
<td>Selective listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Environmental noise</td>
<td>Sender credibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal sensitivity</td>
<td></td>
<td>Needs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 Factors influencing communication effectiveness (Narula, 2006; Kerzner, 2009)

Project manager has to plan how to present the information in a way the receiver is able to understand. Here are a few tricks to **send the message effectively**:

- make the information clear, complete and concise (Heldman, 2013);
- use the words with precise meaning (Kerzner, 2009);
- send the same message a couple of time in a different format;
- use more than one learning style (visual, auditory, reading-writing, tactical), for example include both text and graphics to written communication;
- be familiar with the receiver’s cultural and personal peculiarities (William Dow, 2008).

A communication is complete when the **feedback loop** is finished. Feedback is necessary to ensure the sender that the message was gotten by the receiver and to explain, how it was understood. However, it does not mean that receiver has to agree on the idea included in the
message (Mosaic). Project manager has to plan communications in both directions: sending message and receiving feedback. For example, to allot time for a talk to major stakeholders each time after key communication, or to ask specifying questions after conversation with a team member. Feedback also explains if the communication was successful, if it was not – gives the opportunity to improve it (Campbell, 2002).

Project manager should plan time to conduct face to face communications with each team member, key customer and other stakeholders involved in the project. These sessions have to be launched as early as possible. They can be limited in time, but regular, for example, weekly. Holding such meetings will eliminate some communication barriers and help Project manager to resolve possible worries. Face to face sessions will build trust and rapport, improve individual and group communication (William Dow, 2008).

3.7. Developing Communications management plan

Based on the gathered stakeholders’ communication needs a Communication requirements matrix should be built. This chart presents who needs which information, how frequently, and who is generating this message. Stakeholders are grouped by their role in the project and communication claims (William Dow, 2008). The example of Communication requirements matrix is shown on the Table 4. The Communication requirements matrix has to be approved in the beginning of the project. This will ensure stakeholders that their needs for project data will be satisfied.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team Member/Tool</th>
<th>Project Manager</th>
<th>Stakeholder (Internal)</th>
<th>Stakeholder (External)</th>
<th>Owner</th>
<th>Estimator/Estimating Team</th>
<th>Financial and Reporting/Estimator System(s)</th>
<th>Medium</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project Manager</td>
<td></td>
<td>Weekly status updates, monthly stakeholder meeting</td>
<td>Weekly status updates, monthly stakeholder meeting</td>
<td>Red status for project, add dates, add budget information</td>
<td></td>
<td>Electronic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholder (Internal)</td>
<td>Feedback, Issues/ Concerns</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Verbal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholder (External)</td>
<td>Issues/ Concerns</td>
<td>Feedback, issues, concerns</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Document and verbal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>Issues/ Concerns</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Document</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimator/Estimating Team</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Document</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial and Reporting/Estimator System(s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Electronic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 Communication requirements matrix (William Dow, 2008)

Another useful tool suggested by Dow and Taylor is Role report matrix. This table contains information, which reports have to be transferred to each project role and how often.
This chart helps to control project reports flow to all the stakeholders. Role report matrix is shown on the Table 5.

The matrixes mentioned above serve as a supporting point for creating a Project communications matrix. A communications matrix is a core tool for managing project communications. This chart shows all the project communications flow and is included into Communications Management Plan. It displays who will receive which type of information, how often, with what purpose and using which media, who develops this information and what are deliverables from each transfer (Wright, 2012). The following table shows a sample of a basic communications matrix (PMP, n.d.).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CEO/CFO</td>
<td>Addy Crown</td>
<td>Status/Cost Report</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Variance Report</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>Maria Kupalova</td>
<td>Media Report</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Resource Utilization Reports</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality Control Manager</td>
<td>Per Lundgren</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Engineer</td>
<td>Ostin Timberlen</td>
<td></td>
<td>Status Report, Cost Report</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreman</td>
<td>Mark Twins</td>
<td>Look Ahead or Activity Report</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 Role report matrix (William Dow, 2008)

The common communications planning tool, proposed by the PMBOK, is a meeting. There are project-related meetings, involving some stakeholders. At such meetings Project manager can gather communication needs and other necessary information about stakeholders. Project manager also uses these meetings to get approved by stakeholders created communication tools and Communication management plan (PMBOK, 2013; William Dow, 2008).

Specific communication planning meeting should be established for the project group. Before conducting this meeting Project manager have accumulated necessary information, such as stakeholders’ communication needs and requirements, available organizational assets and company environmental factors, communications management lessons learned et cetera. At the meeting the communication requirements matrix and the people report matrix are developed. Communication tools, timelines and information sources and responsible persons are reconciled.
Other method which can help to make communications planning effective is **lessons learned**, stored from the previous company’s projects. Project manager should work through this knowledge base before creating communication plan. If the Project manager, who has led previous similar projects, is available, Project manager is advised to interview him or her to determine practice-based information (Heldman, 2013).

Based on the meeting results Project manager is able to complete **Communications management plan**. This is the central document in project communications management, which contains information, which describes in detail all the project information flow. When the plan is created, it has to be approved. An accepted plan should be distributed to all team members, upper management, customers, and other interested parties (William Dow, 2008).

Communications management plan is a living document and has to be reviewed systematically (quarterly) during the project life cycle or when major changes in the project occur, and changed if needed to ensure adequate communication (PMBOK, 2013; Roman, 2006).

According to the PMBOK® Guide, **Communications management plan** should contain the following information:

- Project stakeholders’ communication requirements;
- Information to be delivered, its format and detail level;
- Purpose of communicating this information;
- Timing and frequency of delivering information;
- List of people responsible for data distribution (with positions and backup names);
- List of people responsible to authorize confidential information delivery (with positions and backup names);
- List of people and groups who receive project information;
- Methods of transfer for each piece of information;
- Resources assigned for communication execution;
- Escalation process for certain issues;
- Process of updating and changing the communications plan;
- Project information flowchart, list of available reports et cetera;
- Glossary of common terms;
- Communication legislation, technological or organizational constraints, if applicable.

During the project life cycle **unplanned report request** can appear. Project manager has to plan in advance, how to fulfill unplanned claims. The following questions Project manager needs to ask (William Dow, 2008):

- What information should be included in the report?
- Is there another report which contains similar information?
- What is the objective of receiving this data?
- Who is the addressee of the report?
- How soon the report is needed?
What is the time frame for receiving the report? 
- Is there resources allocated for developing this report?

Having these questions answered before producing an unplanned report of any type will save Project manager time and resources and ensure that the request author will receive needed info (William Dow, 2008).

“Is that documented?” – a constant question Project manager should answer himself (Heldman, 2013). All the project information should be documented in a defined way. Then the project data, such as plans, schedules, reports, issues log, meetings minutes et cetera, has to be archived (PMBOK, 2013). The following project documents may be updated due to communications planning outcomes: Project schedule, Stakeholder register and others if applicable (PMBOK, 2013).

Sometimes Project managers do not perform comprehensive communications planning. Common reasons for this are as follows (William Dow, 2008):
- Wrong assumption that communicating project information is easy and does not need planning, if team members were working together before;
- Difficulty to involve in the planning process all relevant parties;
- Low priority for communications planning, skipping to identify and document communications requirements;
- Lack of skills or knowledge to develop a Communication plan.

The following advices help Project manager to succeed in communications planning (William Dow, 2008; Kerzner, 2009):
- Plan communication activities according to the project management office procedures;
- Build communications early in the project;
- Conduct brainstorming meetings with project team members and stakeholders to detect their requirements and needs for information type and timeframe;
- Establishing effective communications takes time – share communication responsibilities among team members or executives;
- Do not think your message will be received in the form you sent;
- Use more than one communication method
- Use face to face communications when possible;
- It may be difficult to communicate to a huge number of stakeholders face to face – communicate via internet as much as possible;
- Establish communication rhythm;
- Always try to obtain feedback;
- Know your collocutor;
- Encourage good relationships with stakeholders;
- Strengthen words with actions;
- All project communications documents must be archived for future project success.
3.8. Project communications planning framework

To sum up the theoretical background for the planning project communications process, the following Project communications planning framework was created (see Figure 6). This framework shows visually how planning communications has to be organized, according to theoretical recommendations. During the planning process Project manager answers the core questions for effective communications (see page 9) and builds the Project communications management plan based on the retrieved information.

First, stakeholders’ identification and analysis has to be done, based on the lessons learned information, organizational chart, external need, interviews and meeting with stakeholders. Second, stakeholders’ communication needs and requirements are defined from the previous step. Third, on the ground of stakeholders’ communication preferences, enterprise environmental factors and organizational process assets Project manager defines the list of project information to communicate, best methods and time frame to deliver communications. This information serves as a basis for Project communication matrix. Fourth, plan how to receive feedback and communications effectiveness measurement instruments should be developed. Fifth, and the last, Project manager has to create the comprehensive Project Communications management plan, which compounds information from the previous steps.
Figure 6 Project communications planning theoretical framework
4. Empirical findings

This chapter shows the empirical finding of this study. The findings were gathered with the use of mixed method survey, thus provide both quantitative and qualitative data. The survey was performed by web-based self-administered questionnaire, sent to practicing Project managers via professional network linkedin.com and filled in by 97 respondents.

4.1. Data capture

The questionnaire was created with Google Forms – free online survey application. It provides the following functions: develop an online questionnaire, send the form to respondents directly to e-mails or as a link, document all received answers in the spreadsheet (Google Inc.).

The form started with a greeting text, which explained the topic of the survey, its goals and content. The questionnaire guaranteed the anonymity to respondents – name was asked only in case the participant wished to receive the survey results. It contained twenty four close-ended and eleven open-ended questions. First ten questions aimed to outline the context of the projects the respondent work on. Participants were asked about their experience in Project Management, area of business and complexity of common projects.

The main part of the form was developed based on the theoretical framework, shown before in the study. It included required multiple choice and checkboxes questions and after them – non-required open-ended questions about further explanation or additional information; few opinion ranking and required open-ended questions. You can find the questionnaire in the Appendix A.

Personal messages via linkedin.com were chosen as a communication method. Linkedin.com – the largest world-wide professional network, connecting 300 million participants from 200 countries and regions (linkedin.com). The main reasons for this choice were an opportunity to receive a list of potential participants and to get quick direct contact with the needed professionals.

Since the study objective is to investigate how one of the Project Management practices is performed, the targeted audience for the survey was currently practicing Project managers from different business areas and sizes, locations, with different backgrounds. The potential participants were searched by the current “Project manager” title among the author’s 2nd connections – people, with whom the author has at least one connection (person connected via the linkedin.com profiles) in common. Although a non-probable sample method was used to choose the respondents, the author insists on its representativeness. This is because in all cases the author did not have personal contact with the respondent before the request was sent and did not base the choice of the participants on any subjective assessment.
An invitation to connect profiles was sent to all appropriate people, and then a message with the request to fill in the questionnaire was sent to the Project managers, who were added to the author’s network. This procedure was necessary, because personal messages on linkedin.com can only be sent to people in one’s network. As the author’s network was growing with new connections – new invitations and requests were distributed. Overall invitations to connect were sent to 2000 potential participants, and 531 of them have added the author to their network till the start of results analysis. Among these new connections 97 Project managers have taken part in the survey. Therefore the response rate among sent requests for the survey was more than 18 percent. The picture for the data capture process is shown on the Figure 7.

4.1.1. Respondents background

The questionnaire was answered by 97 respondents. All the respondents are currently practicing Project managers. More than 73% of the respondents have at least four years, and almost 29% of respondents have more than ten years of experience in managing projects.

Less than half of the respondents (43 out of 97 managers) have some type of Project Management certification. And almost half certified managers have PMP certificate, a quarter – PRINCE2 certification. The author assumes that certified Project managers are more likely to be familiar with standard Project Management practices, than those without any certification. Therefore, the survey results show almost symmetrically how communication management is planned by both certified and uncertified professionals.

For most of the respondents the primary industry or line business for company or organization they work for is Information technology and software – 25% of participants. Other surveyed managers work in such areas, as Engineering and construction (17%), Business and financial services (13%), Services industry (10%), Manufacturing (8%), Oil & Energy (8%), FMCG (5%), Research/Academia (4%), Public sector (3%) and others (7%). Consequently, the survey results may be influenced by prevailing number of participants from one business area.

Among all the respondents almost 30% work for a local company, 27% – for an international organization with a few offices abroad and more than 40% – for a global company. Therefore, the survey quite uniformly presents practices used in organizations with different international perspective.

Two third of the organizations, which the respondents work for, have established Project Management Office (PMO). Assuming, that in these organizations some of the standard Project management practices and templates are implemented, this factor may influence the communications planning manner.

Most of the projects led by the respondents are relatively small. More than 54% of the projects lay in the budget range up to one million US dollars, among them almost half of the projects with the budget up to 250,000 US dollars. And only 16.5% of projects are in the budget range from 10 million US dollar and more. Prevailing of smaller projects may also influence the survey results.
However, there are also other factors, which influence project communication practices and effectiveness, and increase project complexity. These are geographical distribution of activities and number of stakeholders, actively involved in the project. In this study in 81% of projects, led by the respondents, activities are distributed geographically. In most of the projects the number of stakeholders, actively involved in the project, is less than 25 people or groups of people. Most of them – 36% from the entire sample – have less than ten active stakeholders. Only 7% of projects have the number of responses from 50 to 100 and more than 100 each. Considering the fact that larger number of stakeholders increases communication complexity drastically, this disproportion in the sample may affect the study results.

4.2. Research data

The study research question was: How is the process of planning project communications management performed in practice? To answer this question, first, theoretical background for project communication planning process was explored and general communications planning process framework organized. The questionnaire was developed according to this framework. Main aspects covered by the form were:

- Use of communication tools – What?
- Choice of the communication method – How?
- Establishment of communication time frame – When?
- Feedback, communication effectiveness measurement – Works?
- General practice and content of Communications management plan
- Communications planning importance


The first and the most essential step in planning project communications is defining stakeholders’ communication needs and requirements. It is of great importance for establishing effective communications to deliver stakeholders information they need in the appropriate format and timely. The question “Which sources of information do you use to define each stakeholder's communication needs and requirements?” was asked to study the sources of information in practice.

The findings showed that generally practicing Project managers use in their practices the same sources, as was defined theoretically. It appeared from the survey results, that the most used source of project stakeholders’ communication needs is Meetings with stakeholders – used by more than 72% of respondents. Lessons learned information, second most employed source, is used by almost 62% of respondents. Organizational chart, personal interviews and stakeholders’ analysis information are used by about 40% each. Only 28% of respondents use external needs as a source of stakeholders’ requirements information. The survey also explored, that 8% of respondents do not define stakeholder’s needs and requirements at all (see Figure 8).
Among almost hundred participating managers only four use all of the recommended sources to define stakeholders’ needs. Most of the respondents use a combination of three or four different recommended sources, when one fifth of surveyed – only two. The results also showed that some managers use only one recommended source and no other.

Some participants use sources of stakeholders’ communication needs, which were not mentioned in the theoretical study. These are: company policy on distribution of sensitive information; invitation to the Tender document; internal discussions within the company; and contractual requirements. Participants also advise to analyze stakeholders’ personality and attitude to work.

![Figure 8 Used sources of information about stakeholders’ communication needs, % of respondents](image-url)

4.2.2. Use of communication tools – What?

Among the communication tools, recommended to use for effective communication, the most used tools appeared to be E-mail, Project presentations, Periodic reports, Project meeting minutes and Project status meetings – all used by about 90% of respondents. All these tools were planned to use in advance by 60-70% of managers, who utilize them. The least used tools according to the survey are: Press release, Project newsletter and Stop light report. These communication tools are used by less than 35% of surveyed managers.

There can be different reasons for utilizing or not the specific communication tool. More important is to know, which of the communication tools are planned to use in advance, and which – appeared to be necessary during the project execution, among the managers who use these tools. Recommended communication tools, which were planned to use by more than half of respondents, are listed in their planning decreasing order: Budget spreadsheet (planned by 85% of participants, who use this tool), Gantt chart, Communication plan, E-mail, Project meeting minutes, Project calendar, Project status meetings, Project presentations, Periodic reports and Dashboard report (57% respectively). Interesting point is that among Project managers, who use Communication Plan for their projects, only 70% planned to use this tool, for other 30% it came to be useful during the project.

It also important to know, which recommended communication tools appeared to be useful during the project. This information may help to plan communication tools more thoroughly. Daily progress report, Instant messaging, Project newsletter and Stop light report are the tools, which came up to be useful at the project implementation stage for more than half of
the respondents, who use them. However, the nature of these tools can be a reason for this, as it may be hard to plan their use before.

Except recommended communication tools, highlighted in theoretical part, surveyed Project managers provided the study with a list of other tools they use to make project communication more effective. These tools can be divided in three main categories:

- Internal communication and collaboration systems: online systems – Cisco WebEx, Microsoft SharePoint, Microsoft Lync, Trello; SAP system – internal activities tracking, communication with customers; internal Project Management Software.

- Information transfers (how project information is delivered): Internet Relay Chat rooms (group and private messages), Skype (chat, files share, video calls), Dropbox (files share); physical documents transmittal, if required by the stakeholder; Apsis and EventOnline (external e-mail communication).

- Formats of project information: Project Delivery Workbooks, Steering group meetings, Excel overviews, Project Management Information System based follow-ups, Informal information to other parties that may be concerned but not directly involved stakeholders, Infographic.

4.2.3. Choice of the communication method – How?

Different aspects are considered, when choosing communication channels for planned communications. Among factors, defined in theoretical background, the most counted are: amount of information, which should be delivered and its detail level; purpose of communication and channel’s appropriateness for specific communication (70%, 67% and 60% of respondents respectively). The least important to consider from respondents the point of view are stakeholder’s preference – only 38% of surveyed managers told they take into account this factor. Answers also showed that some of the Project managers do not plan channels for their communications.

![Figure 9 Aspects considered when choosing communication methods, % of respondents](image)

Besides suggested factors to consider when choosing communication vehicle, surveyed Project managers offered additional aspects to take into account. The most often added, therefore
the most important factor, is time needed to communicate. Respondents claim on the minimizing the time to transfer information in order to receive fast answer or follow-up and meet deadlines. The next factor, most recommended by participants, is stakeholders’ characteristics in different aspects: their motives, goals, involvement, current status et cetera. Other highlighted factors are communication goal – what action or support is expected as a result; common sense; project phase; culture and language differences.

4.2.4. Establishment of communication time frame – When?

The next significant aspect of planning project communications is establishment of communications frequency and stable rhythm. Most of the surveyed Project managers (81 persons out of 97) have established time frame for delivering project information. These respondents can be divided in two specific groups: those who use already established standard time plan and those, who develop a communication time plan for each particular project. The first group uses the time frame predefined in the project methodology or in company's PMO toolkit. These are minority of managers.

Most of the respondents, who develop communication frequency plan, state that stable rhythm is set for part of the information delivery. Such periodic communications as Progress reports, Status meetings, Project reviews, Project presentations et cetera have stable timing. Other communications for most of the respondents stay flexible. The most commonly used time frames are: weekly or biweekly for ongoing reporting and internal meetings; monthly for external or senior level reporting and meetings; daily for project team updates; established dates for non-regular communication.

However, the frequency of each communication depends on different factors. Among the aspects which influence project communications time frame and as advises for this process surveyed managers highlighted the following (factors are listed in the decreasing order from more often mentioned):

- Establishing communications around key project milestones and tollgates, key events or when the project progress can be seen after completing some part. Sometimes – based on the Project management practice, used in the company, for example, PROP at Ericsson.

- Stakeholders’ needs, expectations and requirements, number of stakeholders, their availability and interest, necessity of specific stakeholders to be communicated – these aspects should be taken into account. The “enough” level of communication frequency is advised to be agreed or developed through stakeholders’ feedback.

- Project type, deliverables, scope, size, duration, pace, project phase and intensity.

- Experience from previous projects, use of historical information and company’s best practices were mentioned as a source for planning communications frequency.

- Project schedule, as well as project or contract requirements also serve as a base for planning communications time frame for some of the respondents.
However, there were also surveyed Project managers, who communicate ad hoc. Some of respondents stated they did not see the necessity of establishing stable communication rhythm or consider it as too much firefighting, others – that they stay in touch with the team all the time and this is enough. Also the next reasons for not planning communication time frame were claimed: too small staff: hard to plan because of a lot of projects or quick changes. In part of the cases the Agile methodology is used for delivering the project. Therefore, communications are not planned by definition.

4.2.5. Feedback, communication effectiveness measurement – Works?

More than 90% of surveyed Project managers consider feedback to be important for establishing effective project communications, and more than half of them stated that it is extremely important. However, obtaining feedback on communications is planned by only 51% of the survey participants. There are two main trends in planning feedbacks, displayed by the study answers:

- No distinct communication feedback plan is developed in almost all cases, however, managers plan in advance when and how to get feedback from specific communications;

- Obtaining feedback is planned only for critical decisions or from key stakeholders, where receiving it is essential; key milestone events and key communications, such as Change order request or Notice of early termination.

The suggested by respondents methods to obtain feedback from different communications are listed below:

- request for acceptance, action or follow-up, included deadline;
- surveys, feedback or Questions & Answers pages on the project portal;
- questions at project meetings
- feedback (or lessons learned) sessions during or at the end of the project, follow-up meetings to discuss results.

The most common used communication channels to obtain feedback, according to the study, are (in the decreasing order of popularity): e-mail, direct conversation (face to face or by phone), meetings, teleconferences, Project place, and internal chats.

Other managers do not plan how to get feedback from their communications. Most of them agree on importance of feedback, but do not see the need to plan it. There are different reasons for such opinion, stated by the respondents:

- being reasonable and clear in communications guarantees receiving feedback,
- one can ask for a feedback ad hoc, when it is necessary,
- limited time and recourses for planning,
- never was a need for this activity,
- rely on natural communication way, which will bring the feedback,
- no need to plan feedback, as communication plan is approved.

Some of the surveyed managers claim that no feedback is needed at all and their communications are mostly “one way”.

Feedback is only one of the ways to find out, if your communication is effective. Other method, suggested by theoretical findings, is **communication effectiveness survey**. Among all surveyed Project managers only 40% conduct some kind of communication effectiveness survey. The most popular methodology among the managers, who use the survey, is to conduct it at the end of the project (41% of respondents, using the survey). One quarter of participants, who carry the survey, do this after each key project milestone. Other managers conduct the survey before each Communication plan review or on quarterly basis (sometimes as a part of Employee satisfaction survey). One respondent noted a practice to conduct the communication effectiveness survey only when communication does not work, as was expected.

![Figure 10 Practice in conducting Communication effectiveness surveys, % of respondents](image)

Only a few of surveyed managers stated that they plan **communications performance indicators**. Most of the indicators, mentioned by the respondents, give indirect feedback regarding the efficiency of the communications. These are: traffic lights, work packages delivery, burn down chart and others. One of the stated performance indicators, which directly measures external communications effectiveness, is the time it takes to respond to customer complaints. Assessment of communications performance is performed by Business Intelligence Dashboard, feedback on reports, and questionnaires.

Most of the managers do not establish communication effectiveness measurements. Majority of them claim they **do not see the need** for such indicators for their projects. Some of them stated that their projects are too small for this, others – that communication is not a bottleneck in their projects and does not need too much attention. A few managers mentioned that the best indicator is if the client is satisfied, and if he is not – Project manager will be updated with this information without any measurements.

Other common reason, why respondents do not plan communications performance indicators, is **limited time and/or recourses**, as they consider this practice to add too much work. Some managers admitted, that they did not ever use, or even meet such technique, that is why did not think about establishment of communications measures. Other participants state they
do not plan communications performance indicators, because this is not used or required by the company or organization they work for.

About half of the respondents, who do not plan communications performance indicators, state they rather measure the efficiency of use of man-hours to achieve milestones or developed result. Some of the participants also suggest that project implementation process analysis is enough, as it reveals communication failures. Part of the managers report that they evaluate communications effectiveness, but without indicators. They do this with help of feedbacks brought up together, project retrospective meetings or lessons learned information as the project run or in the end of the project.

4.2.6. General practice and content of Communications management plan

The survey also tried to reveal, if Communications management plan is a common tool for managing project communications. Received responses do not show any particular answer. The figure 11 shows, how many of participant’s projects were executed with use of any type of Communications management plan. It is seen from the diagram, that almost equal distribution exists between three groups: managers, who almost do not execute their projects using Communication plan (0-20% of projects); those, who use communications planning for around half of their projects (30-70% of projects) and managers, who execute almost all of their projects using Communications management plan (80-100% of projects managed).

Comparing answers on this question to the respondents’ background some relations were tried to be explored. The survey showed, that the percentage of projects executed with the use of Communication plan may be related to the years of manager’s experience. Among the managers with 1-3 years of experience in Project management area only 17% create Communication plan for more than 80% of their projects, when for the managers with more experience this number increases: 39% of respondents with 4-7 years of experience, 43% with 8-10 years and 44% with more than 10 years of experience. However, the nature of the research sample does not allow proving this correlation statistically.

There is too few responses by each industry to see the relationship between the amounts of projects led with Communication plan and area of business. However, surprising was the number, that more than half of the Project managers (8 out of 17) working in the Engineering and Construction industry execute only up to 20% of their projects with use of Communication plan. There were also no any relationships found between the percentage of projects executed with Communication plan and projects budget, number of stakeholders involved, geographical distribution of activities or presence of Project management office in the organization.
Comparing the practice of using Communication plan for the projects and the presence of any type of Project management certificate among the respondents displayed a slight relation between these categories. It is shown on the table 6 that uncertified Projects managers tend to use Communication plan for less number of their projects, while certified respondents are more willing to plan communications for more than 80% of their projects. However, the number of investigated cases in this study is too small to reveal if there are correlations between the categories, were some relation was noticed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of projects, executed using Communication plan, %</th>
<th>Uncertified Project managers</th>
<th>Certified Project managers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-20</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-70</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-100</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not know</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 Relationship between presence of Project management certification and share of projects executed with Communication plan

Matrix tools are recommended to use for graphical representation and easy understanding of the communication management: communications type, delivery method, time frame, responsible persons and other important information. However, almost half of the surveyed managers do not use any matrix tools to plan communications. Some of them use Organizational chart or Work breakdown structure as communications planning tools. The most used matrix tool among suggested in theory, is Project communication matrix. Other matrixes, as Communication requirements and Role report matrixes are used by 20.6% and 15.5% respondents respectively. These two tools usually serve as a background for creating the Project Communication matrix. The Responsibilities assignment matrix, which contained detailed information of roles and responsibilities in communication process, was also suggested by participants.

Figure 12 Use of matrix tools for planning communications, % of respondents

To be comprehensive enough, Communications management plan should cover a lot of different aspects. Among the suggested aspects, the most used in respondents’ Communication plans are: timing and frequency of delivering information (indicated by 75% of participants); which information has to be delivered (74% of references); project stakeholders’ communication requirements (69% of answers) and list of people and groups who receive project information.
(covered by 65% of respondents). These aspects answer some of the basic communications planning questions: Who? What? When?

Figure 13 Aspects, covered by respondents’ Communication plans, % of respondents

To answer other basic questions Why? and How?, purpose of communicating specific information and method planned to be used for information delivery should be documented in the Communication plan. However, only 39% and 32% respectively of surveyed Project managers include this information in the Plan. The least popular aspects in surveyed managers’ Communication plans are: list of available reports (21.6% of responses), process of updating and changing the Communication plan (22.7%), glossary of common term (23.7%) and recourses assigned for communication execution (25.8%). The survey also showed that more than 12% of respondents do not use Communication management plan for their projects at all.

Most of the respondents – 65% – among those, who use Communication plan for managing their projects, cover from four to nine recommended aspects. Only one fifth of managers, who use this tool, include ten and more aspects in their plans. And 12% of respondents cover only up to three aspects.

Besides information, which was proposed to be included in the Communication plan based on theoretical findings, surveyed Project managers mentioned other aspects they cover. These are: geographical considerations; roles and responsibilities of key members; risks and possible problems; stakeholders’ analysis information; established “response by default”; reporting communication lines; Responsibility Assignment matrix; use of Project management
software if applicable; document management. It was also highlighted, that in some cases not names, but project roles should be stated in the Communication plan.

Most of the surveyed Project managers, who execute their projects with the use of Communication plan, develop different plans for each project, basing on the organization template (38.8%) or use standard template for some projects and create different plans for others (41.2%). Small part of respondents stated they develop a distinct Communication plan for each projects, and only 8.2% always use standard communication management plan template.

![Figure 14 Use of standard organization template for creating Communication plan, % of respondents](image)

There are different aspects of planning project communications, which may affect communication effectiveness. The participants found the most challenging to identify all interested stakeholders (49.5% of respondents), to consider stakeholders’ communication needs and requirements (45.4%) and to perform communications planning early in the project (44.3%). The least challenging aspect appeared to be defining how to evaluate communications effectiveness – chosen by 25.8% of managers. This can be a result of seeing no need for assessment communications effectiveness by a lot of participants. Other aspects, as making formal agreements on communication process and creating Communication plan itself, were added by respondents.

![Figure 15 Challenges faced by respondents when planning communications, % of respondents](image)
4.2.7. Communications planning importance

The survey form also contained questions aimed to see, if there is a relationship between a number of projects executed with the use of Communication plan and their success. For one fourth part of the surveyed managers up to half of their projects were unsuccessful. About one fifth of the managers completed 60-70% of their projects on time, within the budget and primary scope. Other 18,5% of respondents rated 80% of their projects as successful, and 21,7% - 90% of executed projects. More than 9% of respondents stated that all 100% of their projects were delivered successfully.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Projects, delivered on time, within the budget and primary scope, % of all projects</th>
<th>Do not know</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>20</th>
<th>30</th>
<th>40</th>
<th>50</th>
<th>60</th>
<th>70</th>
<th>80</th>
<th>90</th>
<th>100</th>
<th>Total, responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do not know</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7 Relation between share of projects, managed using Communication plan and share of projects, delivered on time, within budget and primary scope

On the table above you can see the distribution of surveyed Project managers’ answers on the percentage of their projects, managed using Communication plan, and percentage of the projects, completed successfully. This table shows graphically, that there is no a relationship between a number of successful projects and those, where Communication plan was used. Among the responses with most of the projects completed on time, within the budget and primary scope, almost equal number of responses corresponds to projects, were Communication plan was not often used, and those, executed mostly with Communication plan. However, this table shows relationships only between general practice, used by surveyed managers, and not specific projects.
To understand the importance of project communications planning, the survey form was added with the question about influence of poor communications planning on the project outcomes. The survey showed that nearly half of the respondents never, or almost never (10% of the projects) experienced deterioration of project outcomes caused by poor communications planning. One quarter of the participants claims that in up to 30% of their projects the results were worsen because of weak planning of communications management. And only 5% of surveyed managers faced these problems in more than 60% of the projects.

Almost 80% of surveyed Project managers agree that Communication plan is inevitable for the project success. More than 15% of respondents did not determine their opinion on the question. There are also 5% of participants, who do not agree with the offered statement. Important will be to note, that one third of managers, who strongly agree with the essence of planning communications, and half of managers, who agree with the statement, use Communication plan for less than half of their projects.

Most of the respondents are sure, that planning is important (44,3% of respondents) or extremely important (40,2%) for effective communication management. However, there are surveyed Project managers, who do not agree and consider communication planning as not very or somewhat important (6% of the participants).

In the end of the questionnaire surveyed Project managers were asked to leave their comments on the topic or the survey itself. Twenty eight among ninety seven managers have expressed their thoughts about planning project communications. This information can be
divided into three categories: advices on communications planning and management; arguing on no necessity of formal communications planning process for all projects; and comments on the survey questions.

The following **advices on improving project communications planning** were given by respondents, based on their experience:

- It is important to “plan for when things breakdown” – in order to re-build communications quickly and effectively, when you have disruption during the project;
- Not to overload stakeholders with too much details or documents, keep communication “simple and clear to the point”;
- “Different understanding of same information can be potential barrier”;
- Project manager should always ask questions if there are ambiguities, issues or no obvious answers;
- “To make things correct from the start” – already during the tender phase;
- The most important factor is internal communication between the project team members;
- Communication “plan should be practical as much as possible and adopted to project size and needs”;
- With the larger number of stakeholders (15 in case of the surveyed manager) there have to be project coordinators (communication managers) roles to synchronize communications and create communication plan;
- “Always validate if the information is worth spreading and to whom”;
- “Early follow-up on the information sent is a key success factor”.

Despite of the fact, that most of the surveyed managers consider Communication plan to be inevitable for the project success, and planning process – to be important for effective communication management, some of the respondents argue, that communications planning process should not be exaggerated or overdone.

These participants claim that **having solid experience** in managing projects allows manager to “work in a more intuitive way”. In this case Project manager can “use the **minimum amount of planning tools**” and still deliver the project successfully. Of course, even in this case it is important to “keep close contact” with all the stakeholders. It was also mentioned, that “planning is less important”, when you “have worked together for a long time”. Some of the managers insist that project communications are more about the way of communication than the planning, and having good communication skills may allow the manager minimizing communications planning or at least documenting it. The opinion was expressed, that “common sense is the most effective power tool in a vast majority of cases” in practical project management.

Some of the respondents argue that concentrating too much on the creating formal documents, for example Communication plan, may distract Project manager from delivering the
project itself. They say that one “should try not to over-emphasize methodology” and “do not get too focused on creating formal processes”, as it can take too much time without the need. “If I would make too many plans and create too much bureaucracy, I would be fired” – stated one of the respondents.

Other surveyed managers state that project types are very different and thus “the way communications are planned and run also very diverse”. Therefore, Communication plan is argued to be needed not for all projects. This tools is necessary for “M&A projects, system- and organizational changes”, “building a new factory or airport, organizing the Olympic Games”, but not for smaller and more simple ones. For start-ups and smaller companies is better to “work more agile and with less planning”, since smaller entities perform better “in a creative chaos style”.

A few respondents also made a feedback on the questions, offered by the survey form. The question about percentage of “projects, executed successfully: completed on time, within the budget and primary scope” was claimed hard to answer, as project can be successful even if it is delivered later, more expensive or with changes, but still meets stakeholders’ expectations. For example, if primary scope was changed during the project execution, what caused project delay, which is acceptable. An analogous remark was made on the question about percentage of projects, where “project outcomes were worsen because of poor communications planning”, because it is hard to distinguish the reason of poor communications planning among the combination of factors, which led to deterioration of results. These difficulties may lead to the different understanding of the questions and some distortion of the results for these questions. However, the survey provides only descriptive analysis of the findings and does not assert any statistical dependencies, and therefore the impact on the results is minimal.

5. Analysis and Discussion

The survey offers opinions of Project managers with profound and diverse background. Most of the respondents are experienced practicing Project managers, and almost half of them are certified in Project management. Participants show diversity in international perspective and primary industry of the companies they work for, with a minor advantage to the Information technology and software area. Projects, managed by respondent vary in the size and complexity, with budget range from up to 250,000 US dollars to over 10 million US dollars and number of stakeholders from up to 10 till over 100 people or groups, actively involved in the project. There is, however, slight overbalance for smaller projects among the responses. Thus, the survey results can be recognized to be reliable to show how project communications planning process is performed in practice (S. K. Mangal, 2013; Saunders, et al., 2012).

The analysis of the data gathered during the survey is done based on theoretical framework, created after the literature review. The framework represents how the planning project communications process should be performed, which steps should be taken and what questions should be answered in Communication management plan (see at page 27).
First step in developing Communication plan for the project is **identification of stakeholders’ communication needs and requirements**. Theoretical framework suggests using the following sources of information for this purpose: *lessons learned information, organizational chart, external needs, and interviews with stakeholders, stakeholders’ analysis* (power/interest, influence/impact, level of risk tolerance, power/legitimacy/urgency) (PMBOK, 2013; William Dow, 2008). The empirical findings show that practicing Project managers use all recommended sources of information. The most used appeared to be meetings with stakeholders and lessons learned information. However, some of respondents use only one or two sources, what does not give the full picture of stakeholders’ needs, thus may cause misunderstanding and lower communication effectiveness. Moreover, some managers do not define stakeholders’ requirements at all, what is contradicting the theoretical approach.

**Recommendations:** Project manager should spend time to define communication needs and requirement of the project stakeholders’ and to use for this purpose combination of at least three or four sources of information, possibly among suggested in theoretical framework.

The defined stakeholders’ communication needs and such aspects as enterprise environmental factors and organizational process assets are the ground for the further communications planning. The list of information to communicate, best methods to deliver communications and their time frame are determined using this information.

There are a lot of different **communication tools** used to deliver project information to the stakeholders. The study revealed that among the tools, suggested by William Dow, 2008, only the following: *Budget spreadsheet, Communication plan, E-mail, Gantt chart, Periodic reports, Project calendar, Project meeting minutes, Project presentations and Project status meetings*, are widely used in practice and planned in advance in most cases. Other of the tools suggested in the theory are not commonly used in practice. These are Daily progress reports, Dashboard report, Earned Value Analysis, Press release, Project newsletter, Stop light report, Team lead’s report and Work package. There may be different reasons for not utilizing these tools, for example project type, organizational needs et cetera. And such variance from the theory does not necessarily mean the negative impact on communications effectiveness. A lot of different communication tools were added by respondents: formats of project information, internal communication and collaboration systems, and information transfers. It means that theoretical suggestions do not address practical issues fully.

**Recommendations:** Project manager should pay attention to planning the first mentioned above list of the tools as recommended in theory and the most used and planned practically. The lists of suggested in theory tools could be expanded or adapted to different project types and environmental aspects.

According to the theoretical framework, when it is already determined stakeholders’ requirements to communications they receive and what information will be delivered to each stakeholder, the **method of delivery** should be chosen. There are a lot of communication vehicles and the choice of them is very individual for particular communication. Theoretical framework suggests the following aspects to consider when planning communication channels: chance to reach the stakeholder; chance the message will be understood; amount of information
to be included; most appropriate channel for the specific message; level of detail; stakeholder’s preference; purpose of communication (Roman, 2007; Campbell, 2002). All these aspects are taken into account by practicing managers. The most important are amount of information, communication purpose and suitability of the method for specific communication. Such aspects as time needed to communicate and stakeholders’ characteristics were added by the respondents what means that theoretical suggestions are not full.

**Recommendations:** Project manager should consider recommended aspects when planning communications methods. The list of factors may be expanded based on Project managers’ practical advices.

The next step in planning project communications, suggested by theory, is to define the **time frame for information delivery** (Roman, 2007; William Dow, 2008). However, not all of the surveyed manager create project information delivery schedule in advance. They claim on communication ad hoc based on their skills and experience, what is sufficient for their projects. However, in this case the stakeholders are not aware when to expect the information to come, and the manager has to be very well organized not to miss to update stakeholders according to their requirements. Most of the managers, who establish communication schedule, do this only for the critical communications, leaving time frame for others to be flexible. Managers state that the choice of approach for timing communications depends on various factors, such as project type, milestones, lessons learned and project schedule. Gathered data reveal that planning communications time frame may not be necessary for each communication, or even for each project.

**Recommendations:** Project managers should plan communications schedule beforehand. However, theoretical framework should be adapted to the practical context. It may be more properly to suggest establishing the time frame only for critical communications, based on factors offered by practicing Project managers.

In order to understand, if created communication plan is working as expected and providing the sufficient communication effectiveness level, theoretical framework suggests planning two assessment approaches: feedback and communication effectiveness surveys (SnapComms, sd; Santarcangelo, 2012). The results of these actions should be compared to performance indicators and evaluation measures established in the plan. Almost all of the respondents agreed with the importance of feedback for effective communication. However, the survey results showed that only half of the participants is planning to obtain feedback, and mostly for some specific or critical communications. Other managers consider feedback to be important, but do not plan obtaining it, leaving the things to take their own course. But in this case Project managers have less control over obtaining feedback, thus – over monitoring quality of communication and may miss opportunities to improve it. The responsibility for feedback as communication effectiveness assessment is shifted to the receiver. But this stakeholder may not provide feedback even if the communication was insufficient, what can cause issues in project delivery.

**Communication effectiveness survey** is not a popular technique among practicing Project managers. Less than half of the managers follow the theoretical advice in this case, and
smaller part of those do it as recommended after each milestone event or before each Communication plan review. Absence of periodic evaluation of communication practices effectiveness may lead to problematic issues, which may have been prevented in case of knowing about the bottlenecks. The survey can be organized in the way to take minimum recourses from the Project manager and the team. This can be a few ranking questions and space left for comments on the topic. They can be included in other survey, for example Employee assessment. Automatic survey tools will allow the manager to see the dependencies and weak points promptly and easily. The survey is more suitable for internal stakeholders. However, as the survey is aimed to the internal stakeholders, if the team members have good communication skills and solid experience in working together, the survey may not be necessary.

Managers basically do not plan communication performance indicators. They assess communications effectiveness or by indirect measurements of work delivered, or without indicators by feedback and lessons learned sessions. It may be hard to establish measurement indicators for all communications, but it would be very useful to do this for the most critical or potentially weak communications. Moreover, indicators do not always have to be numeric, such indicators as presence of follow-up action, response or amount of questions raised after the communication, can also serve as communication effectiveness measurements. There are theoretical frameworks of assessing the effectiveness of project communications, but they are too complicated and take a lot of time, thus not really applicable in practice (that is why not shown in the study).

**Recommendations:** Project managers should plan how to obtain feedback from at least the most critical communications and not to leave the responsibility for this on the stakeholders. This process does not require huge plans, only short notes on when and for which communication to require action or follow-up, or establish Questions & Answers sessions et cetera would be enough.

Simple and quick communication effectiveness survey should be performed by Project managers after milestone events or before the plan changes. This is the best practice when the project team members are not experienced and consolidated enough. The survey execution should be simplified as much as possible not to take much time or other resources.

**Recommendations for further studies:** To develop a framework for assessing project communication effectiveness. It should be based on practical experience, to be simple and undemanding of resources.

Using the Project communication matrix or other tools, as Communication requirements or Role report matrix, are highly recommended by the respondents. These tools create a basis of the Communication plan. Project communication matrix shows in a simple graphical way which information should be delivered to whom, in what format, when, using which communication method, who is responsible for information delivery, what is the purpose of communication and what feedback is expected. Other matrix tools provide the instruction on communications flaw from different perspectives (Wright, 2012; PMP). The survey revealed that almost half of Project managers do not use matrix tools to plan their communications, and the most recommended Project communication matrix is not very common. Developed matrix
allows all involved stakeholders to see in one place what, how and when they will be communicated or have to deliver project information. It is much easier to look at one table with all relevant information, than retrieve necessary information from different project documents.

**Recommendations:** Project managers should pay more attention to the development of the matrix tools to plan communication, particularly Project communication matrix.

According to the theoretical framework Communications management plan has to be created based on all the information gathered in previous steps. Theoretical framework recommends, which **aspects should be covered by the Communication plan** to ensure its completeness (William Dow, 2008; PMBOK, 2013). Among the suggested aspects there some included in the plan by most of the participants: stakeholders’ communication requirements, information delivery time frame, which information should be delivered, in which format, who is responsible for the delivery and who will receive it. Other aspects are not common in practice. However, they are also beneficial for establishment quality communications because of the following reasons: purpose of information delivery – to adapt communication specifications; communication method – to use the most suitable one for specific communication to the specific stakeholders; detail level of information – not to overwhelmed stakeholders with too much info; escalation process – to solve nonstandard issues; assigned resources – to know how much recourses can be spend on communication; glossary of common terms – very important to gain understanding of the plan from all stakeholders; plan change process – to adapt the plan smoothly; and list of available reports – for stakeholders to see what types of project information are available. Practicing managers also cover other aspects, such as geographical considerations, risks, document management et cetera. Communication plan surely has to be adapted to the needs of the distinct project, but it has to be complete enough to guarantee effective project communication.

**Recommendations:** Project managers should try to develop the Communications management plan to be comprehensive to answer all questions: Who? Why? What? How? When Works?, and cover other aspects to assure effective communications, as recommended in theoretical framework.

Scholars recommend to **follow standard organization’s Communication plan template** (if there is one) and documents regulations, but adapt each plan to the particular project characteristics. The majority of respondents complies these suggestions, developing distinct Communication plans based on the company template or use standard plan for some project and distinct one for others, apparently more complex or unique.

Among the **critical aspects** for project communications planning effectiveness, the most challenging for the surveyed managers are to identify all interested stakeholders, consider stakeholders’ communication requirements, perform communications planning early in the project and consider communication barriers. These steps in communication do not have strict methodology on how to deliver them in the best way. Obviously, Project manager should work on meeting stakeholders’ requirements, but as stakeholders and their needs vary greatly, it is impossible to provide some framework on how to perform this task. The same applies to other
listed aspects. On the other hand, thorough investigation of real world experience in project communications management may present more detailed recommendations on the topic.

**Recommendations:** Project managers should put more emphasis on performing the tasks, listed above, as they are considered as challenging by their colleagues.

**Recommendations for further studies:** To investigate and provide practice-based approaches to overcome mentioned challenges in the best way.

In this survey data showed that managers with more years of experience in Project management are more likely to use Communication plan for the most of their projects. This is surprising, as usually young professionals need more formal guidance, while experienced managers use their knowledge and skills. Certified Project managers tend to plan communication for larger part of their projects, than uncertified. This may be the result of better awareness of certified managers in standard Project management practices. No relationships were seen between the use of Communication plan and project type, size et cetera. However, the study does not present enough sample to reveal strong dependencies.

**Recommendations for further studies:** to examine the relationship between the use of Communication plan and project type, complexity, industry, Project manager’s background.

Besides answering the research question how project communications planning is performed in practice, the survey addressed an issue of actual importance of planning project communications according to the respondents. The majority of respondents ranked planning to be important or extremely important for communication management effectiveness. They also agreed with the statement that Communication plan is inevitable for the project success. Some of the participants, however, have opposite point of view.

Nearly half of the participants almost never faced the deterioration of project outcomes, caused by poor communications planning, and only 5% experienced this in more than 60% of the projects. Moreover, comparison of answers about percentage of projects managed with Communication plan and those, which outcomes were worsen because of poor communications planning, did not show any relationship. The same lack of pattern was noticed between the percentage of projects, executed with Communication plan and those, which were delivered on time, within budget and primary scope. It shows that, although communications planning is considered to be important for the project success, it is not a critical factor.

Some of the respondents remarked that the question about project outcomes deterioration was hard to answer because of multiplicity of issues’ reasons. The question about project delivery on time, within the budget and primary scope was also hard to answer due to complexity of the meaning of project success. These aspects may have influenced the survey results.

Creating Communications management plan is highly recommended by the scholars to manage project communications effectively. However, only one third of the surveyed Project managers is using Communication plan for the most of their projects, one fifth is planning communications only for up to 20% of the projects, and 12% of all respondents do not develop any Communication plan.
Project managers argue that in some cases experience and good communication skills are fully enough to manage the project and no Communication plan is needed. However, project managers skills can guarantee effective delivery only information, transferred by him-/herself. Other project communications has to be managed continuously. And Communication plan provides all involved stakeholders to know their role in building communications.

Other managers claim that creating a formal Communication plan may lead to over-emphasizing methodology and wasting time without the need. However, the following facts should be taken into account: the majority of managers consider Communication plan to be important and inevitable for the project; the plan can have a simple form of a Project communication matrix with some guidance – not a twenty pages report; in any case Project manager thinks in advance, when, what information, to whom and in which format to deliver. Looking at these reasons it can be revealed, that creation of Communication plan is recommended, and can not to be very time consuming if keeping simple.

The point of view, that Communication plan is needed, but not for all projects, was also stated. Project managers claim that small projects with experienced and united team communicate more effectively in an agile manner. This is probably the valid opinion for the teams with the few stakeholders involved and good understanding on their needs.

Recommendations: Project managers should develop Communication plan for their projects, as communications planning is recognized important and Communication plan – inevitable for the project success. The exception can be made for small projects with the experienced united project team. Anyway Communication plan should be kept simple and not too much overwhelmed with information, which is recommended, if it is not applicable for the case.

Recommendations for further studies: Considering the concerns, expressed by some Project managers, it makes sense to add new dimensions to the planning project communications framework: to investigate, in which cases Communication plan is a critical tool for effective project communications and in which it can be skipped or minimized; based on the practical research to propose best suitable form of Communication plan for distinct project types.

6. Conclusions

The study aimed to investigate the Project communication management planning process in practice. The research question addressed was: How is the process of planning project communication management performed in practice? The primary goal was s to produce literature in Project management knowledge area. To reach the goal and answer the research questions the following midline goals were established:

- Conduct an extensive literature research and explore theoretical background, methods and tools for effective project communication management planning.
- Carry out an empirical research on how project communications planning is performed by different Project managers.
• Compare results from empirical study to theoretical background and suggest possible areas of improvement project communication management planning.

6.1. Summary of findings

First, the literature review about planning Project communication management in projects was conducted. Different authors’ views and recommendations on the topic were gathered and the framework for project communications planning was revealed (see page 27). According to the theoretical background, Project communication plan has to answer the following questions:

Who needs the information? What type of project information do they need?

When do they need it? How the information will be communicated?

Why do they need this information? How do you know your plan is working?

Planning project communication process is built around these questions. In order to respond to them fully, the following actions should be taken:

- Identify and analyze stakeholders, which may have interest or need in project information;
- Define the stakeholders’ communication needs and requirements;
- Specify what type of information should be delivered to which stakeholders;
- Determine methods for each communication;
- Establish communication time frame;
- Plan to assess communication effectiveness;
- Consider communication barriers;
- Create Project communication matrix;
- Develop Communication management plan based on the gathered information.

Advices on how to perform each of the listed tasks and other aspects for increasing communications planning effectiveness are highlighted in the literature review chapter.

Second, to investigate the planning project communications practice in the real world, the mixed method survey was performed. It was conducted using the web-based questionnaire with quantitative and qualitative questions types. The survey form was spread through the professional network linkedin.com to practicing Project managers and 97 responses were received.

Third, detailed description of the gathered data was performed and findings were analyzed against proposed theoretical framework. The survey results reveal that project communications planning is not widely used in practice, although is recognized to be important for the project success. Project managers, who create Communication management plan for their projects, mostly follow the activities, suggested by the theoretical framework, with some
exceptions. The majority of Project managers identifies stakeholders and defines their communication needs and requirements, using the recommended sources of information.

Not all of the suggested communication tools are used, and not all used are planned in advance. However, there are a lot of not mentioned in theory communication tools used by respondents. Most of the participants use recommended factors when choosing communication vehicles. Not all of the respondents establish stable time frame for project communications, or some – only for critical communications. Only half of surveyed manager use matrix tools to plan project communications.

Developed Communication plans are mostly adapted to the project, as stated in the theory. Some of the aspects, recommended to be covered in Communication management plan, are missed by the most of respondents. However, a few undefined in theory aspects are suggested. The largest dissimilarity between the theory and practice is noticed in planning the communications effectiveness assessment. This activity is not common and even not considered to be needed by a lot of practicing managers.

There was noticed slight relationship between Project manager’s years of experience and presence of certification from one side and the share of projects they execute using Communication plan. However, the specifics of the research do not allow defining any strong dependencies. There are also manager who do not plan project communications. The main reasons revealed are sufficiency of experience and skills to manage communications, evaluating the process as too much time consuming or claiming that not all the projects need to have Communication plan.

The grounded literature review on the topic was performed and theoretical framework for planning project communications was created. Then empirical findings were gathered by the survey from Project managers with diverse background. Last, analysis of data was conducted in relation to the suggested theoretical framework, as well as general analysis for the answers, not based on the framework. The empirical findings provide quite extensive picture of how the planning project communications is performed by practicing Project managers. Therefore, the study achieved the established goals and answered the raised question.

6.2. Limitations

The main limitation for the results generalization is the nature of the study. The descriptive research with the use of snow-ball sampling with the size of 97 responses does not allow generalizing the findings to all practices used in planning project communications or identify any dependency.

6.3. Recommendations for further research

Although the study fully answered the research question, data gathered during the survey revealed unexplored areas and raised new questions. Based on the survey data and analysis, the following aspects for further research can be recommended:

- Developing a framework for assessing project communication effectiveness. It should be based on practical experience, to be simple and undemanding of resources.
- Investigating and providing practice-based approaches to overcome the main challenges in planning project communications: stakeholders’ identification, considering stakeholders’ communication requirements, performing communications planning early in the project and considering communication barriers.

- Examining the relationship between the use of Communication plan and project type, complexity, industry, Project manager’s background in order to define which areas are more in the need of planning project communications.

- Adding new dimensions to the planning project communications framework: to investigate, in which cases Communication plan is a critical tool for effective project communications and in which it can be skipped or minimized; based on the practical research to propose best suitable form of Communication plan for distinct project types.
Reference list


PMBOK, 2013. PMBOK guide. Newtown Square, PA, USA: Project Management Institute, Inc..


Appendixes

Appendix A. Questionnaire used for the survey

Project Communications Management Planning

*Required

Happy to meet you here!

My name is Olena, I am a Master student in Project Management and Operational Development program at KTH, Royal Institute of Technology, Sweden. I want to express my sincere gratitude for your readiness to share your experience and contribute to this research in Project Management studies.

In the context of organizational Project Management, effective communication to all stakeholders is the core competency to lead the project to its objectives. Planning Communication Management is the first stepping-stone to effective communication. The goals of this survey are to learn how communications planning process is organized in practice and to define possible areas of improvement of this process.

So how does communications planning work?

What's waiting for you

In this questionnaire you will find 32 questions. First 10 questions outline the context of projects you work on. Other questions concentrate on your experience in project communication management planning process. Most of questions are close-ended, with a few exceptions. Completing the questionnaire will take you about 15-20 minutes.

Can you describe your role as a Project Manager?

Please, state your full name, if you wish to receive the survey results

Your name will not appear in the research analysis information
What is your current role? *
- Project Coordinator
- Project Scheduler
- Assistant Project Manager
- Project Manager
- Senior Project Manager
- PM Consultant
- Other: [ ]

How many years of experience do you have in this or similar role? *
- 1-3 years
- 4-7 years
- 8-10 years
- more than 10 years

Do you have Project Management certifications? If yes, please, name them *
- PRINCE2
- IPMA
- APMP
- PMP
- CAPM
- None
- Other: [ ]

Please, describe shortly the company/organization you work for
What is the primary industry or line business for your company/organization or project you manage?*
- Business and financial services
- Engineering and construction
- Information technology and software
- Manufacturing
- Oil & Energy
- FMCG
- Services industry
- Public sector
Is the company you work for local or international? *
- Local company
- International with a few offices abroad
- Global company

Does the company/organization you work for has a Project Management Office? *
- Yes
- No

**What kind of a project represents the most common projects you manage?**

Budget range
- Under $250,000
- $250,000 to $1M
- $1M to $3M
- $3M to $10M
- $10M or more

Are the project activities distributed geographically? *
- Yes
- No

Number of stakeholders actively involved in the project *
- 1-10
- 10-25
- 25-50
- 50-100
- 100 and over

How many of your projects were executed with the use of any kind of Communication Management Plan? (approximate per cent) *

Do you use standard company template or develop your own communication plan? *
- Always use standard communication management plan template
- Use standard template for some projects and develop different plan for others
- Develop different communication plan for each project, basing on standard template
Develop own distinct communication plan for each project

I do not develop any communication plan

Which aspects are covered by your Communication Management Plan? *

*Please, choose as many as you want*

- Project stakeholders’ communication requirements
- Which information has to be delivered
- Format of information to be delivered
- Detail level of information to be delivered
- Purpose of communicating this information
- Timing and frequency of delivering information
- Names of people responsible for data distribution
- List of people and groups who receive project information
- Methods of transfer for each piece of information
- Resources assigned for communication execution
- Escalation process for certain issues
- Process of updating and changing the communications plan
- List of available reports
- Glossary of common terms
- I do not have any Communication Management Plan

Does your Communication Management Plan cover other aspects? Please, describe them

Which sources of information do you use to define each stakeholder’s communication needs and requirements? *

*Please, choose as many as you want*

- Lessons learned information
- Personal interviews with the key stakeholders
- Meeting(-s) with stakeholders
- Stakeholder analysis information (power, interest, level of risk alertness, legitimacy, urgency)
- Organizational chart
- External needs
- I do not define stakeholders' communication needs

Do you use other sources to define stakeholders' communication requirements? Please, describe them
Which aspects do you consider when planning communications channels? *  
Please, choose as many as you want

- Expectation that the message reaches the stakeholder
- Chance that the message will be understood
- How much information should be included and how detailed should it be
- The most appropriate channel for the specific message
- Stakeholder's preference
- Purpose of communication
- I do not plan communication channels

Do you consider other aspects when planning communication channels? Please, describe them

Which tools do you use for planning communications? *

- Communication requirements matrix
- Role report matrix
- Project Communications Matrix
- I do not use matrix tools to plan communications
- Other: 

Which of the following communication tools do you use to manage your projects? *  
Please, mark which tools were planned to use in advance and which appeared to be necessary during the project?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Planned to use in advance</th>
<th>Appeared to be necessary during project implementation</th>
<th>Do not use</th>
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<tr>
<td>Communication Tool</td>
<td>Planned to use in advance</td>
<td>Appeared to be necessary during project implementation</td>
<td>Do not use</td>
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<td>Stop Light Report</td>
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<td>Team Lead's Report</td>
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<td>Work Package</td>
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Do you use other communication tools? If yes, please, describe them

Do you plan, how to establish a stable rhythm for each planned project communication? If no, why? If yes, how do you develop a communication time frame? *

In your opinion, how important is feedback for establishing effective project communications? *

- Extremely Important
- Important
- Moderately Important
- Somewhat Important
- Not Very Important

Do you plan how to obtain feedback from each communication? If no, why? If yes, what type and channel of feedback from each communication do you plan? *

Do you conduct communications effectiveness survey to evaluate quality of existing communications? *

- Yes, after each key milestone event
- Yes, before each Communication Management Plan review
- Yes, quarterly
- Yes, in the end of the project
No, I do not conduct these surveys
Other: [ ]

Do you plan communications performance indicators? If no, why? If yes, which indicators and measurement tools do you use? *

In your opinion how important is communications planning for effective communication management? *
- Extremely Important
- Important
- Moderately Important
- Somewhat Important
- Not Very Important

To which extent do you agree with the statement, that communications plan is inevitable for project success? *
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Which aspects of planning project communications do you consider to be the main challenges in building effective project communications? *
- Identify all interested stakeholders
- Take into account stakeholders' communication requirements
- Perform communications planning early in the project
- Document all planning information
- Consider communication barriers
- Plan to obtain feedback
- Define how to evaluate communications effectiveness
- Plan a stable rhythm for each communication
- Choose the most effective communication channels
- Ensure everyone involved in the planning process understands its importance
- Other: [ ]
How many of your projects were completed on time, within the budget and primary scope? (approximate per cent) *

How often your project outcomes were worsen because of poor communications planning? (approximate per cent of your projects) *

How often your project outcomes were worsen because of communication problems? (approximate per cent of your projects) *

Do you have comments left? Or wish to give project communications planning tips or share more information, which was not covered in the survey? Please, feel free to express your thoughts – they are very important for us.

**Thank you for this opportunity to gain practical knowledge from your experience. I really appreciate your contribution to this study.**

Yours sincerely,
Olena Lys
### Appendix B. Qualitative data

#### Answers for the open-ended questions

**Does your Communications Management Plan cover other aspects? Please, describe them**

Communication is informal & ad hoc based on project needs. Essentially all projects are "soft" changes/improvements to ways of working, as opposed to creating tangible deliverables.

- **RACI matrix**
  - It describes where documentation for the Communication Management Plan is to be found and where it should be stored.

- **Ground Rules. Note:** We don’t use names of people in Communication Management Plan, but project roles and then Team Register (part of HR Management) used to assign team members to roles.

- **The size of my projects usually does not require a specific plan. The number of stakeholders is too small. I just send them regular emails with updates or requests, and call them or organize meetings when required.**
  - The overall communication plan is described in the contract with customer. The plan is based on company standard but the practical one is negotiated with the steering group. Too much communication will create spam/noise for the stakeholders and then it can be hard to get attention when it is really needed. You must always validate if the information is worth spreading and to whom. Something very important for the PM might be totally insufficient to the Product Owner for example. But if you have important stuff it is better to spread it to more people and the ones in your communication plan.
  - **On the beginning of any communication I want to make clear who is reporting to whom - lines of communication.**
  - Communication to peripheral (non-project) areas which will be impacted by delivery.
  - Geographical considerations (stakeholders are split geographically)
  - **Roles and Responsibilities of the key members (e.g. Project Managers)**
  - **Future Model Risks and possible problems.**
  - CMP should define "response by default" which means, for example ,"approved" if didn't answered in meant time.
  - **Interest and power of stakeholders as in to what extend they might be able to have an impact on the project**
  - **who to communicate with whom and what to be communicated**
  - **As my own Projects are very much based on a field of expertise that I'm almost alone in the organization to be working with, my Communication plans are a very simple matter... Other Projects in my organization are more typical, with detailed Project planning as per internal templates and guidelines. In other words, my situation is hardly typical.**
  - I have an communication plan (word document) and also an activity matrix list (excel), where every communication activity are listed, responsible persons for each activity, in what way we shall do the communication, when shall the information be delivered etc.
  - **How communications are handled internally within the organization (project team) and externally (Client team). Use of Project management software for communications and document distribution.**
  - Since we work with clinical trials there are other aspects to consider, the study protocol is an example. We work mostly with reports.

**Do you use other sources to define stakeholders' communication requirements? Please, describe them**

- **Analyzing type of a stakeholder as a person- strictly professional attitude, relaxed and friendly, shy...**
- **Company policy on distribution of sensitive information.**
- **Invitation to Tender document**
- **Internal discussions within company.**
- **Interviewing to identify the inputs / outputs of the line business.**
- **It’s depending on what type of project I have.**
Contractual requirements

The clients require specific reports which they want to be updated with regularly

Do you consider other aspects when planning communication channels? Please, describe them

I just take a common sense approach and consult with the client.

To be honest, a lot of projects they are just done based on experience. There is no time and money to make extensive plans, paperwork, processes. It may be useful for really big projects (building a new factory or airport, organizing the Olympic games) but in day to day life in a business, most of the time we just get told to deliver, deliver, deliver. If I would make too many plans and create too much bureaucracy, I would be fired. Businesses are about making money, and thus, I get hired based on my experience as a project manager and reputation on how fast I deliver, within budget and on time. Whilst there is a trend to increase methodology and planning, which has its place, it is often over-used. Methodologies work well in complex environments but their use has to be balanced: if project managers are inexperienced or not very organized, a methodology will be very important to them. For someone with a lot of experience, only subsets of methodologies will be used, and the emphasis will always be to deliver as best as possible whilst skipping all unnecessary paperwork, processes, meetings, etc. This applies to overall project methodology but also to communications methodologies: I'm experienced, so I know who to communicate with and approximately how frequently once I have met and discussed with them. I won't make a communications plan - I just put notes in my diary or checklists to contact people when required - I guess you could call that a plan too, though :-)  

Project phases, We consider changing intervals and method of communication depending on in which phase the project is, and if there is any problems... that also has impact.

Are the stakeholders motivated and involved with your project? If not, the information makes no sense and the stakeholder can be removed or need to be escalated in the steering group.

Yes, since it is heavily dependent on background of the stakeholders involved and nationality. I work mainly with Chinese but same time with very international team so there are many obstacles on the way because of different levels of used common English language and Additionally different culture's interpretations.

The format in which the stakeholder or stakeholder group needs the information.

Stakeholder's character, motives and goals

The channels depends also on the time, whether or not I need an immediate answer, the channels is chosen in function of the priority of a task


Time - if possible, quick, non-time consuming channels.

Depending on the type of info: i.e. KPI, decision making information, etc. and depending on the type of contract the info will differ (e.g. Fix price contract, reimbursable contract, etc.)

Meeting deadlines is the most important aspect while conducting clinical trials

Time needed to execute communication plan

Which tools do you use for planning communications?

Emailing, ad hoc documentation
RACI
WBS
Excel
Communication Plan Document
Org chart

Do you use other communication tools? If yes, please, describe them
IRC Chat rooms
Phone calls, unplanned touch-bases at desk
Webex, Sharepoint, Delivery Work Books
Trello
Email, phone, MS Lync, Sneakernet.
Steering group
Skype
Infographic (found this particularly useful) - it's not a tool, as such, but I put one together as it gets multiple points across to recipients. Easy to publish to the Intranet and easily accessible by all concerned parties.

Other communication tools used are for documents transmittal (e.g. some customers may want to have the documentation for different equipment written on DVDs which will be further shipped through post office, others may want to use tools similar with Drop Box to have big files transmitted to them, instead of having the inbox flooded). Also SAP system is used as a communication tool between our customers and us. This is also used as a communication tool for placing orders and tracking progress of different activities internally and pulling out different reports.

Excel overviews.

We use own Project Modeling System
Skype, Viber
Project Management Information System based follow-ups
Apsis and Eventonline as newsletters. Questback as survey tool.
Agile tool for software development with built in dashboards etc.
Informal information to other parties that may be concerned but not directly involved stakeholders
Project Internal website
Weekly meeting and Its mom
Internal PMS (Project Management Software)
Online tools. Chat

**Do you plan, how to establish a stable rhythm for each planned project communication? If no, why? If yes, how do you develop a communication time frame?**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>(5 responses)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>(6 responses)</td>
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- **Not particularly.**
  - To some extent yes. I determine the timeline it will take to have a Beta version of my project complete, and allow direct-stakeholders a rough time when communications will be held to see the progress, what changes needed to be made, etc. My role is normally not bound by strict deadlines. (aka, sooner the better!)

- **Yes,** we do not have a strict time frame as the time frame depends on the clients’ needs and the individual project's requirements.
  - Yes, monthly basis
  - I use weekly or be-weekly communication frames depending on project, with weekly reports review.
  - Yes. Follow best company's practices. In case of additional information/frequency change - agree with stakeholders on distribution list, frequency and following procedure.
  - Yes. developed according to experience from previous similar projects.
  - No, because I stay in touch about all the projects with my team all the time.
  - Communications are timed after key meetings and around milestones of the project.
  - I don’t really understand the question
  - Depending on project type, I tend to email key stakeholders an update once a week or month or so.
  - Bi-weekly updates
Yes, I use gathered information and also a direct communication with some stakeholders to listen for what they expect, aside from the requirements they have.

It is important to be agile in the communication management. In some stages you need to increase the reporting and sometimes decrease. As said, you must find the "enough" level and ask stakeholders for feedback on communication level over time.

**Using Calendar**

Yes. I develop a time-frame by gauging the needs of my stakeholders/audience. Open discussion with stakeholders helps with this.

The communication time frame is predefined in our company's PMO toolkit.

Yes, I have established dates for sending project reports to the customers (e.g. biweekly), also established dates for Weekly Project Presentation, Monthly and Quarterly Project Reviews both with the clients and internally.

Yes, using an Excel overview which is used for monitoring and evaluations of communication.

We have own special system for It and it's work very good and strong

In our company we have implemented PMO recently.

I do but I keep the communication dynamic, i.e. initially there is official communication almost every day, for people to find their feet. After that the frequency and depth depends on the intensity and phase of the project.

I use communication tools such as e-mail distribution

Yes, keep key stakeholders informed on regular basis.

Look at the most critical times when communication is needed for making change management as effective as possible.

Create a complete project plan from start to finish, and manage all key milestones in the project lifecycle including define (goals, scope, deliverables), validation, execution, and sign-offs on completion.

The projects I manage does not have that many stakeholders and thus a communication plan and time frame is not needed and is something that intuitively can be made. For the longer projects, specially in-house, there is only a small core working and thus the communications are daily in a morning meeting.

Basically, how to communicate what to communicate and how often are vividly defined in the contract.

No, we use standard times for communication points.

I don't understand the question

The projects usually move on in various paces and therefore Milestones or expected events set the planning for communication

Always

The time frame is decided, according to the different deliverables and the number of stakeholder involved, and the duration of the project. The shorter the project, the more frequent communication will have to be dealt with

We do almost everything ad hoc

This is usually determined purely based on expert knowledge/historical information and adjusted during project execution as needs change/arise.

No, hasn’t been necessary

No, a stable rhythm is quite impossible in my work. Too many things change quickly and I need to alert and inform the customers on my discretion and experience

Yes, daily

No, I like to keep things simple.

Yes, I develop the time frame with the project team so we all know where we are in the project. Sometimes daily update of the charts sometimes on a weekly basis. Depends on the project and where we are in the project. The control of the project is important for me.

No, senior management usually establish this

Yes. The project schedule is the time frame and, the different phases is next level. And then we have the milestones. That together is the platform for the communication plan

I like to keep a rhythm in regards to communication, but this gets based on feeling and stakeholder availability
mostly.

It is developed most of all in accordance with main project time plan and the critical lines.

Project model includes the gate passages to be crossed, at these gates possible/appropriate to communicate.

No, since we have left the project organization and instead use agile methods.

No, since we are usually running many projects at the time, the time frame to attend each planned project communication sometimes differs from week to week so, it’s hard to plan when to execute the task but it has to be ready for when it was defined.

A competency framework defines the knowledge, skills, and attributes needed for people within an organization.

I use the Gantt chart to time communication, so that all parts receive correct information timely. That saves me a lot of time, because project participants do not have to request information.

Yes. Case specific. Depends on project scope, team size, timeline...

Yes. It’s standard for each type of actions taken: Meeting minutes, Status update, Update with Board of Directors. Frequency: weekly/bi-weekly

The progress of the projects depend on many variables that are difficult to estimate in advance, so general information points are set, but details need to be flexible

Depending on need of others and my estimate of what is necessary

Defined in the project methodology.

Yes. Communication time frame actually depends on project type and how it goes. The idea is to keep customer updated and whenever there is substantial news about results it must be communicated.

This depends on the time plan for the project. Normally I follow tollgates and milestones time plan for the communication.

Communication via modern communication channels, such as Lync-, e-mail, phone calls, meetings and workshops

By defining and scheduling information as well as status updating meetings and forums.

Yes in the project plan

There are already some periodic communications that sets the minimum rhythm for communication within the team and the stakeholders, then is up to the team / stakeholders to identify the need of increase the rhythm of those communications.

Frequency of communications are established in the project communications plan, same as type of info and source of information. Who produces the info, who check it and who receives what and when. All is into the communications plan approved by the client. That is as per PMI book.

No, very small staff

Haven’t seen it necessary to have a planned communication. However, my current project team is slowly growing so the need might come. ;-)  

Yes, project reports on a preset regular basis.

Yes, we coordinate with our other two regional teams to see how we will together get the message out about our respective events at the different locations.

No, too much firefighting. Also, stakeholders across the globe with different communication preferences.

We divided the team into several groups, the safety group, the supply group and the equipment group, principally. Each group take actions according their area and they inform in a one minute speech meeting every week.

Yes, based on the task of the project from daily to weekly.


We usually agree at Toll gate meeting and method of communication, frequency of communication and so on.

Established during communication planning.

Yes, I have weekly meetings “check-ins” with everyone involved in the project, with a clear agenda to be able to keep on with where the project is going, if we are following our goals and so on.

It always depends on the project implementation process, actions and results planned for each stage, the necessity of certain stakeholders to be or not to be communicated on current project status, etc.
Not fully applicable

I have reminders for all my deadlines

At least on a quarterly basis

I develop communication time frame as per PROPs framework. For project management, PROPs framework is used at Ericsson.

We are using Agile for all of our development project and it change constantly

Yes and No, as for some aspects of communications of plan e.g. Daily Progress report, Technical Lead reports, Project status meeting minutes etc. There is a certain time frame for sending these reports. In case of issue occurrence or change request it usually depend on project.

Yes. I identify groups I will communicate e.g. developers, client stakeholder, 3rd parties, management etc. Based on their availability and interests I propose and confirm communication tools and frequency.

Do you plan how to obtain feedback from each communication? If no, why? If yes, what type and channel of feedback from each communication do you plan?

No (8 responses)

No. Most of the time its 'one way' communication and no feedback its necessary.

No. I just take an organic approach to the conversation. I glean any information necessary for the sake of the project, but I don't worry about anything other than that.

No. I've learned that being personable and clear in my comments and questions will result in feedback. Good questions get good/fast feedback, and bad questions get bad/no feedback.

Yes. The feedback channel could be a meeting set on skype, phone or emails since most of our clients are not in the same geographical location where we are present.

Request for the milestone deliverables acceptance, e-mail follow-up.

Status reports - follow up meeting to discuss result. Work books - response e-mail /OCS chat on task start/finish time. Information e-mail - if action is needed - action is requested in e-mail.

I prefer sending or receiving minutes after every meeting.

Typically feedback is not requested other than mentioning that key recipients should reply with any updates or corrections.

I do not plan it formally.

I will ask people regularly if they are happy with the amount of communication. Sometimes they tell me to stop spamming them, and sometimes they say it's OK, or sometimes they want more frequent updates.

Yes - direct conversation (phone, face-to-face), email

Yes, this is expected and you have to have resources/ time for taking care of stakeholders input. Feedback are logged in project diary for a correct handling of any issue.

Yes, by asking the stakeholders face-to-face if you should change the frequency and information in any way. Best way to build trust is by meeting the stakeholders f2f. I do not like pdf, doc and xls format. If you meet f2f you will be sure that the stakeholder had been informed. So important information I always spread by meetings or f2f talk. Then send out MoM for traceability.

I definitely monitor was the message understood (daily on skype) since work is very dependent on results of communication.

Yes. Email or phone call to make sure it was correctly received.

over on mail and short daily meetings

No. Some communication does not require feedback. However, where feedback is required, I use e-mail as it provides an audit trail.

Feedback is not planned, but welcome.

Yes, customer feedback is extremely important, especially since it captures opportunities for improvement, new requirements, may lead to changes which have to be captured in Variation of Orders etc. Equally important is the internal feedback which is necessary before communicating officially to the clients.

Yes, usually discussed at internal meetings in the beginning of the project to outline how feedback will be obtained.
It is confidential.

In our company we have implemented PMO recently

I go out physically into the organization and ask probing questions within a day or two from the communication.

Yes (2 responses)

Not really plan it, but getting on a need basis.

Questioners

The types of persons and customers we work with tend to have a really tight schedule and do not have the time or interest to get back an evaluate each step. Also their needs changes all the time so adaption to new ways to work is a constant. But if something goes wrong there is a need to understand what went wrong.

The only feedback we actively seek is the customer's feedback when delivery is done. During project we mainly communicate what we are asked for unless some necessity pops up. Reason for this is highly hourly-rate of those who are involved in preparing the reports.

No, I ask for it when I need it.

Mail, skype, meetings

Always try to obtain feedback

No not all. Some is for awareness where feedback is possible but not expected or required.

as stated before, it depends on what expectations the stakeholders have and how much information is to be communicated according to the importance of it, if it had to be quick most likely a phone call will be done, but as the same time if the information’s needed are important a mail could be more appropriate as you can keep track of the conversation and keep the relevant data.

No, we use web-based tools

Email, and quick roll call check during project status meetings (if i did not get adequate responses via email).

Generally, some people never have any feedback which we take to mean the information was acceptable, sufficient and necessary for the purpose intended.

No, hasn’t been necessary

No feedback, on my work they are not needed. I just need to reach the gate at the right time and make customer happy

yes, feedback in every project meeting

Communication have different class, not all are important. I like to receive , message read feedback from outlook. For important communication it’s better to have an email with replay deadline date. for urgent ones - Phone call or meeting in person.

If I understand your question correctly from time to time I check with the receivers of the information that they have received it and understood. On meetings I ask questions to check and for development purposes.

Yes, usually via email

No, limited resources

I don’t understand the question, "each communication"? The communication includes hundreds different parts over the time.

Usually I try to get the feedback planned within my Gant's, sine then it’s a deadline to be kept. At least the ones I find important.

Principally yes, but not from each. There will not be time for a manager to perform that. My main channel is to discuss feedback during frequently performed lesson learned meetings.

Requires a confirmation that any information given is OK to proceed with.

No, since we don't use projects anymore. Communication is done using the agile tool.

No, getting feedback when necessary is just part of the task I do and is not pre-defined into a plan.

Yes, after each key milestone event

Yes. Through Customer satisfaction surveys

Yes, with established tools

I use the project management tool to request feedback.

Planning, no. Feedback normally comes naturally anyway.
Send communication with Requests and Deadlines. If not helping: go for line manager of person who
information you are waiting on
Not from every Communication but from the key points
Depending on what is communicated and to whom. If necessary I make an appointment to get it.
Feedback given "live" in telephone meetings
It is usually via email, web meetings, tele calls or personal visits
Yes. For me it is ok if I received feedback via mail or via notes from a meeting.
Through evaluation meetings at the end of the project
E.g. by implementing feedback and Q&A pages on the project portal.
Feedback on reports
The need of feedback depends upon the importance of what you are communicate. E.g. contractual
documents follow a certain process usually with the help of a dedicate software, other communication can be just
by sending E-mail, nevertheless all follow predefined rules.
Some feedback is not required: e.g. Minutes of meetings. Some documents communications must have a
feedback: e.g. Change order requests. We use emails but formal post letters are used in case of contractual
notifications: e.g. Notice of early termination, major schedule deviations due to client responsibility... etc. etc.
Regular project meetings
Normal e-mail works fine as for now.
No, the type of communication etc. is set in an approved communication plan that is considered to be the
standard to use.
Participant evaluations from the events we hold. We have also have regular mail/phone contact with our other
partners
No, too much firefighting.
We do not really have a feedback plan since we are a very small research team, the feedback is that one we get
during the meetings
Yes. E-mails, Telecoms and MoMs.
We usually get any feedback on a reply to status report email, we also use weekly stakeholder meeting to
discuss any improvements to communication
Through direct communication, emails, and surveys.
I schedule time for feedback sessions during the project, and after it has finished
On the planning stage I define the key points when, or key stakeholders from whom it will be essential to get
feedback. I prefer to agree with these key stakeholders on feedback importance and expectations on the planning
stage.
Not applicable
I ask the question itself and perform follow-ups when needed
Check with some key stakeholders that they have received the information in different part of the world
This is not within my projects scope.
Email
Yes, usually we use Jira to get feedback of the active stakeholders.
I do not plan it for all communication channels. I only when I need to obtain feedback for critical
decisions/milestones.

Do you plan communications performance indicators? If no, why? If yes, which indicators and
measurement tools do you use?

No (14 responses)
No, communications is common sense. As long as the client is happy, I'm happy. (They will tell you when
they are not happy!)
There hasn't been a clear need to do this. Communication is not a bottleneck in my projects.
No we don't use the communication performance indicators since it has never occurred to us to use them.
Information has been presented and delivered to stakeholders, seen, necessary feedbacks received and qualified on monthly basis.

No, as not standard in our field area.

No, this is not a part of the process used by my company.

I don’t plan it

I would get fired if I did all this kind of "social studies" behind my projects. If people are unhappy, they can tell me when I ask them, or in meetings, or they know where to find me.

Yes - evaluation at the end of the project

No, the projects are limited in size, I don’t see the benefits in my kind of projects.

Traffic lights, delivery packages and budget burndown chart on steering groups.

That would be too much additional work since I have huge work overload at the moment

No. I’m too new at my position at a new company.

Yes (2 responses)

No. Generally I elicit feedback and to ensure I have met the communications needs of my stakeholders.

Not yet, but I should think about it.

Yes. One of the Project KPI measures the time it takes to respond to customer complaints. The answers and resolutions for the different customer complaints have to be closed within 90 days.

It is confidential.

In our company we have implemented PMO recently

Honestly I haven't found the time for coming up with valid, measurable indicators and as the projects I have run seem to go smoothly so far, this hasn't risen on the priority list.

No, try to stay in touch and get feedback instead

Questioners

No, don't measure. Just use my intuition on how the stakeholders needs are. And if I notice a problem, I deal with it.

We do not have any specific KPIs for communication except for a simple customer survey.

No, we use standard work flow without indicators.

No, no reason to

Performance indicators are hard to use as different stakeholders view them in various ways

Kind of analyze and adapt as the Projects run.

No, usually don't have the time to measure the communications performance, in my case I think quickly adapt/adjust if I see that one channel is not working well enough, or efficiently enough

We measure how much our network grow every month

No, I have never gotten to this detail.

No, hasn’t been necessary

No, the information coming from my side don' need a performance indicator because it is a one way info

No, I haven't thought about this but it would be good

Not yet done

No. Just bring up feedback on the way and add to Lesson learned.

no, so far there has been no requirements to use such indicators

Yes we have a programme for that

No, I have not familiarized myself with this yet.

No, I believe that will bring the issue not necessary deep.

No, Do not know ... have not been introduced to this "tool"...

No. We measure only the developed result.

No, because there is usually not enough time to do it with so many projects at the same time. What I do is, during the lessons learned review, try to figure out how effective the communication was based on project results.
and what was good or wrong (not as objective as indicators but still)

Sales Revenue, Cost Per Lead, Customer Value, Budget management, etc.

No, I have never used this.

No. I currently do too small projects for this.

No. It’s not necessary for now.

No - this is measured elsewhere and not part of my task.

No. Why?

No, feedback is ad hoc and informal.

No. I do not need to.

The only indicator that I have is that the customer is satisfied in a verbal or written way.

No, mainly due to time shortage or/and constraints.

Feedback on reports

No. The success of a project depends largely of the communication, however there are others key indicators that will give us an indirect feedback regarding the efficiency of the communications.

It is no planned. We do not measure the effectiveness of the communications, rather we measure the efficiency of use of man-hours to achieve milestones.

No, limited resources

Haven't seen the need for it (yet).

No, this has not been asked for.

When people apply to our events we ask where they heard from us.

No, too much firefighting.

Because we have seen that communication is not a problem in our team since we are between 10-15 persons, for sure is important to measure the communication level but is not our priority right now.

No. I use key performance indicators for each department to check the general performance of my projects.

Yes. Externally: only the progress and changes.

We usually cover this as part of project retrospective meeting.

Business Intelligence Dashboards

No, we do not use any indicators and measurement tools to measure communication performance.

I do not plan, but usually project implementation process analysis reveals communication failures.

Not applicable.

Since I ask the question directly I see the performance indicators.

No, have not thought about it.

This is not within my projects scope.

Work package

No, currently not in that phase of project management.

No. Not needed.

Which aspects of planning project communications do you consider to be the main challenges in building effective project communications? (Other aspects)

Make formal agreements on communication process for the full project

Create a communications plan

Do you have comments left? Or wish to give project communications planning tips or share more information, which was not covered in the survey? Please, feel free to express your thoughts – they are very important for us.

Plan for when things breakdown. I have had a breakdown in communications and it was not pretty! You must re-build this bridge as quickly and effectively as possible- it can threaten the entire project.
Project Management roles can vary greatly within the same company or even the department. There are project managers for customer logistic projects, IT improvement projects, product development projects, etc. These all have varying degrees of "business criticality", and whether stakeholders are in the same team, department, or company.

In my specific role, stakeholders are knowledgeable about departmental jargon and what is needed from them at the start of a project. Therefore it would actually be more costly to implement a formal communication plan instead of focusing on the project tasks and using experience as a guide for communicating.

For the projects with the stakeholder quantity more than 15, there have to be at least 2 project coordinator (project communication manager) roles assigned to separate people reporting to project manager, who validates and shares with the project team the communication plan at the planning phase (before the project running actually starts).

Any plan should be practical as much as possible and adopted according to project size and needs. I saw projects with great formal plans, which didn’t follow them and projects with no formal plans, but great communications established.

I think we should try not to over-emphasize methodology (and/or formal planning) for projects. Some people believe in process, others in delivery. People believing in process tend to love methodologies/formal planning, because they can always say they have done everything according to the "rules" laid out by the methodology, and so they are in the clear, even if the project never gets delivered. This is often the case in government or other non-commercial organizations. Projects cost a lot more than necessary but at least all the rules were followed. People focusing on delivery often skip much of the methodology and work based on their experience and gut-feel. If they are organized and systematic, they can work that way and deliver projects quicker and cheaper. This is more often found in commercial environments.

I encourage you to study the communications subject, but I hope you don't get too focused on creating bureaucratic and/or formal processes around it - there is too much process and paperwork in project management already, much of the time. All the best.

In reality you will never have time to spend on planning and create a lot of documents described in project management frameworks. In real life you will get a bunch of resources that waits to start implementing project requirements and the main subject is to get them the tools they need so they can start development. If you spend time on creating a lot of documents described in the frameworks you will lose pace of development and you might fail the project objectives. In fact, the only one reading those documents are yourself. People are too busy with other stuff. Also, too many high level managers in your steering group will make it impossible for you to book meetings with them because they do not have time in their calendar. Then you might need to wait 3 weeks for an urgent meeting and then you will risk the entire project delivery.

Different understanding of same information between people (through different perspectives because of different nationality, cultural difference, age, language - can be potential barrier.

I believe I personally have a skill with communication which has let me get away with taking shortcuts in the communications planning, or at least the documentation of it. For whatever reason (intelligent and experienced colleagues, possibly good communications skills on my part etc) people seem to understand and get it right the first time.

I think early follow-up on the information sent is a key success factor - if PMs personally followed up more on the receiving of their communication I believe project teams would tend to take it more seriously and also give good instant feedback. As project work is the work of a team effective communication, in my opinion, is the most important single success factor in project management.

I think I come from a very different direction I come from the uni-world (where there is no strategies what so ever) and work today towards start-ups and small companies and some large in-house projects. So I wouldn't say I even know how or have read about communication plans. But many of the companies I work with comes from these kind of environments (larger corporations) but even though I tend to feel that they work more agile and with less planning over all since these smaller entities does well in a creative chaos style but of course with a set goal and a rough idea of what needs to be done. And this is also true for the communications part, you kind of more wing it and adapt in a daily manner to new needs.

It is hard to answer this types of questions since I do not really work according to models or what you read in books. I work in a more intuitive way based on long experience. Every project is unique and it all comes down to people. I use minimum amount of planning tools and keep close contact with my stakeholders, in a personal manner. It is enough with a Gantt chart and the office package for me to run my projects and deliver on time and on budget.
To me as a PM for about 20 years and hired to lecture on the topic for about 15 years in many countries, I always stress that 90% of what we do as PM's is communicate. A lot of people think that Project Management is about Project Schedules, tasks and Daily meetings, but that has no value at all if it is only on paper and we cannot get the team, stakeholders, steering groups etc. onboard.

We have a long experience and have worked together for a long time. Then planning is less important because everyone knows what to do.

Communication is very important, not only towards stakeholders but also from management team to the project management team, especially the project manager. A large part of management is all about the quality and frequency of communication. I started one of my projects very badly because of inadequate clarity from management on what the exact objectives were. No matter how good a PM is, he needs direction and clarity as he and his team are also key stakeholders in the project and success or otherwise often depends directly on them.

Very important in Communication is to keep it simple and clear to the point, provide more details if needed. no one has time to read huge mail or documents.

The most essential is to make things correct from start. That means to 100% clearly define all communication needs already in the drawing up of the tender. Trying to fix communication problems after a contract will cause loss of money and time.

The project manager MUST be involved already in the tender phase!!

As project manager, I have the role of always asking questions every time there are uncertainties/issues where there is no obvious answer. Or in cases where certain issues are so obvious that it failed to define ownership i.e. who owns the question/task.

The project communication management processes provides the critical links among people and information that are necessary for successful communications.

Projects (at least in my work) is much more diverse than this (or any) survey covers - and hence, the way the Communication is planned and run is also very diverse. The Communication issue is about way more than the planning - that's merely a skeleton to start with. So many other aspects matter.

On time, on budget, in scope it is not very relevant. Projects must be delivered according to expectations. time, budget, scope are only formal reasons for stakeholders to tell why the project failed. If a project is a success it is Always because expectations are met (which does not mean it is within time, budget and scope)

Regarding the communication around different projects it is difficult to give answers in a survey like this. Some projects do not need to have a communication, but for other projects it is extremely important (i.e. M&A projects, system- and organizational changes). If we look at a communication plan regarding an acquisition or a divestment it is very important to have a communication plan.

Might be useful for this study the corporation of the different software we can find in the market to supervise, save and manage the communication between the stakeholders.

How many of your projects were completed on time, within the budget and primary scope? (approximate per cent) : this is not easy to answer. There are scope changes and are inevitable. With scope changes the project suffer delays which are accepted by the client.

How often your project outcomes were worsen because of poor communications planning? (approximate per cent of your projects): Project failure is a combination of factors. It is not possible to say that is due to poor communications however communications are always playing an important role on projects. Same applies to the last question on this page.

The projects I work with is not typical projects - most of them are in a development phase.

The questions seemed a little hard to understand from our own organization. We host events on a regular basis and a big one on an annual basis (can be good to keep into consideration when reading). The key stakeholders we communicate with are our partners, our sponsors and our participants.

Interesting research questions you have. Project Management discipline is pretty solid in every aspect, but once you enter working life as, possibly, a PM one day you'll notice that common sense is the most effective power tool in a vast majority of cases.

The internal communication amongst the project team members is the most important factor. As a project manager it is your duty to make sure that everyone in the team is communicating at the same level. Communication makes the team members understand the nature of the project better and hence give them more confidence in themselves. Working with clinical trials requires continuous communication with the sponsors and vendors, deadlines have to be met, so if communication is missing then the whole project fails.