Project Communications

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Introduction

The Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) defines a project as a temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product, service or result (2013). Project communications management includes the processes that are required to ensure timely and appropriate planning, collection, creation, distribution, storage, retrieval, management, control, monitoring and the ultimate disposition of project information (PMI, 2013). For the purpose of this paper the focus will be on various ways effective communication leads to project success, skills and competencies needed to create effective communication, and how to keep track and apply various lessons learned. These topics will be a reflection of subject matter learned during PMGT 502. A summary of all discussions will be provided.

Effective Communication

There are many ways that effective communication in project management can lead to project success. The one that stood out from the rest throughout PMGT 502 was stakeholder communication management. The project manager should work directly with the customers or clients to ensure they are receiving the information they require. This upfront planning, and working with the clients or customers to understand exactly their needs will help to ensure effective communications between the two parties (Dow & Taylor, 2008). There is a reason why the PMBOK has dedicated an entire section to stakeholder management.

Stakeholder management focuses on continuous communication with stakeholders to understand their needs and expectations, addressing issues as they occur, managing conflicting interests and fostering appropriate stakeholder engagement in project decisions and activities (PMI, 2013). Everyone understands and agrees that without support of the project stakeholders the project will ultimately fail. It's imperative to be able to effectively communicate with your

stakeholders because of this. There are many ways to do this, but one document provides a road map to success. PMBOK Chapter 13 is your one stop shop on how to accomplish this.

There are four sections that comprise stakeholder management. The first section, identify stakeholders, discusses the processes used to figure out who the stakeholders are. This is accomplished by pulling data from the project charter, procurement documents, organizational processes, and any environmental factors that may influence the project. A tool to help with this process is, stakeholder analysis. Stakeholder analysis is a technique of systematically gathering and analyzing quantitative and qualitative information to determine whose inputs should be taken into account throughout the project (PMI, 2013). You can then compile the information gained into a stakeholder register that can be used to identify, assess and classify the project stakeholders.

The second section, plan stakeholder management, is the meat and potatoes of how to communicate with your stakeholders. The key benefit to this process is that it provides a clear, actionable plan to interact with project stakeholders to support projects interests (PMI, 2013). Stakeholder management goes beyond normal lines of communication by creating a process of developing relationships and how to maintain those relationships between the project team and the stakeholder. The goal should be to satisfy each stakeholder's needs and requirements within the scope of the project. This process is critical to managing expectations and achieving project objectives.

The final sections are, manage and control stakeholder engagement. These sections define how to physically communicate with the stakeholder in order to foster appropriate stakeholder engagement throughout the project lifecycle. The key benefit of this process is that it allows the project manager to increase support and minimize resistance from stakeholders,

significantly increasing the chances to achieve project success; as well as it will maintain or increase the efficiency and effectiveness of stakeholder engagement activities as the project evolves (PMI, 2013). This is how the project manager will select the best communication methods to be utilized for each stakeholder. You can then, based on stakeholder inputs, determine the format and frequency of communication. This will tailor you communication to each stakeholder and help ensure project success.

Skills and Competencies

There are many skills and competencies that need to be developed in order to create effective communication strategies in project management. Some of those skills and competencies that were covered in PMGT 502 included face-to-face communication and virtual communications. One of the most challenging aspects of being a project manager is project communications management. As projects become complex and more challenging, project managers need to step up and become effective communicators (Dow & Taylor, 2008). Honing and refining communication skills will enable you take on the challenges presented in managing a project.

One skill a project manager should work to develop is face-to-face communication. This entails conversing in person, with at least two people discussing something. Project managers should try to establish face-to-face communications with each project team member on a regular basis. These individual sessions will help enhance the overall group session that is held when the project manager leads the regular scheduled status meetings (Dow & Taylor, 2008). This method of communication will help to develop rapport and build relationship connections, hopefully reducing conflicts or escalations that may arise.

Besides building rapport, face-to-face communications also help to establish credibility and professional friendships. Like trust, earning credibility and respect occurs between the parties over time, and as people continue to meet commitments and expectations of the parties this respect comes more quickly (Dow & Taylor, 2008). After you have built rapport and credibility, often a working friendship evolves between team members or stakeholders. This can enhance the power and influence you will have over your projects through the course of your career as a project manager. You cannot assign a dollar value to the benefits of using face-to-face communications (Dow & Taylor, 2008).

In today's age of information technology and social media, the need to be competent in using virtual communications is paramount. The project management profession is clearly changing, moving away from boardroom meetings and group gatherings, and favoring virtual project teams at various sites around the world (Dow & Taylor, 2008). While many might think not having to conduct in person meetings and group gatherings would be a blessing, the truth is communicating to a virtual team is much more challenging. These communication challenges include time zones, language barriers, resource challenges, obtaining the right skill sets, cost challenges (exchange rates changing), adding additional team members to bridge the gap between the two countries, and scheduling and quality challenges where team members are not able to fulfill the needs of the project (Dow & Taylor, 2008). With the right tools and techniques, these challenges can be overcome.

Some techniques you can use to increase your skill level at dealing with virtual teams include understanding how to manage a virtual team, how to motivate your team, consistent communication, communication guidelines, and knowing your team members qualifications. When managing your team using the following will help in a virtual environment; create good

team dynamics, keep tasks short for early success, ensure project team members have work and increased responsibility as appropriate. To motivate your team hold morale events. Morale events are great pick-me-up events where the team members get together, can relax, chat about nonbusiness related topics, and get to know one another in a relaxed environment (Dow & Taylor, 2008) Knowing your team members, being consistent in communicating with them and have established standards will all contribute to enhancing your skill set with leading a virtual team.

Lessons Learned

There are many ways to keep tracked of lessons learned. At my work place we conduct a formal debrief where we create a timeline of events and discuss the good and bad of each major event. We then document those lessons and share some of the most important with the rest of our work place a meeting once a month. During PMGT 502 we discussed various ways to accomplish this as well. One of these methods was the creation of a lessons learned document.

Lessons learned documentation includes the root cause analysis of issues faced, reasoning behind the corrective action chosen, and other types of lessons learned about stakeholder management. (PMI, 2013). On major difference from my work place and documenting lessons learned for a project, is that you want to document throughout the project life cycle not just at the completion. A best-practice technique that is starting to gain popularity is the collection of the lessons learned information during the life of the project (Dow & Taylor, 2008). Starting at the project kick-off meeting you should begin to gather the issues your team faces and store them in a central database accessible by everyone. You should strive to continue this process weekly and use data collected to be briefed at each subsequent meeting.

Each week, continue this process, capturing exactly what went right, what went wrong from each team member. At the end of the project, compile the information into a final presentation (Dow & Taylor, 2008). You can lead the discussion around the lessons learned information from past projects or even weeks on the current project to ensure that the team is not repeating the same mistakes (PMI, 2013). This process will greatly enhance your team's knowledge base on what to do and not to do while managing a project. When you are reviewing lessons learned information from past projects, you are personally gaining a wealth of knowledge from the last project manager and their team members on the events of a previous project that would not normally be available (Dow & Taylor, 2008).

There are major benefits to be had by sharing lessons learned. One of the advantages of sharing lessons learned information is the positive impact that information can have on your project. Sharing these past experiences and the specific knowledge that team members gained allows the next project to benefit greatly (Dow & Taylor, 2008). Discussing and comprehending previous lesson learned at the begging of your project will enable your team to reduce the chances of repeating the same mistakes on your current project. When managing a second iteration of a project, you should be clear on how the other efforts occurred and at the minimum be aware of the major issues or concerns within those other projects (Dow & Taylor, 2008). One of the primary reasons to study history is to learn from our past.

When conducting a review of past project lessons learned you should be sure to share information that relates to budget, schedule, resources, risks and issues. You should always want to know how previous projects were budgeted; what worked, what didn't. Schedule information is beneficial by comparing and contrasting past projects to your current one to see if similarities exist that might show if your project will make its completion date or not. Seeing how resources

were allocated, whether positive or negative, can help you determine how to distribute your own resources. Understand the previous project's risks and issues and try to eliminate the chances of those reoccurring on your project (Dow & Taylor, 2008).

Summary

Communication in project management needs to have timely and appropriate planning, collection, creation, distribution, storage, retrieval, management, control, monitoring and disposition of project information. By effectively communicating to your project team and stakeholders you will set your project up to achieve its communication requirements. Keeping yourself and your team member's communication skills and competencies current, well-practiced and relevant, will enable effective communication. Reading and documenting lessons learned from pervious and current projects will lead to prevention of repeating past mistakes and being able utilize proven techniques. PMGT 502 has given me the knowledge, skills and confidence to be an effective communicator within the project management career field.

References

Project Management Institute (PMI) (2013). *A guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK guide), fifth edition* (5th ed.). Newtown Square, Pa.: Project Management Institute.

William Dow & Bruce Taylor. (2008). *Project Communications Bible.* Wiley Publishing, Inc.