

Project communications

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PMG112

Lecture 5



Lecture

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Section

01

Managing communications



Without a sufficient project communication plan, it's impossible to keep all responsible parties up-to-date on the changing status of the project. There's a lack of transparency which eventually leads to inefficient, counterproductive decisions that will hinder the aims of the project in question.



What is “managing communications”?

Managing communications is “the process of ensuring timely and appropriate collection, creation, distribution, storage, retrieval, management, monitoring, and the ultimate disposition of project information.”

What is “managing communications”?

Among the project team, we need to make sure that everyone who is working on the project is kept informed—that they have the information they need for successful completion of their assigned tasks and deliverables.

Outside the project team, we need to ensure that stakeholders are also well informed—that they have the information they need to stay up-to-date and continue to support the project, or move from being unaware or resisting the project to a more supportive position.

In other words

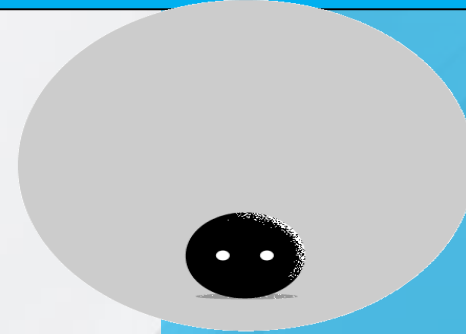
From a broad perspective, managing communications on a project means ensuring that the project communications management plan is being executed. In practice, managing communications starts with managing your conversations with all stakeholders.

Ideally, your interactions end by accomplishing at least one of the following:

Providing information needed to support the role of the person/group or their project needs

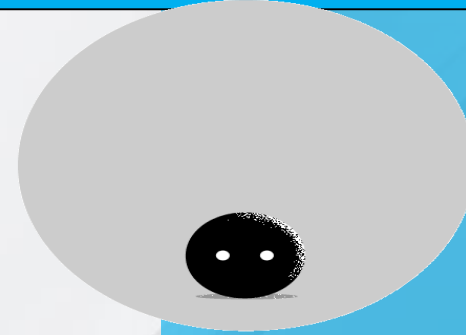
Reducing their uncertainty about the project, their role, or others involved in the project

Building their trust in the project's goals, plan, and participants



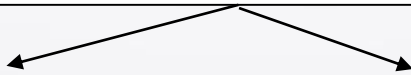
How do you effectively manage conversations?

Through DDI's years of extensive study and research, they found that "people come to work with both practical needs (to get work done) and personal needs (to be respected and valued)." The same is true with project teams. Team members are focused on getting the work done to achieve the project objective (practical needs) and to know that they are valued contributors and integral key members to the project team (personal needs).



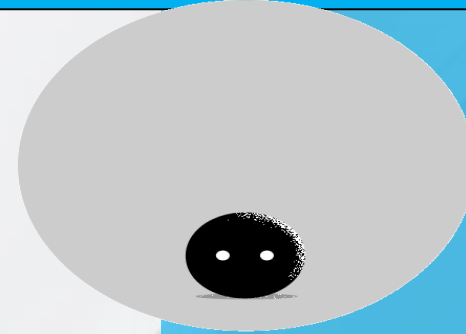
How do you effectively manage conversations?

The skills used to meet the personal and practical needs in our communications are called “Interaction Essentials”.



Personal Needs

Practical Needs



Personal Needs

By maintaining or enhancing self-esteem, we are managing communications by reassuring team members that they have the necessary expertise to be part of the team, by giving praise for doing a great job, or suggesting a better way of working.

To maintain self-esteem, we would have fact-based discussions, focus on the problem (not the person), and show our respect and support.

Self-esteem

Personal Needs



Self-esteem

“Joe, you have the most knowledge about the problem on this project. This project is very important to our customers. We really need your expertise in handling this situation.”

Personal Needs

To enhance self-esteem, we would focus on recognizing great ideas and key contributions. This is an opportunity to build and show confidence in the project team member or stakeholder. In order to do this, we must be specific and sincere.

To maintain self-esteem, we would have fact-based discussions, focus on the problem (not the person), and show our respect and support.

Self-esteem

Personal Needs



Self-esteem

“Sally, great job in speaking up today at the project team meeting to express your concerns with the project schedule. You are correct. It is very aggressive. I really appreciate your ongoing contributions to the team.”

Personal Needs

By listening and responding with empathy, we are managing communications to build understanding, address the positive and negative emotions, and show that we care about others' feelings while working with the facts.

Empathy

Personal Needs



Empathy

“Maria, now that we have developed the project plan together, what are your thoughts? What does project success look like for you?”

Personal Needs

By asking for help and encouraging involvement, we are managing communications to seek ideas, ask for help, get commitment, and really be involved with the project and working together as a team. This is an opportunity to ask open-ended questions.

Involvement

Personal Needs



Empathy

“Brian, I know this is a very large, complex project. You might be feeling a bit overwhelmed with doing all this project work, as well as getting your regular work done.”

Personal Needs

By sharing our thoughts, feelings, and rationale, we are managing communications to build trust. Trust is everything when it comes to working as a high-performing project team. To build trust, we must share our feelings, have open and honest communications, and discuss “why” decisions, changes, or actions are taken. The benefit of sharing is building relationships.

Share

Personal Needs



Share

“I understand how you are feeling. I had a similar experience working on a large, complex project, and worried about getting my regular work done. By developing a simple time management system, I scheduled time in my calendar to do project work, and time for my operations work. It worked for me. It might also work for you.”

Personal Needs

By providing support without removing responsibility, we are managing communications to build ownership. In managing projects, everything is “owned” by someone. When you own a task or responsibility, you are more likely to see it to completion and be successful. As the project manager, it is your responsibility to provide the necessary resources to help team members get their project tasks done and remove any obstacles that get in their way. With support, you are building confidence in others to be successful.

Support

Personal Needs



Support

“What can I do to help you? What is in your way of getting the project done? Perhaps there are some barriers that I can remove for you to be successful.”

Why these principles are important

Using these five key principles—self-esteem, empathy, involvement, share, and support—in managing project communications ensures that the personal needs of your project team and stakeholders are being addressed. That they feel “valued, respected, and understood.”

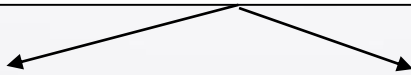
How will you know their personal needs?

For the project team, we suggest simply asking each team member.

For outside stakeholders, we suggest identifying their needs during stakeholder analysis and documenting them in your stakeholder register as part of knowing your audience.

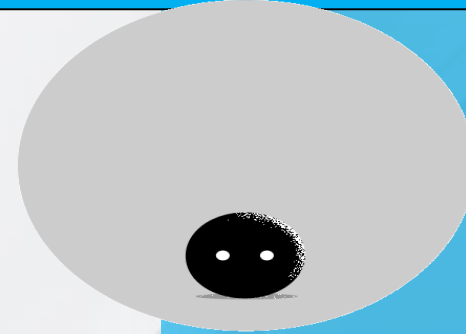
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Personal Needs

Practical Needs



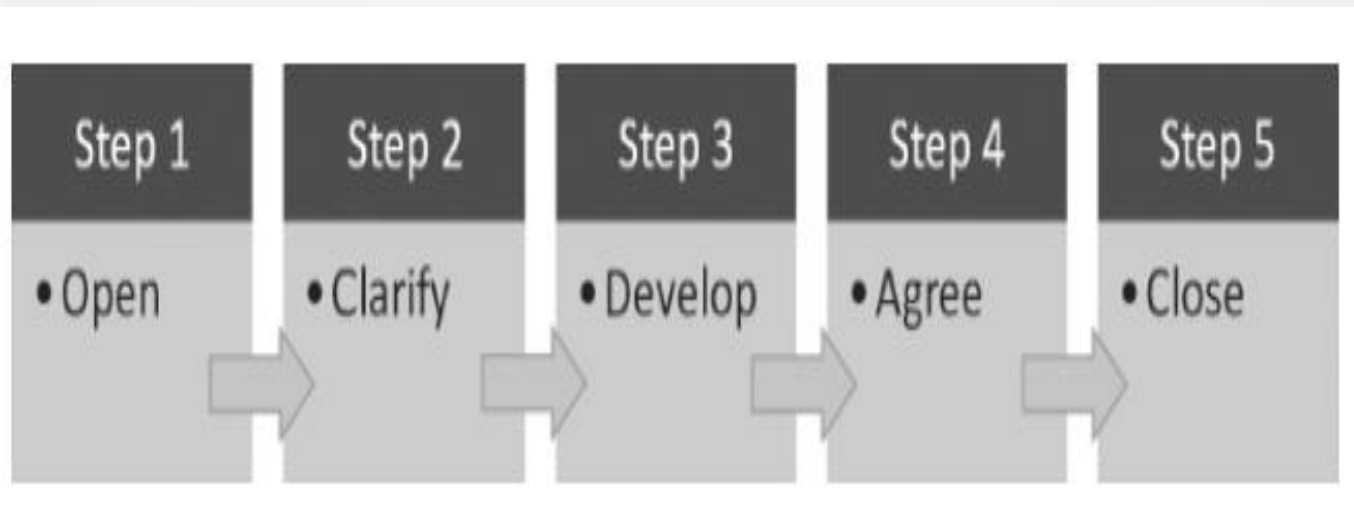
Practical needs

A “five-step conversation roadmap” called the Interaction Guidelines. Consider it as “a vehicle to frame conversations in a quick, logical, and thorough way—from start to finish—to cover all the specific information people need” on the project.



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Practical Needs

In order to have effective communications and conversations, there needs to be a structure to address the practical needs of individuals and stakeholders.

It can be used with any conversation or interaction—any time—with anyone associated with the project. To meet the practical needs and to ensure that you have addressed all items that need discussing, the five steps in the Interaction Guidelines provide an excellent framework to follow.

When to use this approach?

Practical Needs

Open

The first step is OPEN. In this step, we address what the objective of this conversation is, and why it is important.

Just like a “project objective,” you could consider this step as your “communication objective.” This is an opportunity to “open the dialogue.”

Practical Needs



Open

Today, I would like to hear your thoughts on how the team will achieve the project objective for the new accounting system. This new system will reduce our invoicing time by 30 days, and accelerate receiving customer payments.

Practical Needs

Clarify

In this step, we are gathering information by seeking details and sharing data about the project problem.

This is an opportunity to ask questions, to identify roadblocks, and reveal any concerns.

This step is essential for establishing clarity and gaining mutual understanding.

Practical Needs



Clarify

We both agree that this is a very difficult project, and must be delivered on time, within budget, and according to project specifications. So let's look at the facts that we have. I don't want to miss anything.

Practical Needs

Develop

In this step, we are developing ideas, leveraging our creativity, utilizing the expertise of others, and discussing what resources and support are needed to make these ideas a reality.

This is an opportunity for you (as the project manager) to also share your ideas and suggestions.

Practical Needs



Develop

In order to achieve the project objective, we really need a high-performing project team. I would like to hear your ideas on this. What do you think it will take to be a high-performing team, and what additional resources do you think are needed?

Practical Needs

Agree

In this step, we are putting together our action plan with specific dates, details, and alternatives if needed.

This is an opportunity to show commitment and how progress on the action plan will be tracked.

Practical Needs



Agree

So let's agree to meet every Monday morning at 9 a.m. to review the action plan together, and make any necessary adjustments. I will send a calendar request for our weekly meetings.

Practical Needs

Close

In this step, we want to summarize the important items that have been discussed, and to provide our support and encouragement.

This is an opportunity to build confidence and trust.

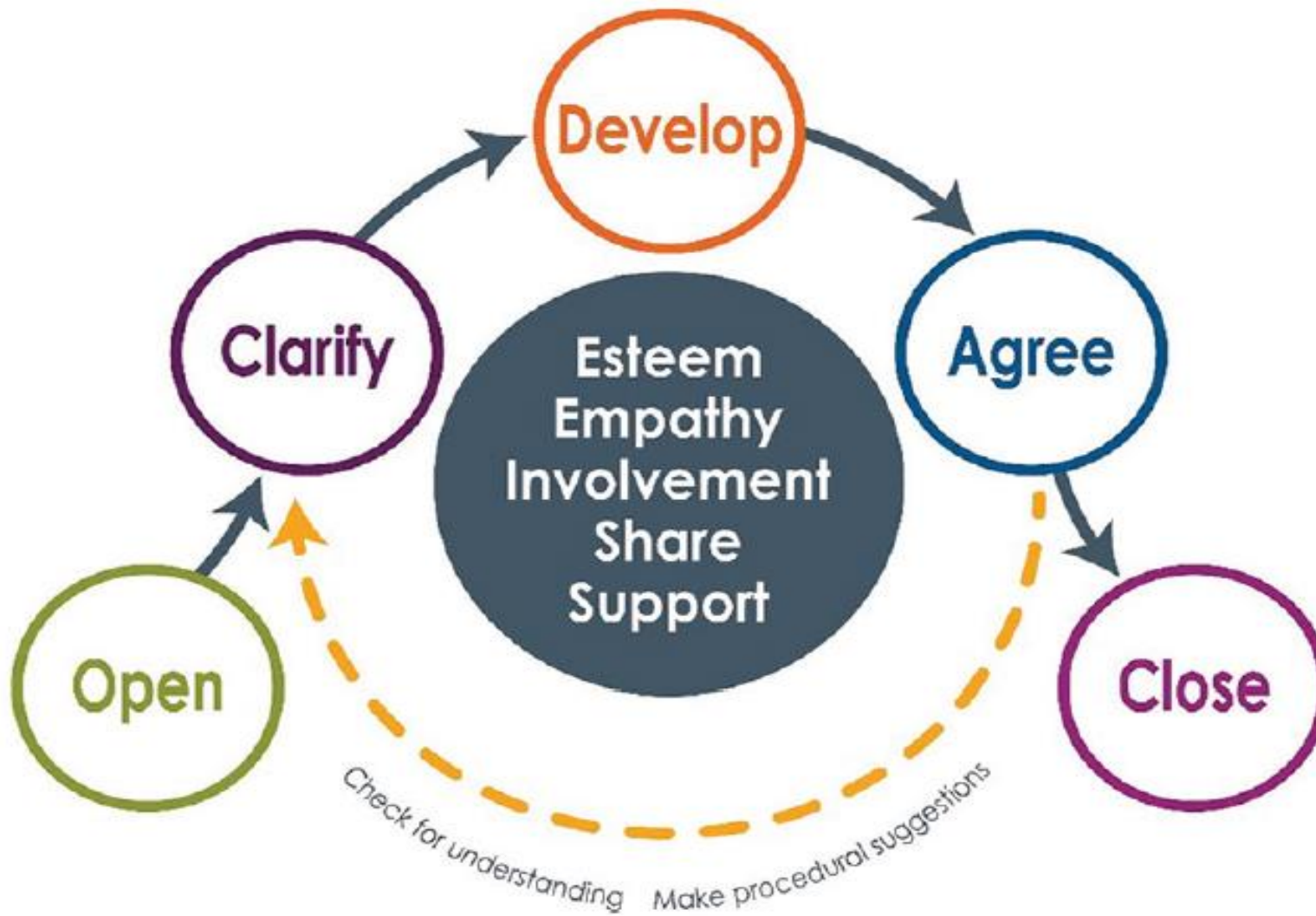
Practical Needs



Close

Let's recap what we have decided. Do you have any questions? I have complete trust and confidence in you. I know that you will do an excellent job on this. You are the right person to handle this difficult situation.

Personal & Practical Needs



Section

02

Monitoring communications





Does Monitoring and controlling the same thing?

Monitoring communications occurs in the monitoring and controlling process group. the Control Communications process was eliminated since there are many things outside the purview of the project team that they cannot control, such as when, how, where, or why people communicate.

However, there are still some elements of control in communicating on projects. While we may not be able to control everything — like when and how stakeholders communicate—we can control our reaction, attitude, approach, and response to their communications.

During monitoring communications

Providing continuous oversight is necessary to constantly be aware of the communication taking place throughout the project, whether it is communicating about project status, activities, or results, or keeping stakeholders current with project information.

Over the life of the project, we should also seek opportunities to make improvements in our communications, processes, and environment. This can be done through feedback, surveys, ongoing conversations, etc.— various ways where we are asking for (and using) the valuable inputs and diverse perspectives of others.

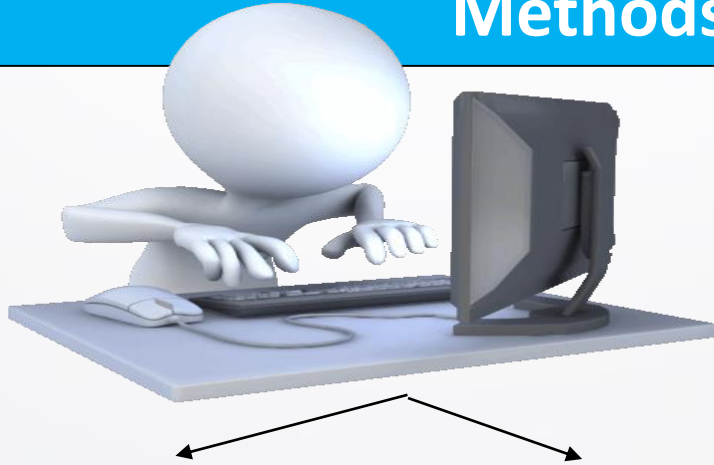
During monitoring communications

The project communications management plan should be revisited regularly and revised as needed. When the team receives input on implementing more effective ways of communicating with stakeholders, the project communications management plan should be updated to reflect this improved way of working.

During monitoring communications

And finally, we need to deliver project information in a way that influences and inspires, that reduces uncertainty and builds trust, and that grows the project knowledge and support of individuals and groups interested in our project at all levels, both inside and outside the organization.

Methods of Monitoring Communications



Measure the effectiveness of Your project communications

Incorporate Feedback loops

Measure the effectiveness of Your project communications

Peter Drucker, well known for his innovative thinking in the way we do business, is often quoted as saying, “What gets measured gets managed.”

What actions do we take when things aren't working?

Great questions. Communication is known for being difficult to measure, as it is hard to prove a cause–effect relationship between communication and action. However, let's see if we can take a closer look at measuring the effectiveness of our project communications with helpful steps that we can take as project managers, team members, and project sponsors.

Measure the effectiveness of Your project communications

Before you start evaluating the effectiveness of your project communication, you need to determine

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What

How

When

Measure the effectiveness of Your project communications

What

are you measuring? What are the criteria for the measurement?

Start with the outcome you desire to achieve. The purpose of your project communications is to keep all stakeholders informed so that the project progresses smoothly and ultimately achieves its objectives.

Measure the effectiveness of Your project communications

What

are you measuring? What are the criteria for the measurement?

Different elements of your project communications management plan will do this in different ways. Stand-up meetings are meant to keep the team informed.

Status reports keep stakeholders outside the project team apprised of progress. When deciding what to measure, revisit the specific goals of each tactic in your project communications management plan.

Measure the effectiveness of Your project communications

How

Will you measure it?

Usage data: Technology applications lend themselves most readily to quantitative measures. Intranet sites can track analytics on who is using the site, how often, and for how long.

E-mail marketing applications can track open and click-through rates.

Measure the effectiveness of Your project communications

How

Will you measure it?

Online collaboration tools can track which team members are most active and where the most conversations are happening. Correlating this data with project deliverables and deadlines can potentially show areas where communications are, or are not, accomplishing the desired objectives.

Surveys: If you want to know if communications are working for the people who receive them, just ask. Surveys can range from simple feedback questions that provide qualitative and/or anecdotal information to more formal surveys with quantitative results.

Measure the effectiveness of Your project communications

How

Will you measure it?

Planned versus actual communications: Your project communications management plan should outline your different communication tactics and how often you plan to use them—for example, status reports will be sent every 2 weeks.

Measure how closely you are keeping to the plan and compare that with other project outputs. As with usage data, you may be able to correlate your communication efforts with positive or negative aspects of the project's progress.

Measure the effectiveness of Your project communications

When

Will you measure it?

It is a good idea to start measuring early, and then measure frequently throughout the life of the project. If you don't discover until the end of the project that your communications were ineffective, you have missed an opportunity—and possibly hindered your project's success in the process.

If your initial findings lead you to make changes to what or how you communicate, then measure again to ensure that the changes you made have actually improved your project communications.

Feedback Loops

The feedback part of the process occurs in reverse, with the receiver responding to the sender to ensure that he/she actually understood what you intended to communicate.

Why is it important?

It verifies that what you intended to communicate is what is actually understood by the receiver. Whether you are the sender or receiver of the message, one essential element in feedback is closure. Too often, there are items left unacknowledged, unclear, or unresolved in a conversation or interaction.

Feedback Loops

The feedback part of the process occurs in reverse, with the receiver responding to the sender to ensure that he/she actually understood what you intended to communicate.

Why is it important?

It provides crystal clear that the subject has been closed, agreed upon, and next steps decided. This is why Step 5 (Close) in the conversation guidelines outlined earlier in this chapter is so important

Feedback Loops

The feedback part of the process occurs in reverse, with the receiver responding to the sender to ensure that he/she actually understood what you intended to communicate.

How to ask feedbacks?

According to Tom Peters, coauthor of In Search of Excellence, the “four most important words in management are.... “what do you think?”

Feedback Loops

The feedback part of the process occurs in reverse, with the receiver responding to the sender to ensure that he/she actually understood what you intended to communicate.

Why to ask feedbacks?

It provides space for team members or stakeholders to address any remaining uncertainties they may have, and/or confirm their understanding of your message.

It helps build trust by demonstrating that you value their personal and practical needs and want to ensure they are addressed by your message.

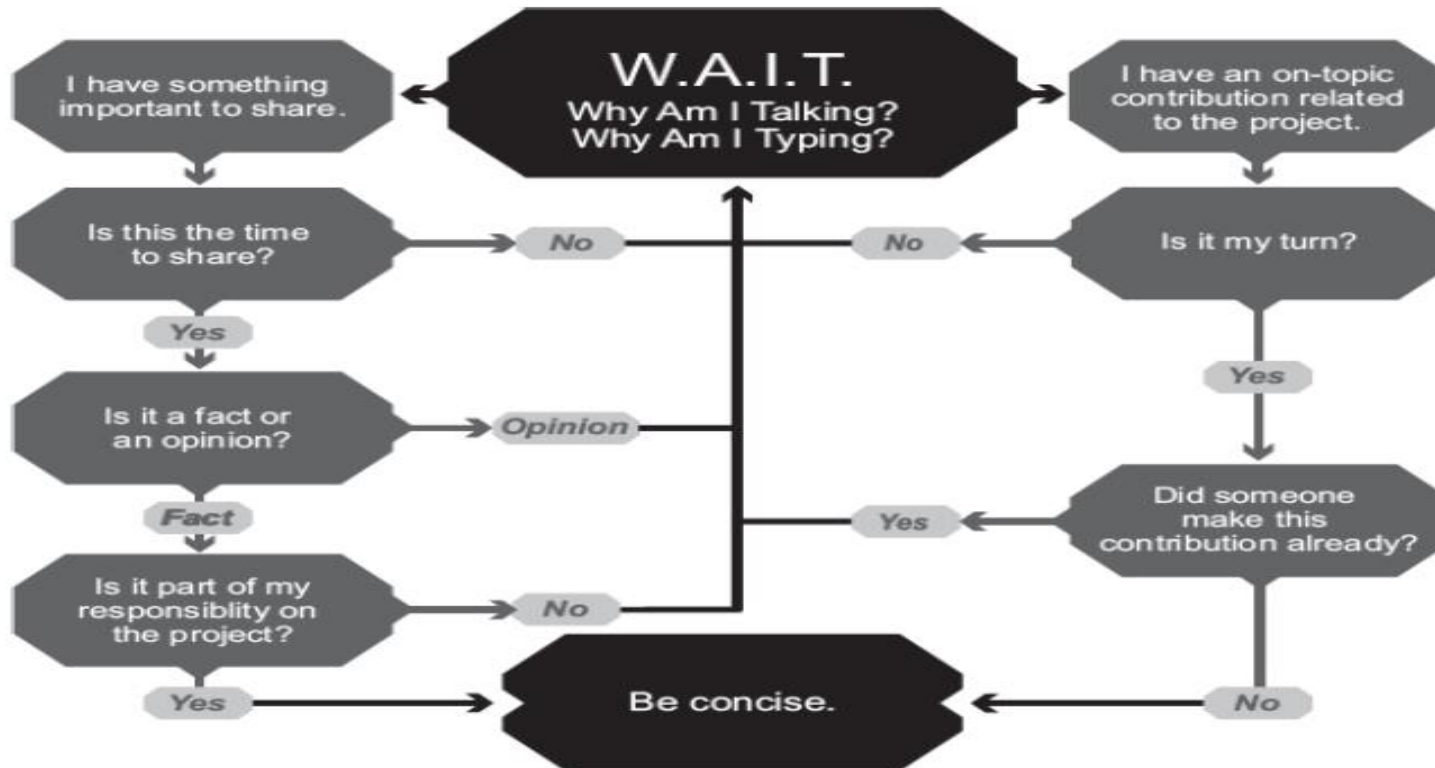
Feedback Loops

Feedback from yourself

Finally, when engaging in a conversation or electronic exchange, check in with yourself using your own internal feedback loop. How can you be sure you are communicating what matters? Ask yourself: Am I adding value to this discussion? Is it a fact or my opinion? Is it relevant to the topic? Has someone already said this, and I am just repeating what someone else said?

Feedback Loops

Feedback from yourself



Section
02

Putting it into practice



For traditional Teams

Managing and monitoring project communicationsTraditional
project
teams

- Introduce the five-step approach to managing conversations to your project team. Conduct role-playing activities where each team member has the chance to be on the giving and receiving end of the conversation.
- Set a feedback requirement with your team that all communications from other team members or stakeholders must be acknowledged within a set time limit (e.g., 24 hours). After 2 weeks, meet with the team and ask them to share the results and impact of using this technique.
- Set up a reward system—gold stars on a publicly displayed board, points toward meaningful prizes, etc.—for team members who ask, “What do you think?”

For Virtual Teams

Managing and monitoring project communications

Virtual
project
teams

- Virtual teams often use technology-based collaboration tools that provide analytics on usage. Find out the most active people and workstreams, and ask those team members why they are so active. Challenge less active team members or working groups to communicate more.
- Develop a brief survey about communications on your current project, and send it to your stakeholders. In reviewing the results, take note of why some stakeholders may be more satisfied with project communications than others.
- Post lessons learned in a searchable database with easy access for everyone. Organize content by categories with similar items grouped together for ease of reference.



Thank You