

The Quintessential Guide to Project Communications

or

“Everything I Need to Know about Communications I Learned from *Star Trek*”

Kathie York

Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University

Another version of this paper is available elsewhere in this portfolio. However, this is my favorite copy. The assignment was to present our views on what we felt is the most important element in project management. In my opinion, communication is most significant since everything stems from the proper exchange of information.

As Project Managers, we can have the perfect charter in hand and plan to the n^{th} degree, but if we do not communicate continually with the stakeholders ... what was the point?

I hope you enjoy this paper. It was interesting to incorporate new information, rework it, and approach it from a different angle. This is especially true since, in a serendipitous moment, I was able to interview an out-of-state driver who traveled through this work area in 2003.

That was a pleasant surprise. Have fun!

Abstract

The author recently listened to an interview with Nichelle Nichols (Lt. Uhura on the original *Star Trek* series) where Ms. Nichols mentioned her character – the communications officer – had the most important job on the *Enterprise*. If Uhura were not at her post (I wonder what happened during the night shift?), the captain could not talk to anybody outside the ship. He could not negotiate with anyone. If it had not been for Uhura, there would have been no voyages of the Starship *Enterprise* after the crew met the first mean alien!

This paper considers this author's corroboration of Ms. Nichols' theory as it applies to project management: the most important element in projects is excellent communication. Without it, nothing is accomplished, no one talks to anybody else, and stakeholder expectations cannot be managed properly. This researcher selected a 2003 road construction project, in Indianapolis, IN, as her topic because she found excellent communication throughout the planning, directing, and controlling of the effort. The reader will discover how the city went to great lengths to keep the traveling public stakeholders involved, informed, and updated on a daily basis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	2
A Logo is Born.....	1
Using the Internet for Updates.....	3
Project Timeline.....	3
Public Survey Results.....	4
Interviewing an Out-of-State Driver.....	5
References.....	8
<i>Figure 1: From Mroczka, Straumins, & Pinkelman. Hyperfix 65/70 historical files (2004). p. 9.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Figure 2: From Mroczka, Straumins, & Pinkelman. Hyperfix 65/70 historical files (2004). p. 9.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Figure 3: From Mroczka, Straumins, & Pinkelman. Hyperfix 65/70 historical files (2004). p. 8.....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Figure 4: Sources of Hyperfix Information from Public Survey. From Sinha, & McCollough, et. al. (2004). p.12.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Figure 5: Project Location. From Sinha, et. al. (2004). p.80.....</i>	<i>6</i>

The Quintessential Guide to Project Communication

It was known as “Hyperfix,” and it certainly lived up to its name. The author cannot remember another major road construction venture that advanced as smoothly. The ‘hyper’-traveled interchange of Interstate Highways 65 (I-65) and 70 (I-70) in downtown Indianapolis (Indy) is part of the not-just-a-slogan “Crossroads of America.”¹ That crossroads was showing excessive wear due to explosive growth in the city and its environs, not to mention the uptick in interstate through traffic. The interchange was designed to carry approximately 60,000 vehicles per day, but the total was closer to 180,000 (“Collaborative Leadership,” 2007).

This writer thought back to how well Hyperfix progressed, somewhat due to experts in communication. The city and contractors went to great lengths to treat the citizens – important stakeholders in the process – as valued customers, providing them a first-rate roadway while keeping them in the information loop.

A Logo is Born

The approach of the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) to the upgrade was correct, but Indy residents, tired of annual “cone zones,” lurched into panic mode. Close down the aptly nicknamed Spaghetti Bowl and work on the roads 24-hours a day for three months (“Success Story,” 2010, p. 1, para. 3)? A public relations firm was hired to create a campaign to sooth citizens’ fears and its first move was a good one. It created the Hyperfix name and logo (Sinha, et al., 2004), attaching it to almost everything that could hold ink:

¹ The “Crossroads of America” moniker is certainly true for Indianapolis. Since the state’s inception, all major forms of transportation from the entire country have come together in Indy as they made their way to other parts of the United States.



Figure 1: From Mrocza, Straumins, & Pinkelman. *Hyperfix 65/70* historical files (2004). p. 9.

The tongue-in-cheek logo certainly demonstrated Indy's commitment to the cause: the worker must run to the next job before he is even finished posing for the picture! Two characteristics of this image made it striking and memorable, helping communicate its dual message of a work zone and super-fast project. It was bright, patterned after familiar cautionary road signs, and featured the figure of a worker in a hurry. In this researcher's opinion, it was an excellent idea to make the logo bright and fun. Its creators found a way to alleviate some of the public's fear simply by producing ... a smile.

Here is an example of the logo's use, updating commuters to special parking lots:



Figure 2: From Mrocza, Straumins, & Pinkelman. *Hyperfix 65/70* historical files (2004). p. 9.

Using the Internet for Updates


The Hyperfix team used the Web to its advantage.

Project Timeline

Mrocza, et. al. demonstrate with this completion indicator (“We are here”). The author found a copy of the timeline close to project completion. Mrocza offer it as the final web update and have now updated the text to reflect the completed undertaking:

Project Timeline

INDOT's Hyperfix Web site featured a project timeline to keep the public notified of progress at a glance. With each new stage, INDOT moved the arrow indicating completed stages in green, and stages to be completed in red.



The site also included an explanation of the activities that would occur at each stage and projected calendar dates for completion:

- **Planning**—Evaluating the best possible solution to achieve efficiency and effectiveness.
- **Design**—Developing the working plans that will constitute the scope or magnitude of the project.
- **Letting**—Preparing all the necessary paperwork and awarding the contract to the lowest qualified bidder. This project was let on January 22, 2003.
- **Pre-Closure**—Preparing to close I-65/70. All lanes were to remain open to normal traffic between the hours of 6:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m., though some lane restrictions might be necessary. All work was completed by May 21, 2003.
- **Closure**—Closing the mainline I-70 and I-65 roadways between the north and south splits from May 26 through July 20, 2003.
- **Post-Closure**—Completing work such as pavement patching, shoulder reconstruction, and ramp resurfacing of northbound and southbound I-65 and eastbound and westbound I-70 in the south split interchange area. The project was completed on September 3, 2003.

Figure 3: From Mrocza, Straumins, & Pinkelman. *Hyperfix 65/70* historical files (2004). p. 8.

The timeline in Figure 3 was posted online immediately after the project’s announcement (“Collaborative Leadership” p.2) and was updated religiously. The city communicated with

stakeholders from the start. Several terms on this table come straight from courses in this master's program: "efficiency and effectiveness" or "scope or magnitude of the project," for example. This learner found it encouraging to see these used in a real-world application and to understand to what they referred. As an aside regarding the first item on the table, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and INDOT followed a best practice to stay on target: *neither rushed the planning phase and took the necessary time (one year) for the process* ("Collaborative Leadership," Description/Purpose section, p.1).

Public Survey Results

The city went to great lengths to consistently revise the official website and staff an information service (telephone) for updates. Newspapers, magazines, billboards and talk show hosts kept the Hyperfix idea before the public, and when asked what source they depended on for commuter details, residents' responses mirrored this (Sinha, et al., 2004, pp. 11-12):

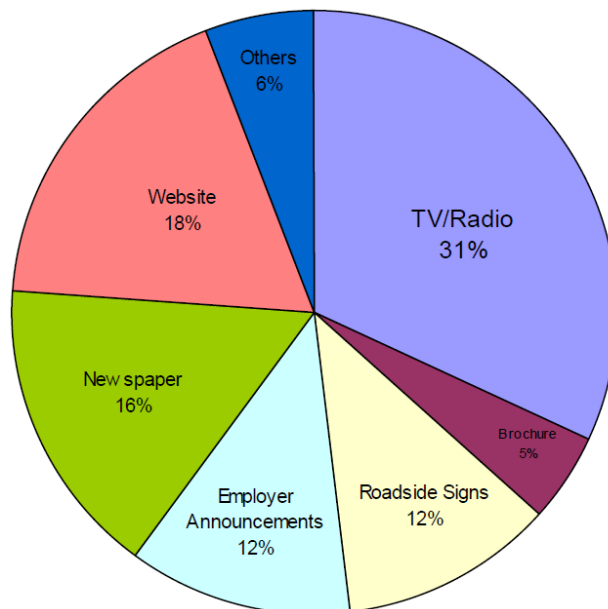


Figure 4: Sources of Hyperfix Information from Public Survey. From Sinha, & McCollough, et. al. (2004). p.12.

According to Mroczka, et. al. (p. 8), even before the project began the news media were in the mix, helping the city with its total-shutdown decision and communicating the results:

The Indianapolis Star polled area residents asking their opinions on a complete shutdown of the facility to permit quick repairs versus a longer project with partial closures. By a 2–1 margin, residents indicated a preference for closure. “Because we partnered with the news media throughout the process,” [INDOT] Commissioner [J. Bryan] Nicol says, “that first day we did not have the gloom and doom gridlock with the whole city shut down. People changed their travel behaviors, and it was a huge success.”

Interviewing an Out-of-State Driver

Out-of-state drivers were most appreciative of well-marked detours (included in the “Roadside Signs” communication source in Figure 4) posted miles ahead of their needs, helping these unwitting stakeholders navigate through the road maze in Indiana’s capitol (“Collaborative Leadership,” 2007, p.4 and Sinha, et al., p. 70). This author recently spoke to a gentleman who traveled from Ohio through Indianapolis, on westbound I-70, during Hyperfix. “I hit the warning signs just outside of Cincinnati and I thought ‘Oh boy! if they’re telling me about it *this* far away...’ But it wasn’t too bad. The only problem was we were all rerouted out of our way. It was slow going and I got home late, but it could have been a lot worse” (J. Wiese, personal communication, August 18, 2011).

Conclusion

A statement from one of the INDOT contacts for Hyperfix shows that complexity is in the eye of the beholder. When this investigator was unable to find project spreadsheets and other figures for this paper, she was surprised with INDOT's definition of "major." Especially after completing a project management degree, the author definitely considered Hyperfix to be a complex undertaking. However, the INDOT representative she contacted broke the news that the artifacts Ms. York needed were not available elsewhere because "The Hyperfix was never a major project and all we would have is online" (C. Gottschall, personal communication, July 12, 2010). Perhaps if they had shut down the entire state, that would have been "major"!

Indianapolis residents certainly viewed Hyperfix as major, but residents' attitudes were much better than one might expect. Most of that was due to the excellent communication afforded the citizens of Indianapolis even before project start. For a town that dreads "construction season" as much as Indy, keeping everyone focused on the quickly-approaching proverbial light at the end of the tunnel was a stroke of genius.

The construction team laid out the communication plan, followed it, and kept its word to the thousands of stakeholders whose lives were disrupted on a daily basis.

References

- American Psychological Association. (2010). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.
- Dow, W., & Taylor, B. (2008). *Project management communications bible*. Indianapolis, IN: Wiley Publishing Co.
- Houghton, P.M & Houghton, T.J. (2009). *APA: The easy way!* (2nd ed.). Flint, MI: Baker College.
- Mroccka, G., Straumins, V., and Pinkelman, J. (United States Department of Transportation - Federal Highway Administration (2004). *Hyperfix65/70*. Retrieved from <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/publicroads/04mar/01.cfm>
- Rossiter, J. (2007). *The APA pocket handbook: APA rules for format & documentation*. DWPublishingCo.com (no city/state provided): DW Publishing Co.
- Sinha, K. C., McCollough, B. G., Bullock, D. M., Konduri, S., Fricker, J. D., & Labi, S. (2004). *Final report: An evaluation of the Hyperfix project for the reconstruction of I-65/70 in Downtown Indianapolis (FHWA/IN/JTRP-2004/2)*. West Lafayette, IN; INDOT Division of Research.
- United States Department of Transportation - Federal Highway Administration (2007). *Collaborative leadership: Success stories in transportation mega projects successful collaborative leadership examples - The hyperfix project*. Retrieved July 12, 2010 from <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/programadmin/mega/collaborative06.cfm>
- United States Department of Transportation - Federal Highway Administration (2010). *Success story: Indiana – Hyperfix: fast-track innovation in Indiana*. Retrieved July 6, 2010 from <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/hfl/successstory.cfm?id=10>