

PMI 10.3 Distribute Information

Meeting Management Techniques: Establishing a Communication Rhythm

Kathie York

Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University

This is an excerpt from a paper in my PMGT 502 “Communications” course in the Embry-Riddle MSPM program. A portion of the original paper’s abstract is included for clarification of the assignment.

Abstract

The author has worked in a project environment for over two decades but had never heard the term nor considered the work that went into “communication rhythm.” Good project managers (PMs) obviously make this tool a seamless part of the undertaking. Communication rhythm can even help make meetings successful.

Establishing a Communication Rhythm

Andrew Sparks (2009), of EMEA International Projects, encapsulates the idea of communication rhythm in this quote:

Every successful project ...has had its own pace and rhythm. When problems occur, they do not knock the project out of balance. Problems are just grist to the mill and the project team cranks through anything that crops up during the normal weekly schedule of meetings, discussions and decisions. (p. 1)

Mr. Sparks describes the make-or-break piece that is important to every mission: communicating issues by establishing a meeting timetable and sticking with it. Upon reading Mr. Sparks’ essay, this investigator recalled a job where the PM used the Stoplight Report in weekly meetings. The consistency of the time and the format were important even if the meeting lasted only a few minutes. The stoplight procedure was part of that rhythm, keeping the team on track (“I’d better get this to ‘green’ for the update meeting on Thursday. I’ll need to ...”).

One of the first tasks for the PM is discovering the best time for consistently gathering the team and for delivering reports to stakeholders. Team meetings are usually relatively easy to schedule, but assembling stakeholders can be a very different process. If, for example, Department X has another obligation every Wednesday at 2:00 p.m., it is pointless to calendar their updates at that time. It is prudent to set the meeting schedule similar to Dow & Taylor's (2008) example on page 313. It shows a logical sequence to data collection and disbursement, which makes everyone's reporting job easier:

- Monday: Status collection day
- Tuesday: Weekly status meeting
- Wednesday: Status report submission and compilation
- Thursday: Customer project status review meeting
- Friday: Final project status report submission and distribution

It is important to arrange meetings in an efficient as well as effective order. The team in this example knows all information for the Tuesday status meeting is collected on Monday. If the PM switched the Monday (data collection) and Tuesday (data disbursement) content, data would be a week old at the status meeting instead of just one day removed from collection. While information could still be effectively disbursed, timing would not be efficient.

One caution from this author and from Baca (2007) is to avoid Monday or Friday meetings if possible. Holidays/vacations tend to fall on those days (p.1). The point of communication rhythm is to meet and/or deliver reports at the same time each week (or other interval). In this writer's experience, most meetings are Tuesday through Thursday. This shortened schedule lends urgency to communications while freeing the "bookend" days for preparation and follow-up.

Conclusion

Establishing a communication rhythm helps a project's chances of success. Scheduled meetings and report delivery provide the "rhythm." Thinking back over well-run projects and those that were continually in upheaval, the author now realizes the successes came from organized, professional managers. They took the time to establish the rhythm and keep things on an even keel. That planning helped everything run smoothly and achieve the ultimate goal: a happy team and client.

References

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