Industry Roundtable

Communication Conundrum – Roundtable Report

Sponsored By:

Managing Meetings

Managing meetings is a vital part to the communication process and without a structured/defined strategy the project could suffer. At any meeting it's important to meet with a purpose to contribute, share information, and make decisions. Below are a few key issues that were addressed in the industry roundtable discussion and ways to improve on meeting management.

Issue: Communication Effectiveness

Action: In any project or meeting all team members must be prepared and start strong.

Strategy:

- Don't meet without a purpose – to share information, contribute to a decision, or to make a decision.
- At the beginning of a project utilize goal setting techniques to identify & understand the team/ project expectations.
- Important to make sure that the leaders of each team are aligned and that they communicate shared goals up and down their organizations.
- Ensure that sub groups or silos have a mechanism for communicating priorities and have a shared understanding of each other's key objectives and deliverables.

Issue: Establish Consistent Ways to Communicate

Action: Determine effective ways for communication.

Strategy:

- Learn to match communication styles.
- Understand what is required to communicate more effectively.
- If results start to slip, that is a sign that the team is not communicating effectively, don't underestimate the importance of stopping to evaluate the health of the team and getting them back on the right track.
- Develop processes that meet the common and defined priorities.

Issue: Setting Expectations for the Project

Action: Meet at the beginning to identify project team.

Strategy:

- Determine whom the point of contact is for each role.
- Define roles and responsibilities.
- Ensure key decision makers are in the meetings and that they understand their role in setting priorities and making decisions.
- Start to build professional relationships with the project team to understand individual expectations.

Issue: Owner Expectations

Action: Focus on a team understanding as to what the Owner is looking for.

Strategy:

- Establish owner expectations early in the project with the entire team.
- Develop trust with the owner. Trust will develop character and capability.

Action: Determine the definition for success on the project.

Strategy:

- Define what the level of success is for the owner, architect and contractor.

Issue: Change in Team Members

Action: Determine strategy for change in project members.

Strategy:

- Set standards for the project to determine how all staff transitions will be handled throughout the entire project.
- If a change is required in staff, ensure that an appropriate time is established for the transition to the new team member.

- Communicate project expectations and project goals with all new members.

Project Team Building Skills

One of the single most effective strategies in Team Building is being deliberate about the process. Don't expect new team members will get it. Don't anticipate your way of viewing an issue is the only way.   By setting initial team expectations and starting strong early in the process you will build strong team dynamics and build your leadership skills at the same time. Here are a few key issues that occur and strategies to improve your team building skills.

Issue: Onboard new team members

Action: Make the deliberate effort with new team members joining the team

Strategy:

- Who will be consistent through the project? Who is only here for a specific task?
- Understand each members priorities.
- Share the culture that has been developed.
- Get them comfortable with each members priorities.

Issue: Determine how to measure success

Action: What defines when a project, phase of activity is successful?

Strategy:

- Measures could be revenue generation, total costs, schedule milestones, warranty, etc.
- Make sure that the leaders of each team are aligned with these metrics and that they communicate shared goals/success up and down their organizations.

Issue: Teams Change—How to maintain the trust

Action: Foster and build trust and report

Strategy:

- Develop Formal and Deliberate communication to all new team members.
- Have a deliberate approach in place, a checks and balances system to get new team members up to speed.

- Establish a single point of contact during any transition. Remember that change WILL affect trust.
- If results start to slip, that is a sign that the team is not communicating effectively, don't underestimate the importance of stopping to evaluate the health of the team and getting them back on the right track.

Action: Promote sub-group team engagement throughout the job

Strategy:

- Formal and deliberate methods to promote building relationships.
- On the job and off the job team building events.
- Ensure that sub groups have a mechanism for communicating priorities and have a shared understanding of each other's key objectives and deliverables.

Action: Define the priorities of each party throughout the job?

Strategy:

- Communicate priorities to all team members.
- Openly share expectations to foster positive communication.

Issue: Managing diverse types of people

Action: How to build professional team relationships is very important. Ask who needs to communicate with whom, what is your communication style, how do you like to communicate, when do you expect to see communication and when don't you want to have correspondence.

Strategy: Use the Selfish Goal Exercise

- Create a formal meeting and divide group into common team members. Ie, Owner User Group, Mechanical team, Superintendents, etc.
- Have each group spend time thinking selfishly, what do they want out of the project.
- Document and share with entire group.
- Now bring the overall team back together and blend these selfish goals to achieve a Shared Goal.
- Define the teams unifying goal and objective. Determine what is considered successful for each member of the team.

Issue: Understand the owner's perspective

   Action: Put yourselves in "Our Shoes". 75% of the total project life time costs are operations of the facility. How are your Owners needs being evaluated on the project?

  Strategy:

- What are the priorities of your Owner.
- What are their personalities and how do want to communicate.
- What is each attempting to get out of the project, strengths and weaknesses, understand the personalities and what is their level of expertise?

Developing Soft Skills

Soft skills are personal attributes that enable someone to interact effectively and harmoniously with other people. For some this comes natural and for others it's a challenge. As a skill it is something that anyone can improve on with some effort. During the roundtable several issues were brought up related to developing soft skills.

Issue: How do you build trust

  Action: Do what is expected and promised

  Strategy:

- Demonstrate your abilities consistently.
- Show your character and reliability.
- Take ownership of what is assigned to you by fulfilling your obligations to others.

  Action: Understand how other team members are being measured

  Strategy:

- Try to understand how others success is being measured.
- Observe when they are interacting with others learn how they participate.
- Support others when they need help.

  Action: Learn more about the person you are working with

  Strategy:
- Learn more about others personality to learn how they work.
- Find out what others think is important.
- Ask open ended question to start conversations.

Issue: Inefficient project communications

Action: Take deliberate steps to improve communication

Strategy:
- Have the right conversations at the right time on right topic with the right people.
- The meetings will happen regardless just not with the right people.
- Include all team members to build trust.

Action: Make communications more efficient

Strategy:

- Effective communications make problems easier to solve.
- When using proper communications questions are answered quicker.
- Schedule meetings consistently and with the right people.

Action: Improve participation from team members

Strategy:

- Make personal connections.
- Work to understand what's important to them, how they think and their communication style.
- Develop the professional relationship first.
- The bonus would be to learn more about them personally.

Issue: Working with diverse group

Action: Understand team members bring different perspectives from past projects

Strategy:
- Past experiences influence how they communicate.
- Determine the predetermined assumptions.
- Reset expectations based on what the project requires.
- Every project is unique.

Action: Identify the leaders

Strategy:

- Communicate with right people about the right things.
- Show respect and listen to them.
- Build the relationship by earning their trust.

Planning Communications

Communicating the project plan to all the essential players is just as important as the plan itself. Throughout the roundtable discussions on other varying subjects, one common denominator is the importance of maintaining the continuity of information throughout the life of a project. Approaching each project with an actual plan for communication can break through the noise and keep things moving.

Issue: Change is lost knowledge

Action: As the project changes phases you need to re-engage and re-adjust to the new team members.

Strategy:

- Make the effort to communicate with new team members.
- Assess and adjust the ways you communicate to build the new relationships just as you would at the beginning of a project.

Action: Identify the transitions within the project phases

Strategy:

- Often towards the end of a project there is a lot of change that can require changes in communication.

Issue: Deliberate Communication Plan

Action: Plan with the end in mind

Strategy:

- Identify who will be involved and start communicating early.
- Establish ways of communicating that achieve the end goal.
- Look ahead when you see changes coming and keep all team members in the loop.
- Look for the need to reset priorities and ways to remove constraints.

Issue: Communication is complicated by all the different ways to communicate

Action: Phone calls, emails, text messages, face to face, and collaboration apps

Strategy:

- Set the expectation for your own or team preferred communication method.
- Be consistent with how and what you communicate.
- Use the right method for the right purposes (e.g. – if you find yourself sending a third email reply, it might be time to pick up the phone and please do!)

Issue: Owner's Expectations

Action: Identify the Owner's expectations and goals

Strategy:

- Put yourself in the shoes of the Owner, how would your perspective shift if you were funding the project?

Issue: Working with Suppliers

Action: Leverage their knowledge

Strategy:

- Suppliers often have more up to date information and can foresee risk to schedule and budget within their specific scope of expertise.
- Be open to opportunities to educate the owner or architect on products or applications that can improve the project outlook.

<u>Challenging Situations</u>

Conflict is not something that many people look forward to. During the round table several discussions arose related to how to deal with the many challenging situations that the project team encounters throughout the life of a project.

Issue: Dealing with contentious people

Action: Focus on the root of the problem – what is the cause of the frustration?

Strategy:

- Find the core reason for the anger. Understand that anger is most likely caused by an unmet expectation.
- Diffuse the situation by asking "what were you expecting that you did not get?"
- Clarify the expectations. Be clear about what is important to each team member.

- Do not make assumptions.

Issue: Dealing with project team disruptions such as team member changes

Action: Take deliberate steps to communicate again, and again, and again.

Strategy:

- Establish the constant team member who will be involved throughout the entire process.
- Take a time out to bring any new team members up to speed. As discussed above, clarify the expectations. This often results in a "start over" period.
- Establish new roles/responsibilities.
- Define the line where the distinct change was made.
- Be able to adapt during the many phases/processes while keeping the end goal in mind. The end goal is broad and has many aspects to achieving it, including the close out.

Issue: Be alert to project politics

Action: Varies by project type.

Strategy:

- Both Public and Private projects often have political elements that are important to understand and consider. Some are "hot button" issues directly related to re-election, campaign promises, etc.
- Private project politics are often subtle and can involve many different items such as personal relationships, previous promises, getting the next project, etc.
- Ensure the leaders of each team are aligned accordingly.

Issue: Efficient Communications

Action: Identify any gaps in communication.

Strategy:

- Identify the team lead.
- Confirm the right people are included in the communication to make decisions.
- Identify what key personnel are being held accountable for.

Action: Develop personal relationships, building trust and communication skills.

Strategy:

- Meet offsite in a social meeting to get better acquainted.
- Build trust.
- Make a deliberate effort to find out what drives other team members.

Action: Email / Text are great ways to communicate day to day; however not necessarily the best ways to resolve problems.

Strategy:

- Don't be afraid to pick up the phone or meet face to face and have a real conversation.
- Schedule face to face meetings (outside of normally scheduled meetings) based on need. If the issue is HOT, don't wait. Be proactive.