

Credocast

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About Credo Advisory

Credo Advisory is a strategic communications firm that specializes in designing and implementing strategic, operational and tactical communications initiatives. We provide a full suite of communications support to our clients, which include public communications and advocacy, government relations, community engagement, media relations, crisis communications, digital communications and capacity building.

Our mission is to develop bespoke communications products, activities and campaigns based on knowledge, research and industry insights. With our ability to communicate effectively with diverse audiences and stakeholder groups, Credo's mission is to provide impactful strategic communications advisory from inception to implementation. At Credo, we are committed to improving the way societies communicate.

www.credoadvisory.com



“Project communications involves developing, designing, planning and implementing project-specific communications on all levels to ensure that stakeholders are kept apprised of developments, expectations are managed and impact is adequately communicated throughout the lifetime of the project.”



Defining project communications

¹ Belassi, W. and Tukul, O.I., (1996). A new framework for determining critical success/failure factors in projects. *International Journal of Project Management*, 14(3), pp.141-51. Available at: [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0263-7863\(95\)00064-X](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0263-7863(95)00064-X)

² Pritchard, C.L. (2004). *The Project Management Communications Toolkit*. Norwood, MA.

³ PMBOK Guide (2008), 4th ed. Pennsylvania, USA.

⁴ Project Management Institute, Inc. (2013). *Pulse of the Profession In-Depth Report: The High Cost of Low Performance: The Essential Role of Communications*, May 2013. <http://2020projectmanagement.com/resources/communication-management/communication-the-key-to-successful-project-management>

⁵ Communication: The Key to Successful Project Management. Available at: <http://2020projectmanagement.com/resources/communication-management/communication-the-key-to-successful-project-management>

Projects are by design complex and collaborative. There are several moving parts and to achieve success, effective project communications must be leveraged. Projects are also susceptible to unprecedented change due to political, social and economic factors that are pervasive in the value chain and this speaks to the need for project communications.¹

Communications is a cornerstone of effective project management and without its deliberate application along project activities and outcomes, the chances of achieving set goals and objectives remain limited.²

“Project communications management includes the processes required to ensure timely and appropriate generation, collection, distribution, storage, retrieval, and ultimate disposition of project information.”³

Project communications involves developing, designing, planning and implementing project-specific communications on all levels to ensure that stakeholders are kept apprised of developments, expectations are managed and impact is adequately communicated throughout the lifetime of the project.

The impact of project communications is further underscored in the findings of a study conducted by the Project Management Institute (PMI) which revealed that 1 out of 5 projects is unsuccessful due to ineffective communications.⁴ PMI also recommends that project managers should spend 90 percent of their time communicating.⁵

“ The communications strategy is the ultimate playbook for project communications success. It helps project managers structure and control information flow at various stages in the project lifecycle, eliminates uncertainty on the part of key stakeholders and facilitates smooth project flow and resounding impact.⁶ ”

Developing the right strategy



Conducting effective project communications demands that a clear, comprehensive communications strategy is developed to guide project implementation from start to finish and to account for contingencies. The communications strategy is the ultimate playbook for project communications success. It helps project managers structure and control information flow at various stages in the project lifecycle, eliminates uncertainty on the part of key stakeholders and facilitates smooth project flow and resounding impact.⁶ To develop a strong project communications strategy, the following noteworthy steps must be completed:



Define the objective

Developing a project communications strategy begins with determining the core communications objective in alignment with the project objective. The objective outlines the specific results project developers aim to achieve within a given time frame through communications which could be to engage, persuade or inform.⁷ It is imperative that the project communications strategy is in tandem with the overarching project goals and milestones.

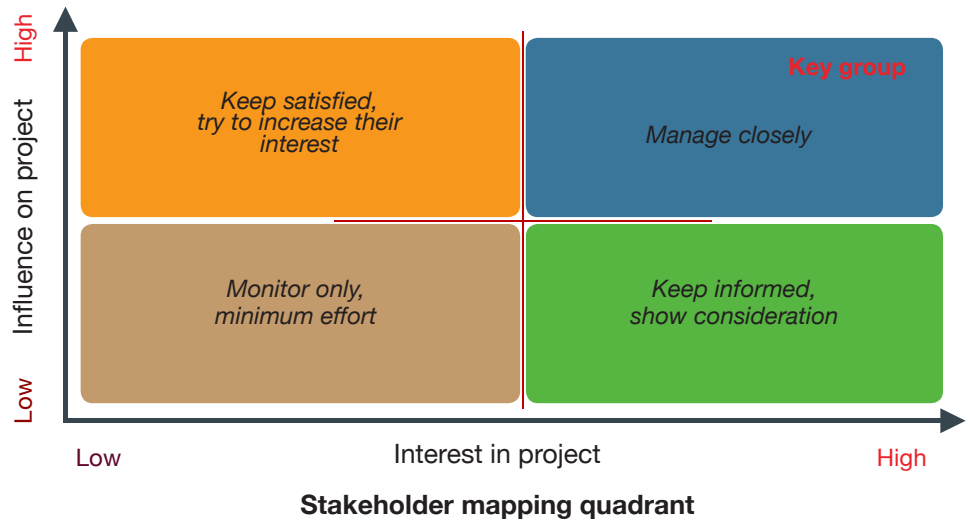


Identify project stakeholders

Project stakeholders are critical for the project communications strategy. It is important to understand who the stakeholders are, their level of interest and influence on the project. It is also important to maintain tailored communications depending on the required level of engagement. Project stakeholders may be categorized into two main groups – *internal* and *external* stakeholders. While the former comprises of the project team on all organizational levels, the latter refers to other stakeholders who are either beneficiaries of the project or exert considerable influence on project outcomes. Stakeholder mapping ensures that stakeholders are appropriately classified on an interest versus influence basis and guides the project management team on the level of engagement required to manage them effectively.

⁶ Abramo, L. & Onitiri, R. (2010). The impact of a strong communications strategy in a large program of work. Paper presented at PMI® Global Congress 2010—North America, Washington, DC. Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute. Available at: <https://www.pmi.org/learning/library/communications-strategy-complex-program-work-6639>
⁷ Interreg Europe Secretariat. Designing a project communication strategy. Available at: https://www.interregeurope.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/events/Rotterdam/pdf/Designing_communication_strategy.pdf

“Project messaging will vary by stakeholder group. However, core message would be required to capture the totality of all communications around the project that shapes stakeholder understanding of project goals and expected outcomes.”



Conduct communications baseline survey

Once project stakeholders have been identified and classified, the next step is to assess their knowledge of project objectives and benefits; challenges in relation to the proposed project solutions, communication needs and how best to communicate with them. A baseline survey will ensure that only fact-based messaging is crafted for each communication deployed during the project and that scarce resources allocated for communications are not wasted on ineffective assumption-based communications. Establishing a baseline before implementing communications initiatives also identifies key performance indicators with which the effectiveness of project communications efforts can be measured.



Develop project messaging

Project messaging will vary by stakeholder group. However, core message would be required to capture the totality of all communications around the project that shapes stakeholder understanding of project goals and expected outcomes. From the core messaging stems other tailor-specific sub-messaging communicated across individual phases of the project based on the stakeholder group, project status and/or unfolding events; values, interests and habits.

In developing the project messaging, testing is key. Run the messages by the larger team and ensure that they have affirmative responses to the following questions:

- Is the message clear, concise and easily understandable?
- How likely is it to be retained by the audience?
- What are the prospects for positive impact in line with set project objectives?
- Can it create conflict or controversy depending on the geographical setting (cultural, political, social, economic, etc.) that can put the project at risk?



Determine communications channels/tools

The best messages can end up ineffective if deployed using the wrong tools or sent via the wrong channels. Three vital questions will guide project communicators in determining the best communications channels:⁸

- What channels do your target audience use and trust?
- What is the purpose of your communication?
- What resource do you have?

⁸ The Health Foundation. Communications Channels: a guide. Available at: <https://www.health.org.uk/sites/default/files/Communications-channels.pdf>

“*Social engagement promotes collaboration, allows for physical interaction, cross-pollination of ideas, better appreciation of target group’s concerns/opinions and immediate feedback.*”

While these questions may be helpful in determining communication channels, it is also necessary to evaluate the pros and cons of each communications tool/channel before making a final selection. These tables will guide channel selection:⁹

Internal stakeholders

Communications channel	Advantages	Disadvantages
Project documents This includes executive summaries, brochures, factsheets, FAQs, etc.	Comprehensive, provides core project information	Information may be too technical to be understood by some stakeholders
Reports May be developed and circulated on a daily to yearly basis depending on project scope and needs	Keeps all project units abreast of developments and helps in communicating next steps	Progress tracking becomes counterproductive with excessive reporting
Meetings Could be conducted on a daily to yearly basis depending on project cadence	Allows for physical engagement between project team members, conversational approach and prompt mitigation and decision-making	Can be lengthy, repetitive and restricted to available project team members
Project working documents All documents that guide project activity including the project charter, action items list, cheat sheet, process flow, etc.	Guides project activity, tracks progress and facilitates proper governance and project discipline	May be tasking to manage along other core project documents

External stakeholders

Communications channel	Advantages	Disadvantages
Project documents This includes executive summaries, brochures, factsheets, FAQs, etc.	Comprehensive, provides all technical information on the project	Information may be too technical to be understood by some stakeholders
Printed materials These include flyers, posters, signposts, pamphlets and other printed communications materials.	Visual, attractive and fosters targeted communication	Geographically-limited audience, content limited to short and simple messages
Feature placement This involves placement of articles on online and offline publications	Articles can discuss the subject in detail with varied arguments	Requires effort in interfacing with journalists/media outlets; information may be distorted due to editorial policy or misrepresentation
Promotional products These include t-shirts, bags, hats and other promotional items	Visible and touchable, emotional appeal, long life	Expensive design and production, geographically-limited audience
Online media This includes websites, social media platforms and influencers	Generally free, easily accessible, organic, global reach and interactive	Management requires skill, financial resources for paid promotions and influencer engagement; reach is limited to only online audience
Audio-visual communications This includes radio spots, TV commercials and programming, documentaries, photos, videos, etc.	Emotive, may be shown at milestone events or promoted on the internet	Requires financial resources for content and creatives development
Third party advocacy This includes key influencers/leaders of various factions of society, members of target group, etc.	Organic, offers higher appeal and credibility to the target group thus increasing sensitization and level of influence	Advocates can be risk factors and expect financial compensation
Social engagements This includes town halls, community engagements, focus groups, etc.	Promotes collaboration, allows for physical interaction, cross-pollination of ideas, better appreciation of target group’s concerns/opinions and immediate feedback	Engagements can be expensive, difficult to implement due to size and scale of event; large engagements may impede effective two-way communication

⁹ “Making A Difference: Strategic Communication to End Violence Against Women.” Available at: http://www.unifem.org/attachments/products/MakingADifference_rus.pdf

“It is necessary to disseminate timely status updates to inform and prompt stakeholders on project activities, provide clarity on corresponding durations and requirements and manage their expectations.”



Develop implementation plan

After the communications framework has been developed, an implementation plan is required for timely and effective execution. The project communications implementation plan should be designed in synchronization with project timelines and milestones. This plan must be easily adaptable to changes in project structure and timelines, and must account for all phases of the project, stating clearly all communications action items and owners.



Monitor, evaluate and amend

Progress tracking and assessment is essential in project communications management. It is important to conduct a thorough evaluation of the effectiveness of project communications based on key performance indicators identified at the baseline survey stage. Monitoring and evaluation will serve these key functions:¹⁰

- Assess progress and impact of project communications implementation
- Determine stakeholders’ understanding of project objectives and benefits
- Mitigate risk of project failure
- Promote project communications management

The project communications monitoring and evaluation framework must provide a comparative analysis of pre- and post-deployment awareness levels of stakeholders.



Communicating project milestones

In the typical 5-phase project structure – *Identify opportunity, Assess feasibility, Set up structure, Build and Operate*, it is necessary to disseminate timely status updates to inform and prompt stakeholders on project activities, provide clarity on corresponding durations and requirements, and manage their expectations.¹¹

Identify opportunity

At this stage of the project, the project opportunity is identified. Communications is mainly high-level with relevant stakeholders who without their support, the project cannot proceed. At this stage, high-level consultations are conducted with core project communications

¹⁰ F.A.O Otieno. The Roles of Monitoring and Evaluation in Projects. Available at: <https://www.irbnet.de/daten/iconda/CIB8942.pdf>

¹¹ McKinsey & Company (2018). <https://www.mckinsey.com/ng>

“Communications is necessary to prepare the minds of project target groups to support personnel assigned to conduct assessments in their territory.”

documents. Executive summaries, fact sheets, brochures, reports, etc. are examples of project awareness tools. For instance, high-level consultations with a state and local government where a bridge construction project is to be deployed is conducted using project documents that outline the benefits of the project to the state and its residents. Additionally, high-level meetings and stakeholder engagements are critical as an avenue for communicating project messaging and attaining project alignment and support.

Assess feasibility

This stage of the project structure is the research phase where project-based surveys are conducted to ascertain feasibility and to determine project beneficiaries. Here, subject areas that meet the requirements for selection are shortlisted for project deployment. Communications is necessary to prepare the minds of project target groups to support personnel assigned to conduct assessments in their territory. A project to electrify a community using solar electricity solutions requires that energy audits are conducted to assess their energy needs before the project is deployed. Community members need to be prepared to accept and cooperate with project personnel when they arrive to conduct the assessment.

Set up structure

At the set up structure phase, preparations for project deployment are finalized and this includes sensitization on the legal, financial and operational requirements for project deployment among other prerequisites for deployment of the proposed solution. Communications is also required at this stage to engage with stakeholders on the need to support the project and to enlighten them on what is coming. For instance, residents of an area subject to a new toll gate project will need to be sensitized on the upcoming construction, possible road diversions/disruptions, expected toll payments to mention a few. Therefore, there is a need for the target group to understand the advantages, disadvantages, impact, benefits and associated outcomes of this project. Again, this is where communications is critical.

Build

At the build phase, project tangibles are being deployed and this will more than likely impact the daily activities of stakeholders on ground. They need to be notified ahead of time that project developers will move to site to conduct the activity. This helps project hosts to plan and minimize conflict arising from project activities. For example, a dualization project of access roads to a commercial market would result in a temporary road diversion for traders. Market patrons and traders must be sensitized to the potential disruption to their business activities. Traders must also be aware of the project benefits to their businesses upon completion (i.e. easier access of customers to the market which could result in increased patronage of their businesses).

Operate

Here, all technical project activities have been completed and beneficiaries can now enjoy the project outcomes and its related benefits. Proper communications is, again, needed to provide guidance on requirements to access project benefits. For example, members of a community where a borehole installation project has been completed need to be educated on how to use and maintain the system through effective communications.



“Data to communicate impact is an essential component that must be incorporated in communication products and related messaging to highlight achievement and attain post-project support for sustainability.”



Conveying project impact

Although projects may be successful for various reasons (positive change, financial returns, new product, new service, etc.), project success will remain unknown without adequate communications on its impact or outcomes. Communicating project impact involves providing a comparative review of the pre-project status (the problem/opportunity) to project completion (the outcome). Data to communicate impact is an essential component that must be incorporated in communication products and related messaging to highlight achievement and attain post-project support for sustainability.

Depending on the project type and stakeholder group, project communicators can leverage documentaries, video testimonials and photography as effective communications tools that provide visual representation of project impact. It is also important to highlight the social impact of projects, where necessary. Project impact must be presented through various communication products and activities and tailored to stakeholders.

Summary

Without adequate communications across all levels of project execution, the most likely project outcome is failure. Communications continues to play a pivotal role in achieving project success as it makes for a clear understanding of project objectives, stakeholder expectations and securing buy-in and alignment for project progress. Project managers must incorporate communications as a core aspect of the larger project structure (like other project requirements like funding, technical, etc.). Project communications should never be an appendage easily expunged in the event of budget constraints; it must be a core project execution activity.