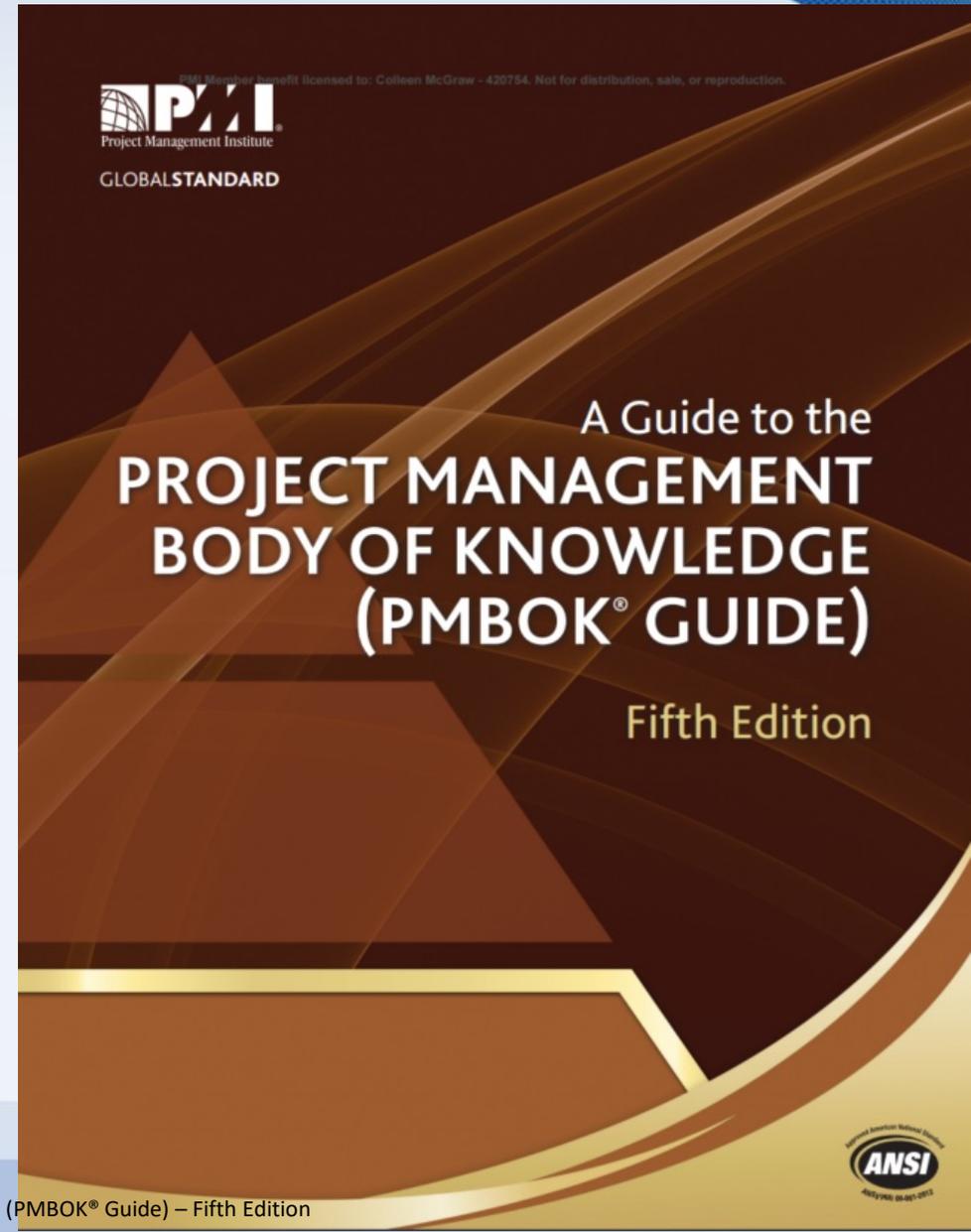


# **Using a Communication Strategy to Improve Stakeholder Relationships**

**Colleen A. McGraw, PMP**

# Communications Management Plan

“The communications management plan is a component of the project management plan that describes how project communications will be planned, structured, monitored, and controlled. “



# Tactical Communication Matrix

Who? ♦ What? ♦ When? ♦ How?

| What  | Who/Target  | Purpose   | When/Frequency   | Type/Method(s)   |
|---|---|---|--|--|
| <Team Meetings>   | <Entire project team. Individual meetings for sub-teams, technical team, and functional teams as appropriate. > | <To review detailed plans (tasks, assignments, issues, and action items). >   | <Regularly Scheduled. Weekly is recommended for entire team. Weekly or bi-weekly for sub-teams as appropriate. >                                     | <Meeting<br>Template:<br>Project Initiation Plan.        |
| <Project Steering Committee Meetings (This may apply only to larger projects) >               | <Project Steering Committee and project manager>  | <Update Project Steering Committee on progress and discuss critical issues that require change request before escalating to the sponsor(s). >   | <Regularly Scheduled. Monthly is recommended. >  | <Meeting<br>Template:<br>Project Initiation Plan.        |
| <Sponsor and/or Executive Sponsor Meetings** (This may apply only to larger projects.) >      | <Sponsor(s) and/or executive sponsor) and project manager>  | <Update sponsor(s) and executive sponsor on status and discuss critical issues. See also Project Initiation Plan. Review status reports, issues, and risks. To identify and communicate potential risks and issues that may impact the schedule, budget, or quality of the project. > | <Regularly scheduled at sponsor level (recommended monthly) or as needed to resolve sponsor level issues that cannot be resolved at project level. > | <Meeting<br>Template:<br>Project Initiation Plan.        |
| <Post Project Review>   | <Project manager, key stakeholders, and sponsor(s). >   | <Identify improvement plans, lessons learned, what worked and what could have gone better. Review accomplishments. >  | <End of project or end of major phase>   | <Meeting/Report<br>Template:<br>Project Initiation Plan. |
| <Quarterly Project Review or End of Phase Review. (This may apply only to larger projects.) > | <Project manager and key stakeholders. >  | <Review overall health of the project and highlight areas that need action. >   | <Quarterly or at critical milestones depending on size and criticality of the project. >   | <Meeting/Report><br>Project Initiation Plan.             |

Is a tactical communication plan enough?

# Why a Communication Strategy?

- Supports change management and addresses stakeholder resistance
- Builds trust and improves decision making
- Drives project focus in order to manage scope
- Mitigates project risks

The communication strategy describes the story of the project, including the project goals, key success factors, and benefits

# Plan

vs

# Strategy

- A list of activities
  - Who, what, when, how
  - Goal of distributing info
  - Project plan component
  - Inputs include
    - Project Management Plan
    - Stakeholder Register
    - Process Assets
    - Project Requirements
    - **Communication Strategy**
- Desired outcome defined
  - Focus on WHY
  - Goal of promoting benefits
  - Change agent aligned
  - Inputs include
    - Organization Strategy
    - Change Management Plan
    - Project Requirements
    - Stakeholder Analysis

A strategy is a set of guiding principles that generates a desired pattern of decision making

# Developing a Strategy

1. Understand the organizational environment
2. Analyze the impact of the project
3. Identify the key messages
4. Develop the project narrative
5. Promote stakeholder alignment
6. Train your team

A good strategy provides a clear roadmap to guide peoples' actions and priorities in order to desired goals

# 1. The Organizational Environment

- Analyze the organizational culture
- Identify the business strategy that the project supports
- Review the critical success factors
- Identify and meet with decision makers
- Understand the history of similar projects
- Identify possible organizational obstacles

What will success look like to the organization?

## 2. Project Impact on Stakeholders

- How will the project change stakeholders lives
  - Model the new roles
  - Develop use cases/user stories around the future
  - Focus on the people, not the organization
- Change Management = Marketing the future
  - Help stakeholders identify with the future state
  - What information will help to overcome concerns
  - What is needed to build buy-in and ownership

What information and outcomes will the individual stakeholders need to feel successful?

# 3. Identify Key Messages

- Messaging reinforces project success factors
  - Focuses on purpose and outcome
  - Supports decision making
  - Keeps team focused on the goal
- Documenting key messages in advance
  - Promotes consistency
  - Provides foundation for tactical status reporting
  - Communicate the messages to the entire team
- Build the strategy around the key messages

The messages are the components of the project success story that help the team “keep the story straight” during the project

# 4. Develop Project Narrative

- Historically, people communicate by storytelling
  - Create compelling stories for your project
  - Develop elevator speeches around key work streams
  - Be honest and comprehensive –address challenges
- Develop project sponsors as storytellers
  - Help them own the story of their project
  - Build buy-in and trust among their organizations
  - Communicate project successes to executives
- The story may evolve over the life of the project

The narrative is the story of the project - storytelling helps stakeholders experience the future during the project

# 5. Promote stakeholder alignment

- Manage expectations
  - Analyze gaps in stakeholder understanding
  - Use stories to communicate project goals
  - Validate alignment around the project messages
- Reinforcement mechanisms
  - Project narrative as focus point for decisions
  - Key messages as consistent thread for reporting
  - Supports on-boarding and team evaluations
- Project Brand – Consistently promote messages

Communication strategy should drive stakeholder alignment on project success factors to promote buy-in and ownership

# 6. Train Your Team

- Continually promote the strategy
  - Communicate outward – start with the project team
  - Be consistent, even as the project narrative evolves
  - Maintain change management on the strategy
- Involve senior leaders and influencers
  - Talking points for meetings
  - Framework for briefings
  - Support for budgeting, vendor management and operations planning

The entire extended team must consistently conform to the communication strategy to achieve the desired outcome

# Execute the communication strategy

- Day to day planning and execution via the Communication Plan / PMP (input)
- Coordinate with Change Management efforts
- Use monitoring and control to enforce strategy
- Document the project narrative in deliverables
- Tell the project story at every opportunity – consistent repetition helps the story “stick”
- Iteratively validate the effectiveness and appropriateness of the narrative throughout

**Communicate! Communicate! Communicate!**

# Questions?

ColleenMcGraw@gmail.com



*colleenamcgraw*

A large red ring graphic with a white center, resembling a life preserver or a thick letter 'O'. A dark blue horizontal bar is superimposed across the middle of the ring.

**MIND THE COMMUNICATION GAP**