

IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT: A CASE STUDY OF COMMUNICATION & WORKS DEPARTMENT PESHAWAR

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Abstract. *Project management is a growing concept in public and private organizations of Pakistan. There are many obstacles in way of a successful project completion. The problem of Communication is of great importance in project management. A qualitative investigation was used to explore the importance of communication in project management. The interviews were conducted to explore the phenomena of communication among the ten project team members of Communications and Work department Peshawar. The data were collected and analyzed. The results show that communication plays an important role in project management. Communication combines and coordinates different areas of project management phases. The findings of the study also illustrate that the communication skills of project managers and team members has a great impact on the project completion and its success.*

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1. Introduction

Project management can be defined as the practice of planning, controlling, acting, and executing and achieving the goals and objectives in a given specified time frame (Summers, 2011). Communication is the exchange of ideas, information, feelings and thoughts by using words and other methods. In the context of project management, communication means the exchange of ideas, knowledge and skills. We cannot imagine a project without communication (Cornelissen, 2008). Communication is the most crucial factor in project management. The key of project management is communication. Effective Communication is essential for a successful project execution,

because of the lack of communication many projects have been failing (Weldearegay, 2012). Basically, there are three areas of project management, including internal information exchange, project marketing and information management. It is important for project managers to decide the communication strategy for all areas of project management in order to run the project smoothly (Summers, 2011).

Communication plays a variety of the pivotal roles in project management. An effective communication contributed towards the success of the project. A project manager must ensure the communication between the people of the project, whether in external and internal environment continues without interruption (Soni & Sakhti, 2009). There are different methods of communication which can be used in an organization for project management, such as Skype, email, daily quick update meetings and project status updated (Jia et al., 2004).

It is noted that most of the project managers choose their basic communication channel according to the need of an organization or its project. It became quite difficult to manage the communication channel properly while multiple projects are going on in an organization. If the project employees are working from different locations the difficulty in communication will further increase due to no connectivity. Hence, communication is the process of acquiring all information, communication is also referred as the life blood of a project (Zulch, 2014). The project team members need to collaborate and share information in order to achieve the project objectives. Therefore, communication can play an important role in project management by making the process easy and feasible for managers and other employees of an organization.

The Communication and Works (C&W) department established in 1903 as public works department renamed as communication and works department in 1979. The C&W department is responsible for planning, execution, maintenance and development of all provincial roads, bridge, ferries, tunnel, ropeways and causeways through development program. “The FATA house project Islamabad” is recently completed in C&W Peshawar under the supervision of XEN (Executive Engineer) Mr. Jalal. The department successfully completed the project of “FATA house Islamabad” and is working on several projects.

2. Problem Statement

Project management is a growing concept in public or private organizations in Pakistan (Quraishi et al., 2009). There are many problems and obstacles in the way of successful project completion. Communication plays an important role

in successful project completion. If the Communication type or style is wrong, which does not match the requirements of the project; it restricted the project development (Burke, 2013). The worst scenario is where there is no communication, but, in raw form or too little communication makes it difficult for team members to understand the required information to achieve the goals and objectives of project and restricts its development (Pinto & Slevin, 1987). Because of the lack of communication many projects have been failed. Hence, Communication is essential for project success and development. The main aim of this qualitative study is to find out the importance of communication in project management and successful project completion. An effort is made to examine the contributions of effective communication in project management, and to identify the communication barriers that impede the project success.

3. Literature Review

Zulch (2014) in his study “Communication: the foundation of project management” determine the role of communication in project management that how communication can be a foundation in project management. Researchers have elaborated upon the importance of communication in project management through communication model. The areas of project such as scope, time, and quality etc., management derived from previous researches were used in a model and the communication was presented as a core determinant in working on those areas. The communication process combines the various areas of project management. The research findings illustrate that the project management different areas are dependent upon a good communication skill, without which it is impossible to achieve the goals and objectives of project management. The cornerstone areas of project management, such as scope, time and quality needed effective communication. The paper concluded that miscommunication in the organization leads to misunderstanding of the project.

Muller and Turner (2005) in his empirical research “The impact of principal-agent relationship and contract type on communication between project owner and manager” tried to find out the communication structure between the project managers and the project owners. The practices of owner-manager were mapped in communication model. The study focus on the importance of communication in owner-manager relationships and the risk management associated with it. The study provides recommendations for risk minimizing in project management with the help of principal-agent theory, that how the cost can be reduced in a given project. The paper suggested that communication can contribute to the owner-manager relationship and can help to achieve the goals and profit maximization.

Binder (2016) in his book “Global Project Management: Communication, Collaboration and Management across Borders” detailed the important factors of communication for global projects. The study indicated that most big companies conducting the global projects, which required the distributive skills, the best environment, effective team and time management in order to accomplish the project goals and objectives. The study shows that many organizations are struggling to fulfill these requirements because of less effective communication channels. The book recommended the tools of team management and global communication for the development of cross-cultural project management. The book included the real life techniques that how to apply the recommendations in an organization to achieve the objectives of the project.

Pinto and Slevin (1987) in his research work “Critical factors in successful project implementation” discussed the critical factors which are considered important for the completion of the project. The study shows that the full time managers can better determine the critical success factors, which are essential for project management and project implementation. The researcher discussed the ten factors and linked it in the quasi sequential framework. The communication is one of the factors which are important for project management and implementation. The better the communication process the better the process of organizational and the employee’s effectiveness. The ten factor model helped to analyze the factors which will lead to the success of the project.

Pinto and Pinto (1990) in his study “Project Team Communication and Cross Functional Cooperation in New Program Development” explained the importance of effective communication for the development of new projects in R&D laboratory setting. The patterns of communication and the development of initial the success of the project. The 262 members were surveyed. The results show that the low level of communication results in the low development of the project and management and the high effective communication results in the higher development of the project. Thus, there is a strong impact of communication on project management and its development.

Henderson (2004) in his research work “Encoding and decoding communication competencies in project management – an exploratory study” check out the manager’s competency in two communication processes encoding and decoding. The data were collected from 186 project management team members. The research shows the significant relationship between communication and project management. Project phases include many stages and the role of communication is equally important for each stage. Communication plays a role of bridge between performance and successful completion of project.

Conceptual Framework

Communication is important for project management because it is considered as the lifeblood of a project (Binder, 2016). In the below conceptual framework the relation between communication and project management are explained. The project management phases include project initiation, project planning, project execution and project closure. Communication collaborates and contributed in project management (Katz, 1982). A good project usually starts with a good project plan. A good communication provides a ground for good project management planning and execution (Cornelissen, 2008). The communication plays an important role in effective project planning and completion of the project. Communication helps in achieving the project objectives and total productivity

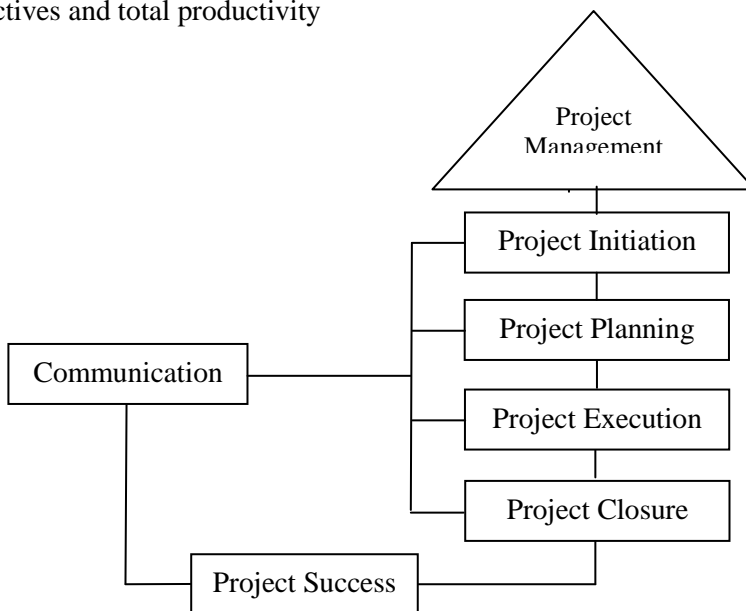


Figure 1 Project Management and Communication

The concept of communication is interrelated to project management. Communication is important, because communication involves all participants of a project (Zulch, 2014). Organizations use different types of communication during different project phases such as daily project meetings, weekly project meetings, Skype and emails etc.

It is important that communication is relevant to a project in which the managers and team members are working. Communication is a tool through which different areas are coordinated and combine the various areas of project

management (Baumgärtner, 2002). The process of communication started with the project initiation phase where communication helps in understanding the project area in which work will be done. In the project planning the short term and long term plans are designed according to which project will be executed and completed in an order (Baccarini, 1999). The execution phase communication is also playing an important role where different mediums of communications are used to complete the project successfully (Visser et al., 2016). Thus, the concept of communication is connected to the concept of project management. Whether is formal, informal, written, oral or non-verbal communication it plays pivotal roles in project management process.

4. Methodology

This qualitative study was conducted to find out the contributions effective communication in project management. The case study method was used. The sample of the study was the ten team members of project in Communication & Works department, Peshawar. The participants were interviewed in their office premises. An appointment through telephone or email was taken from all the participants. The interviews were recorded through a Samsung galaxy, voice recorder. The recorded data was transcribed. After the transcription of data, through open coding and axial coding the themes were emerged. After the emergence of themes in summative content analysis the data was the interpreted in end.

5. Findings and Analysis

The role of communication in project management:

Communication is an essential element of project management (Zulch, 2014). Communication in an organization is of vital importance to everyone involved in the project. The themes emerged from the interviews are: effective communication, communication skills, project management, project performance and project success. Communication plays a variety of the pivotal roles in project management. There are many communication methods such as email, telephone calls, meetings, messenger, telephone call, or informal conversations. In project management all these methods are used as mediums to transmit and receive information in order to carry on the project and to ensure a good performance of employees. If information is not sent in a proper way it may create a chaos and misunderstanding among team members. There is a crucial need to ensure a good communication system in project management.

One of the project managers explains about the importance of communication he said:

“I always find it difficult to complete a project because projects are always unpredictable and once assigned and approved project required a consistent effort. If you are project manager, you will always be thinking that one skill is not enough for working. For a successful project, there could be leadership skills, time management skills and most importantly communication skills. I think it is important for a manager to understand what’ of the project before ‘how’. It is important to understand the objective of the project. Clear Communication in my opinion is very important.”

The study shows that an effective communication plays a vital role in project management. There are so many individuals who need to communicate from the beginning till the completion of the project. Communication required skills which are essential for the project management process and performance. The study indicates that the data, whether in the visual forms of graphs and charts and verbal communication are equally important for the organization. The exchange of data, information and ideas are an important task of project team members. The process of communication in vertical or horizontal form in an organization need an effective communication medium and approach to complete the project in the best possible manner.

The respondent discuss about the difficulties as being a project member he said:

“I describe myself as an active member of this organization and being a manager I am always approachable with an open door policy. I believe in hard work. I always work with the field to complete project tasks. I always try to communicate in the best possible manner. A project manager is responsible for execution and completion of the project. I always ensure that everything going smoothly in the project management process because a single mistake can cause a trouble for project success. I always try to communicate in the best possible manner. Communication and team work required certain skills without which it is impossible to obtain data and transfer information efficiently.”

The study indicates that a good communication required certain skills without which it is almost impossible to complete a project successfully. Communication skill involves the transfer of information and ideas in an effective and efficient manner. Communication skills are needed in every phase of the project. The study shows that the team members and project manager must acquire the knowledge of communication before starting the project

because communication is working as a baseline of all phases in project management.

One of the manager respondent marked communication as a cornerstone in project success he said:

“Yes, communication contributed to project success. I think communication is an effective element of project management. You cannot do everything by yourself, you need teamwork and for teamwork we need a better communication. Miscommunication means mismanagement and it eventually leads to the failure of the project. Understanding the strengths and weaknesses is quite essential for every project. I believe if you cannot communicate properly you cannot work efficiently.”---- said respondent

The study shows that miscommunication can create mismanagement in project management. If the information is not conveyed properly, it can hinder the project growth and development. Miscommunication leads to several problems in the project. The study shows that communication is very important and unavoidable in project management. If there is no communication there is no transfer of information. A good project performance is dependent on good communication process.

The project team member indicated communication is contributing to project success:

“Yes, communication is an important element of project management and it is contributing to the project success. I think communication is the key to any project. An effective communication can change the fate of the project.”

The study finds out that a good communication contributes to project success in so many ways. It is important to note that an effective communication where all employees or team members are connected to each other through any communication medium and can listen to each other and respond to problems are the best way to overcome challenges facing by project management.

The study shows that Communication is essential for all developmental projects. Excellent communication contributes to project success and development. Project management required communication management where good communication the work of the project may do effectively and efficiently. The communication management includes planning, communication management, manage communication management and monitor communication management. Successful project managers used both formal and informal communication during managerial activities. Through better

communication they ensure the project formulation and motivated employees to stay affirm. The study indicates if the communication is not conveyed properly it may hinder the project development and growth. It can create lot of problems where the communication process is slow he whole organization or project suffer a lot.

Communication barriers in project management

Communication is an essential element for a project success. Sometimes project is facing a problem of poor communication management in projects. There are various barriers to effective communication which hinders the project success. The themes emerged from codes of the interviews are communication, organization environment, lack of motivation, different perceptions, language barrier, poor communication channel and project failure.

One of the respondents explains that environment plays an important role in communication process if the message or information is not delivered properly it can hinder the project success. He said:

“There are various barriers to communication in an organization. I think the environment in which you communicate is one the greatest barrier because noise and the temperature effect the communication within the organization. It became difficult to communicate effectively for project manager and the team if the team members are least interested in listening to the manager. The amount of attention and motivation of project manager is required to ensure the good environment which is comfortable for communication.”

The project manager explained that though project played varied roles in project management, but ninety percent problems in project management also comes from communication. The study shows that the bad environment is an obstacle for communication, where due to noise or temperature the communication process becomes slow and creates difficulties for team members and managers to communicate properly. While employees or project team members are not interested in communicating or listening to the manager will further intensify the environment for communication. The study indicates that for a smooth running project and successful project completion the efforts of project manager are required where he can do a better team work and motivate the members to take a part in communication to make the project successful.

The project manager indicated the lack of attention and distractions as a biggest barrier in communication of project. He said:

“There are many problems of communication as being a project manager I faced many problems, but the biggest barrier is I think the lack of attention, interest and distractions. I still remember I was working in Islamabad as a project manager the team was not cooperative they always arrived late and there were so many excuses. What I felt they were actually least interested in the project all they want was their salary amount. So if they are not interested how I can I communicate? As both of we know in communication there is always two parties a sender and receiver, but if the receiver is not responding the communication is of no use. I do believe communication is very important in project management though I did not decide till now which medium of communication is best for project but, I think the best way to communicate is face-to-face communication because the expression can be note down and the message or information is conveyed directly. So there is no delay.”

The study shows that there are so many barriers to communication, which hinder the project success in an organization. There are a number of barriers that retard communication barriers in project management. If the employees or members of the project team are least interested in work or they pay less attention to project, moreover if they are distracted from work then it became difficult to complete a project. The process of communication includes the sender, encoding, the message, medium, decoding, receiver and feedback. The message at any point is misinterpreted or sending through a wrong medium or channel can create trouble for successful project completion. The use of proper communication channel is equally important for transmitting information in a best possible manner. The manager said that the best communication medium in his opinion is the face to face communication in which information is directly received by the receiver and the observation are also noted down by the sender. Thus, direct form of communication is more feasible for organization and employees because it cover up the problems of delays.

The respondents explained about the difficulties faced due to weak communication, he said:

“The effective communication contributed to the project success. During project we faced many difficulties of communication such as different perceptions and views points. When there are more people there are more perceptions and view points and every person are equally important for project success and completion. So many times the problem aroused because of different opinions. Every member wants to do the work with his/her style, though the need of organizations is a bit different. There is a gap in communication I

think. So the minimum consensus building is crucial for starting any project. In project there is a team and the team must work like a family. I am always trying to fill the gap by helping and conveying information in the best possible manner. I ensure good communication because I know without this it is impossible to achieve the target.”

The study finds out that one of the barriers of communication which leads to project failure are the different perceptions and thoughts of team members. Many people mean many opinions and ideas. And every employee, according to respondent wanted to do the work through their styles and feasibility which is sometimes against the rules and regulations. Every organization possesses some codes and ethics of working at a place. Thus the problem of different viewpoints hinders the communication which eventually hinders the project development and growth. The consensus building is important in organization to start any project. The dissent in views and opinions among employees can create communication obstacle and the main objective of the project cannot be achieved.

One of the respondents explained that language is a main barrier in project communication. He said:

“The problem we faced so many times in communication is a language barrier. Because we are from different communities, many of my team members cannot talk in English properly other some members use their native languages such as Pashto which is not understandable for me because I cannot talk in Pashto I always try to communicate in the national language Urdu which is the official language and I think its understandable language for all team members.”---said respondent

The study shows that language plays an important role in communication. The language barrier can cause trouble of employees where sender uses the different language and receiver does not understand the language. The message or information send in this manner are creating hurdles for communication and the project performance. The medium of language which is understandable for all employees should be used in a working environment.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Communication plays a vital role in project management (Zulch, 2014). The importance of communication in project management cannot be denied because communication, cost, and time are equally important for project management. The methods of communication are of great importance during the execution of the project (Binder, 2016). The verbal and the non-verbal communication are essential for project management, whereas the written and oral communication

is of great importance in project performance. The project manager needs to communicate with the full team effectively and efficiently.

The main responsibility of the project manager is to complete the project within a specified period of time with the best quality in a given cost. The success of project depends upon the good communication among team members and the motivation given to them (Muller & Turner, 2005). The best and effective communication skills have an impact on project performance development and successful completion. The use of the best communication medium and channel to ensure the information is transferred and received are important for project process. The importance of communication cannot be denied, because communication is a foundation in project management.

There are also some barriers in communication which hinders the success of project management, such as the environment, language problem, different views points and attitudes, the cultural differences and wrong communication medium or channel. All these problems of communication impact the project development and completion within specified period of time. Miscommunication in a project means mismanagement, which causes a trouble and can cause the failure of the project.

Communication in project management contributed to the success of the project in so many ways. The process of communication in project management involves the sending information, receiving information and sharing the information with an organization. Thus, the success of the project depends on the manager's ability to communicate properly that how they can send, speak write or convey the message which is understandable for others (Pinto & Slevin, 1987).

The scope of project management in the business organization is growing rapidly. However, with the rapid growth the challenges to project completion are also varied and make it difficult to complete projects on time effectively (Burkey, 2013). Whether it's a private or public firm project management is equally important, because, the successful completion of the project determines the success of the business and organization. Communication plays a role of a bridge between project performance and its success. Thus an effective communication is essential for project management.

7. Contributions of the Study

The effective communication in project management can prevent misunderstanding and delays in project management; it can cause the failure of the project. Project managers needs to prepare him for such challenges until the project completion. The project plan must include the types of communication which will be used in the project. Choosing the worst or the bad

communication channel will finish up the project in failure thus, for a smooth running project the importance of effective communication in the project management cannot be denied. It will help the managers to collaborate and cooperate easily and work as a cornerstone in achieving the project goals and objectives.

8. Limitations and Future Research Directions

The limitation in this research includes the sample size of team members and diversity of respondents. Other factors that were not considered, but may have influenced the findings were experience and personal circumstances and various understanding levels and personality types of respondents. It is important to recognize that only one project team members were interviewed. The limitation of this study lend recognition to several areas, where future studies could add further correction and add more information to the findings reported here. The future research can be done on communication styles and different personality types or different languages, culture and its variety of pivotal roles in project management.

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