Communication and Soft Skills – A key to individual and project success

Objective:

This paper will help you to understand the usage of soft skills and effective communication. it shows you how to communicate your message in the best possible way. The Purpose is to have a better understanding of the criticality of soft skills and communication within individuals and groups, via spoken communications, written communications, and even electronic communications for the success of the individual and the organization. This paper provides a framework that would help in effective communication within a project, between individuals and groups for every one to achieve a common goal.

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1 Introduction

Communication is the process by which information and feelings are shared by people through an exchange of verbal and non-verbal messages. Any act by which one person gives to or receives from another person information about that person's needs, desires, perceptions, knowledge, or affective states. Communication may be intentional or unintentional, may involve conventional or unconventional signals, may take linguistic or nonlinguistic forms, and may occur through spoken or other modes

Simple definition: Soft skills – Soft skills are the ability to communicate with people. Anything outside the Technical/Product development can be considered as the soft skill, some of the examples are Listening skills, Conducting meetings, Oral Communication, Written communication, etc.,

The amount of quality time spent on soft skills helps the individual and the projects in the long run.

The mechanism selected for the communication in a project forms a critical factor in determining the success of the project and the organization as a whole.

When do you consider communication to be effective?

The purpose of communication is to get ones message across to others. This is a process that involves both the sender of the message and the receiver. This process leaves room for error, with messages often misinterpreted by one or more of the parties involved. This causes unnecessary confusion and counter productivity. In fact, a message is successful only when both the sender and the receiver perceive it in the same way.

By successfully getting your message across, you convey your thoughts and ideas effectively. When not successful, the thoughts and ideas that you convey do not necessarily reflect your own, causing a communications breakdown and creating roadblocks that stand in the way of your goals – both personally and professionally.

The Importance of Removing Barriers:

Communication barriers can pop-up at every stage of the communication process (which consists of **sender**, **message**, **channel**, **receiver**, **feedback** and **context** - see the diagram below) and have the potential to create misunderstanding and confusion.
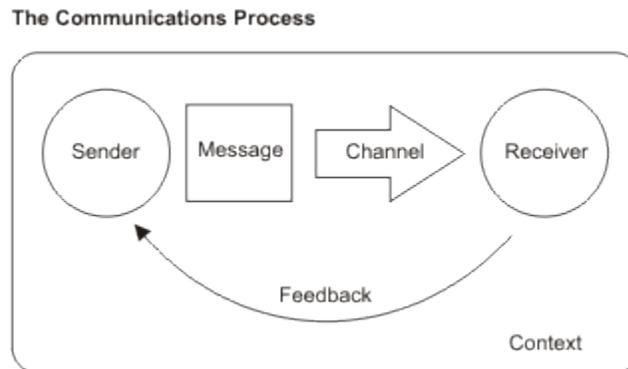
To be an effective communicator and to get your point across without misunderstanding and confusion, your goal should be to lessen the frequency of these barriers at each stage of this process with clear, concise, accurate, well-planned communications. The process is as below:

Sender :

To establish yourself as an effective communicator, you must first establish credibility. In the business arena, this involves displaying knowledge of the subject, the audience and the context in which the message is delivered.

You must also know your audience (individuals or groups to which you are delivering your message). Failure to understand who you are communicating to will result in delivering messages that are misunderstood.

Message:

Next, consider the message itself. Written, oral and nonverbal communications are effected by the sender's tone, method of organization, validity of the argument, what is communicated and what is left out, as well as your individual style of communicating. Messages also have intellectual and emotional components, with intellect allowing us the ability to reason and

emotion allowing us to present motivational appeals, ultimately changing minds and actions.

Channel:

Messages are conveyed through channels, with verbal including face-to-face meetings, telephone and videoconferencing; and written including letters, emails, memos and reports.

Receiver:

These messages are delivered to an audience. No doubt, you have in mind the actions or reactions you hope your message prompts from this audience. Keep in mind, your audience also enters into the communication process with ideas and feelings that will undoubtedly influence their understanding of your message and their response. To be a successful communicator, you should consider these before delivering your message, acting appropriately.

Feedback:

Your audience will provide you with feedback, verbal and nonverbal reactions to your communicated message. Pay close attention to this feedback as it is crucial to ensuring the audience understood your message.

Context:

The situation in which your message is delivered is the context. This may include the surrounding environment or broader culture (i.e. corporate culture, international cultures, etc.).

Removing Barriers At All These Stages

To deliver your messages effectively, you must commit to breaking down the barriers that exist in each of these stages of the communication process.

Let's begin with the message itself. If your message is too lengthy, disorganized, or contains errors, you can expect the message to be misunderstood and misinterpreted. Use of poor verbal and body language can also confuse the message.

Barriers in context tend to stem from senders offering too much information too fast. It is best to be mindful of the demands on other people's time,

especially in today's ultra-busy society. Once you understand this, you need to work to understand your audience's culture, making sure you can converse and deliver your message to people of different backgrounds and cultures within organization, country and even abroad.

2 Subject Matter

Effective communication is the key to individual and project success. If Communication is used effectively and judiciously, it could make a huge difference in the individual and the organization.

Soft Skills

The amount of quality time spent on soft skills helps the individual and the organization in the long run. Discussed below are some of the points that an individual might want to consider for effective communication and there by meet the expectations of all.

Expressing

The core of any team related activity is highly dependent on effective communication, both written and spoken. This is an established fact even for a Project Management scenario. The person should be able to clearly express his/her view. Listeners' perception will largely depend on how well one expresses himself/herself. While articulation of one's thought is very vital, it should also be presented in a simple, confident and unambiguous way. Communication of ones feelings and thoughts resolves more than the present problem!

Listening

Listening is the prime skill for any individual. It is a fundamental need in any interaction before which most other qualities of an individual takes a back seat. An Individual is required to listen to one's view with an open, unbiased mind and deduce what is good. With careful listening one can understand an individual better and there by help in making appropriate conversation thus building a positive atmosphere. A good listener can easily win another's heart as psychologically, every human aspires to be heard and understood.

Networking

There are very few activities in the world that can be done alone. A large number of activities require help in some form or the other from various groups and individuals. The amount of attention and help drawn from different groups largely depend on how well one knows them and how frequently he/she exchanges greeting with them. In today's time testing world it is very important to strike a great balance between doing one's own work and helping others or seeking help from others. Building a large network of friends and co-workers, help the individuals meet their personal and organizational goals faster.

Leadership

Everyone around expects the leader to lead by example. People look at the leader for setting up high standards, giving positive direction, resolving conflict and talk with pride. A strong Leader understands the various dynamics and harnesses the diverse energies within an organization and pulls everyone together.

Attitude

"Most people are about as happy as they make up their minds to be" quoted by Abraham Lincoln. We may have no control on lot of things in life, but every one of us has the ability to manage our emotions and decide as to how to respond to them. And that determines how happy or unhappy we are. An Individual needs a positive attitude towards everything one does. One should establish trust in both directions. Trust in the Team and in the Process, drives everyone towards success.

In general all the qualities mentioned above are cyclic in nature. One has to follow them continuously and constantly improve.

Non-Verbal Skills

For instance, it's not always just what you say. It's also how you "say" it – taking into account your eyes, your posture, your overall body language, even your appearance at the time the communication is exchanged, and the voice in which you offer the exchange.

In verbal communication, an active dialogue is engaged with the use of words. At the same time, however, non-verbal communication takes place, relying on nonverbal cues, such as gestures, eye contact, facial expressions, even clothing and personal space.

Nonverbal cues are very powerful, making it crucial that you pay attention to your actions, as well as the nonverbal cues of those around you. If, during your meeting, participants begin to doodle or chat amongst themselves, they are no longer paying attention to you: Your message has become boring or your delivery is no longer engaging.

Once again, you need to be mindful of cultural differences when using or interpreting nonverbal cues. For instance, the handshake that is so widely accepted in Western cultures as a greeting or confirmation of a business deal is not accepted in other cultures, and can cause confusion.

While eye contact, facial expressions, posture, gestures, clothing and space are obvious nonverbal communication cues, others strongly influence interpretation of messages, including how the message is delivered. This means paying close attention to your tone of voice, even your voice's overall loudness and its pitch.

Be mindful of your own nonverbal cues, as well as the nonverbal cues of those around you. Keep your messages short and concise. This means preparing in advance whenever possible. And for the impromptu meeting, it means thinking before you speak.

Giving People Time

Setting aside a specific time for meetings and regular communications is a great idea. This allows time for everyone involved to prepare. Also, keep in mind that listening is oftentimes much more productive when working to communicate effectively, and can very well be more important than talking. Allow everyone involved the time they need to communicate effectively.

Enhancing your communications:

- Because gestures can both compliment and contradict your message, be mindful of these.
- Eye contact is an important step in sending and receiving messages. Eye contact can be a signal of interest, a signal of recognition, even a sign of honesty and credibility.
- Closely linked to eye contact are facial expressions, which can reflect attitudes and emotions.
- Posture can also be used to more effectively communicate your message.
- Clothing is important. By dressing for your job, you show respect for the values and conventions of your organization.
- Be mindful of people's personal space when communicating. Do not invade their personal space by getting too close and do not confuse communications by trying to exchange messages from too far away.

Verbal Skills:

There are many things you should do to ensure that your verbal messages are understood time and time again.

Although somewhat obvious and deceptively simple, these include:

- Keep the message clear
- Be prepared
- Keep the message simple
- Be vivid when delivering the message
- Be natural
- Keep the message concise

Being prepared:

Ask yourself: **Who? What? How? When? Where? Why?**

Who are you speaking to? What are their interests, presuppositions and values? What do they share in common with others; how are they unique?

What do you wish to communicate? One way of answering this question is to ask yourself about the 'success criteria'. How do you know if and when you have successfully communicated what you have in mind?

How can you best convey your message? Language is important here, as are the nonverbal cues discussed earlier. Choose your words and your nonverbal cues with your audience in mind. Plan a beginning, middle and end. If time and place allow, consider and prepare audio-visual aids.

When? Timing is important here. Develop a sense of timing, so that your contributions are seen and heard as relevant to the issue or matter at hand. There is a time to speak and a time to be silent. 'It's better to be silent than sing a bad tune.

Where? What is the physical context of the communication in mind? You may have time to visit the room, for example, and rearrange the furniture. Check for availability and visibility if you are using audio or visual aids.

Why? In order to convert hearers into listeners, you need to know why they should listen to you – and tell them if necessary. What disposes them to listen? That implies that you know yourself why you are seeking to communicate – the value or worth or interest of what you are going to say.

Be concise. Be brief. Use short words and sentences. Where appropriate, support these with short, easy-to-understand examples, which help demonstrate your message.

Writing Skills:

There are times when writing is the best way to communicate, and oftentimes the only way to get your message across.

Write With Necessary Caution:

When writing, be mindful of the fact that once something is in written form, it cannot be taken back. Communicating through words can be more concrete than verbal communications, with less room for error and even less room for mistakes. This presents written communicators with new challenges, including spelling, grammar, punctuation, even writing style and actual wording.

Thankfully, today's technology makes memo, letter and proposal writing much easier by providing reliable tools that check and even correct misspelled words and incorrect grammar use. Unfortunately, these tools are not fail proof and will require your support, making your knowledge in this area important.

The Importance of "Style":

Some of the most basic tips to remember when writing include:

- Avoid the use of slang words.
- Try not to use abbreviations (unless appropriately defined).
- Steer away from the use of symbols (such as ampersands (&)).
- Clichés should be avoided, or at the very least, used with caution.
- Brackets are used to play down words or phrases.
- Dashes are generally used for emphasis.
- Great care should ALWAYS be taken to spell the names of people and companies correctly.
- Numbers should be expressed as words when the number is less than 10 or is used to start a sentence (example: 10 years ago, my brother and I…). The number 10, or anything greater than 10, should be expressed as a figure (example: My brother has 13 Matchbox cars.).
- Quotation marks should be placed around any directly quoted speech or text and around titles of publications.
- Keep sentences short.

While the above tips cover the most common mistakes made when writing letters, memos and reports, they in no way cover everything you need to know to ensure your written communications are accurate and understood.

The Importance of Careful Proofing

Perhaps the most important thing to remember when writing a letter is to check it thoroughly when it is completed. Even when you think it is exactly what you want, read it one more time. This "unwritten" rule holds true for everything you write – memos, letters, proposals, etc.

Use both the grammar and spell check on your computer, paying very, very close attention to every word highlighted. Do not place total faith on your computer here.

When checking your written communications make sure the document is clear and concise. Is there anything in the written communication that could be misinterpreted? Does it raise unanswered questions or fail to make the point you need to get across?

Can you cut down on the number of words used? For instance, don't use 20 words when you can use 10. While you do not want to be curt or abrupt, you do not want to waste the reader's time with unnecessary words or phrases.

Is your written communication well organized? Does each idea proceed logically to the next? Make sure your written communications are easy to read and contain the necessary information, using facts where needed and avoiding information that is not relevant. Again, outline the course of action you expect, such as a return call or visit.

Close appropriately, making sure to include your contact information. While this may seem obvious, it is sometimes overlooked and can make your written communications look amateurish. This can diminish your chances of meeting your written communication's goals.

Effective Email

As with all written communications, your emails should be clear and concise. Sentences should be kept short and to the point.

This starts with the e-mail's subject line. Use the subject line to inform the receiver of EXACTLY what the email is about. Keep in mind, the subject line should offer a short summary of the email and allows for just a few words. Because everyone gets emails they do not want (SPAM, etc.), appropriate use of the subject line increases the chances your email will be read and not discarded into the deleted email file without so much as a glance.

Because emails have the date and time they were sent, it is not necessary to include this information in your email correspondences. However, the writing used in the email should be like that used is other business writings. The email should be clear and concise, with the purpose of the email detailed in the very first paragraph.

The body of the email should contain all pertinent information and should be direct and informative.

Make sure to include any call to action you desire, such as a phone call or follow-up appointment. Then, make sure you include your contact information, including your name, title, phone and fax numbers, as well as snail-mail address. If you have additional email addresses, you may want to include these, as well.

If you regularly correspond using email, make sure to clean out your email inbox at least once each day. Of course, the exception here may be on days you do not work, such as weekends and holidays.

Make sure you return emails in a timely manner. This is a simple art of courtesy and will also serve to encourage senders to return your emails in a timely manner.

Internal email should be treated as regular email, following the same rules as outlined above. However, internal email should be checked regularly throughout the working day and returned in a much quicker manner as much of these detail timely projects, immediate updates, meeting notes, etc. Nonetheless, internal emails, just like emails, should not be informal. Remember, these are written forms of communication that can be printed out and viewed by others than those originally intended for.

10 Tips for Effective E-mail

1. Think before you write. Just because you can send information faster than ever before, it doesn't mean that you should send it. Analyze your readers to make certain that you are sending a message that will be both clear and useful.
2. Remember that you can always clarify what you said in the past if it was misunderstood. But if you write it, you may be held accountable for many many moons. You may be surprised to find where your message may end up.
3. Keep your message concise. Remember that the view screen in most e-mail programs shows only approximately one half of a hard-copy page. Save longer messages and formal reports for attachments. On the other hand, do not keep your message so short that the reader has no idea what you're talking about. Include at least a summary (action or information?) in the first paragraph of your message.
4. Remember that e-mail is not necessarily confidential. Some companies will retain the right to monitor employees' messages. Don't send anything you wouldn't be comfortable seeing published in your company's newsletter (or your community's newspaper).
5. Don't attempt to "discipline" your readers. It's unprofessional to lose control in person—to do so in writing usually just makes the situation worse.
6. Don't "spam" your readers. Don't send them unnecessary or frivolous messages. Soon, they'll quit opening any message from you.
7. DON'T TYPE IN ALL CAPS! IT LOOKS LIKE YOU'RE YELLING AT THE READERS! Remember, if you emphasize everything, you will have emphasized nothing.
8. don't type in all lower case. if you violate the rules of english grammar and usage, you make it difficult for the reader to read.
9. Use the "Subject" line to get the readers' attention. Replace vague lines ("Information on XYZ Project," or "Status Report Q1") with better "hooks": "Need your input on Tralfamadore Project," or "Analysis of recent problems with the new Veeblefetzer."
10. Take the time to proofread your document before you sent it. Rub the document through the spell checker and/or the grammar checker. Even simple mistakes will make you look sloppy and damage you're professional credibility.

COMMUNICATION FOR PROJECTS

To ensure successful communications in the project , it is best to start with the very basics: Soft skills of an individual with Managing communication process and techniques.

Manage Processes

The processes used to manage communication are described in this section. These processes can be modified as necessary for your project, and then inserted into the Project Management Procedures document.

Note that in all the cases where the term Status Report is used, this does not necessarily imply a written report. Verbal updates, voicemail, conference calls, collaborative tools, etc., are all valid means of communicating status.

Small Projects

Small projects usually do not need more than basic status reporting. If the project manager is doing any hands-on work on the project, he or she probably has a very good idea of the overall status. However, if the project manager is not working in the project details (for instance, the project manager may be have a number of projects being managed), he or she may need a formal status reporting process. The following process would be typical.

Project team members send a status update to the project manager on a weekly basis.

The project manager sends a status update to the Clients on a bi-weekly or monthly basis. However, be careful about monthly reporting. If the project is very small, the client may get no updates before the project is completed - or maybe just one. This does not give them time to react if they see anything

unusual. The project manager should report status bi-weekly or weekly in those cases.

The entire project team should attend project status meetings. The meetings should focus on the status against the project workplan and uncovering any current issues, scope change requests or potential risks. The client should be invited to attend, but their attendance is not mandatory. The frequency of the meeting depends on the timetable for the project and the need to get information in a timely manner. For instance, if the project is three weeks, the team might want to meet twice a week. If the project is eight weeks, weekly is probably appropriate.

Medium Projects

The communication should include formal status meetings and Status Reports. In the smaller project, these could be fairly informal. For a medium project, these activities should be formalized.

The team should attend status meetings on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. The client should definitely have representation at the status meeting. If the project manager prefers, there could be a status meetings for the project team and a separate meeting with the client. There should be a standard agenda for the meetings and the meeting should be kept to no more than one hour. In general, the purpose of the meetings is to communicate status, not solve problems.

The project manager should send Status Reports to all stakeholders on a bi-weekly or monthly basis. Depending on the financial reporting cycle, the monthly Status Report should include a financial status as well.

The project team members should send a weekly or bi-weekly Status Report to the project manager detailing their progress during the reporting period. This information is used by the project manager to update each assigned activity in the workplan. If the project manager understands the current detailed status for each team members, the Status Report may not be required. This report is in addition to the status meeting.

A typical sequencing of Status Reports and status meetings is for the project team to have a status meeting on Monday or Tuesday, with the weekly/bi-weekly team member Status Reports due to the project manager by Friday morning. This process ensures that the project manager is up-to-date on all project activities at the end of the week and is prepared for productive status

meetings with the project team and the client at the beginning of the following week.

On a monthly basis, usually after the financial systems close, the project manager issues a formal monthly Status Report to all the stakeholders, including financial information about the project.

Large Projects

In a large project, all communication takes place in context of an overall communications strategy and plan. Status meetings and status reporting are required, just as for a medium size project. In addition, there are many other types of proactive communication that need to be considered. This creative and proactive communication is laid out in a Communication Plan, which is created as follows.

Determine the project stakeholders. In some cases these are groups of stakeholders with similar communications needs, for instance, higher management. In other cases, there may be a single person, for instance the client.

Determine the communication needs for each stakeholder. Usually this breaks down into three general areas:

Mandatory. This generally includes project Status Reports, legal requirements, financial reporting, etc. This information is pushed out to the recipients.

Informational. This is information people want to know or that they may need for their jobs. This information is usually made available for people to read, but requires them to take the initiative, or pull the communication.

Marketing. This communication is designed to build buy-in and enthusiasm for the project and its deliverables. This type of information is pushed out to the appropriate people. You may also want to "brand" a large project if you require the organization culture or work habits to change

For each stakeholder, brainstorm how to fulfill the communication need. Determine the information they need to know, how often they need an update, and the best manner to deliver the information. At this point, be creative in looking for ways to communicate to the project stakeholders. For instance, all stakeholders still need an updated project status. The Higher management

team may need to get together for an executive briefing and to provide strategic direction every other month. The Client may need a personal briefing on a monthly basis. A quarterly newsletter may need to go out to the entire client organization for informational and marketing purposes.

Determine the effort required to create and distribute each of the identified communication options outlined in step 2. Also determine the potential benefit of the communication to the recipient and the project team.

Prioritize the communication options that were established above. Discard those that require high effort for marginal benefit. Also discard those that provide marginal benefit even though they may take little effort from the project team. Implement the communication options that provide high value and require low effort from the project team. Also evaluate those options that have high value and require a high level of effort from the project team. Some of these might make sense to implement while others may not.

Regardless of the prioritization, implement any communication options that are mandatory for the project or for the environment. This will definitely include project Status Reports, but there may also be government required reports, legal reports, etc.

Add the resulting communication activities to the workplan. This will include assigning frequencies, due dates, effort hours and a responsible person(s) for each communication option implemented.

Manage Communicating Techniques

Effective Meetings

While meetings are wonderful technique for generating ideas, expanding on thoughts and managing group activity, this face-to-face contact with team members and colleagues can easily fail without adequate preparation and leadership.

Stay Focused at Status Meetings

If you find that you are spending too much time in status meetings, it is usually a sign of too much problem solving. While you have everyone together, use the time to discuss general status, issues, scope and risk. The best way to focus status meetings that are too long is to simply reduce the time allocated to them. For instance, if you meet for two hours per week and find that you cannot complete all your work, try reducing the time of the meetings to 90 or 60 minutes. Keep the status meetings short with a tight agenda to be most effective. Take any lengthy discussions offline or to a separate meeting that focuses on these items with the people that are most interested.

Meeting Fundamentals

In general, all meetings should have an agenda. The creation of the agenda takes a little extra work, but it can be as simple as writing it in an email and sending it to the meeting participants. Regularly scheduled meetings do not need a published agenda every week if they stick to the same agenda format. In those cases, the formal agenda is of value while the team is first meeting. Once everyone understands the purpose and the regular flow, a standard agenda model can be reused every time. If this is not an ongoing meeting, the agenda should be sent out ahead of time. Other meeting considerations include:

- If you have a large group of people attending the meetings, there should be a meeting facilitator, although the role can be rotated for regularly scheduled meetings. This is usually the person who requested the meeting unless other arrangements have been made. For ongoing status meetings, the facilitator is usually the project manager, but the facilitator role can be rotated.

- Make sure the participants know ahead of time of anything they need to bring to the meeting or any advance preparation that needs to take place.
- Only invite the people that need to be there. Others may dilute the effectiveness of the meeting.
- The meeting should start on time, with some allowance for those that may be coming from another meeting.
- The person who requested the meeting should explain the purpose and the expected outcome.
- Follow the agenda and watch the time to make sure everything gets covered.
- Someone should document any action items assigned during the meeting. This will be the facilitator or originator unless other arrangements have been made.
- Recap all outstanding action items toward the end of the meeting, including who is responsible, what is expected, and when the action item is due.
- Recap any decisions that were made and document them in an email (or other project communication mode as appropriate).

Reports

Reports are also highly effective technique for managing group and individual activity. With adequate planning of the reporting type, report format, contents, frequency and mechanism could lead to a very productive and tracking mechanism in the project that could be made use for knowing the status at any point in time .

Use Standardized Reports

Avoid creating individualized reports for each person who needs information. Most people need only a standard set of information that can be communicated in a common project Status Report. If there is a need for information outside of the standard report, create an additional standard report to provide the information. For instance, you may have a detailed Status Report on a weekly basis and a summary Status Report on a monthly basis. However, minimize ad-hoc status reporting requests as much as possible.

How Often Should Team Members Submit Status Reports?

The frequency of status reporting is based on the length of the project and the speed in which you need to react. For instance, if your project is two months long and the project manager receives Status Reports from the team members on a monthly basis, there is not enough time to respond if problems are indicated. A good rule of thumb might be that for small projects you may not need formal status reporting. Every week might make sense for medium projects. Every other week might be appropriate for large projects. On the other hand, if critical activities are occurring (for instance when the solution is being implemented) you may need status updates on a daily basis.

Include Useful Information in Status Reports, Not the Mundane
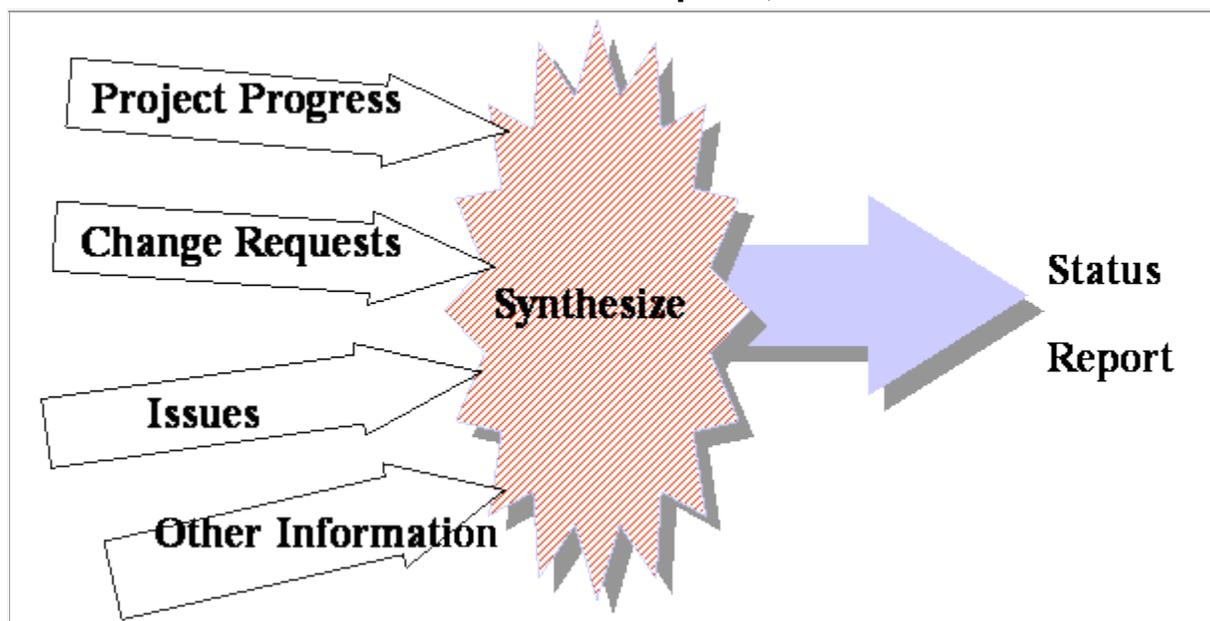
Let's face it. Status Reports are typically not as effective as they should be. This is true for team members that submit Status Reports to the project manager, as well as project managers that are submitting Status Reports to their major stakeholders. One of the major reasons is that the people completing the reports look upon them as a chore and not as a way to communicate valuable information. You typically get the Status Report that is very brief and says nothing, or else you get the Status Report that contains all the mundane activities that a person did.

Try to focus the Status Reports so that the information in them can be used in the decision making process. The writer should ask him or herself whether the

information on the Status Report is there to really communicate something valuable or is it just taking up space. Typically the Status Report should focus on the following:

- Accomplishments against the assigned activities on the work plan.
- Comments on work that should be completed but is behind schedule.
- Problems (issues) encountered, the impact to the project, and what is being done to resolve them.
- Scope change requests.
- Newly identified risks.
- Observations that will be useful to the reader.

If you focus on this type of information in your Status Report, you will find that the information is meaningful and can be used to help manage the project and keep the stakeholders informed. People will stop paying attention if you report on the trivial events of the reporting period.

You Need Less Detail as you get Higher in the Organization

If you create a Communication Plan for your project, the needs of all your stakeholders will be analyzed formally. But even without a formal Communication Plan, always keep the organizational level of your audience in mind. Your team members need information that is highly detailed and highly specific to the work they are assigned. As the project manager, you need information that covers the entire project but at a less detailed level. The manager of the project manager needs to have information summarized and delivered at a higher level. The next higher manager needs information at a higher level still. Although your project is the most important thing on your mind, to senior management it may just be one of a number of important events they are trying to keep track of.

In some organizations, this filtering is a part of the communication system. For instance, you may give a status to your manager. Your manager receives the status from you, as well as from the other people that report to him or her. Your manager then summarizes and consolidates the information and passes a higher-level report to their manager. That manager in turn does the same thing until only very high-level information reaches the top. In fact, if your project is on track, it may not even be mentioned at the executive level.

In other organizations, however, the status information is not summarized and passed upward. The project manager is the one that needs to communicate with multiple management levels. In that case, remember that one size of communication does not fit all. You may need to modify the communication content to each level of management. For instance, you may send a one-page report to your direct manager and your major clients showing the project status and financial situation. This may be summarized to a half-page for the next level of management and to perhaps a paragraph to the next level.

Use the Best Communication Media

When you select the various type of communication that you need for your project, also determine the best medium for delivering the information. For instance

- **Status Reports**: These do not have to be on paper. Depending on the person sending and receiving the information, the status can be communicated via voicemail, email, videoconference or other collaborative tools. Your organization may have a standard way of delivering status. If not, pick a manner of reporting that is convenient for the reader without compromising the value of the information.
- **Email**: Use email for routine messages, information sharing and some marketing related messages. Spread these out so that you don't inundate the same people over a short period of time.
- **Voicemail**: Use voicemail to leave simple messages, to either single persons or to entire departments. Complicated or long messages are not appropriate for voicemails.

3 Benefits

The usefulness of effective soft skills is that they can be applied to any working environment or situation by an individual. Regardless of what business you are in – a large corporation, a small company, or even a home-based business – effective communication mechanism are essential for success of the system. By successfully getting your message across, you convey your thoughts and ideas effectively. In a recent survey of recruiters from companies with more than 50,000 employees, communication skills were cited as the single more important decisive factor in choosing managers. The survey, conducted by the University of Pittsburgh's Katz Business School, points out that communication skills, including written and oral presentations, as well as an ability to work with others, are the main factor contributing to success. When we achieve growth in our communication skills it allows us to:
1. Make discoveries
2. Learn about ourselves
3. Solve problems
4. Develop new skills
5. Have enjoyment
6. Achieve common goals

4 Conclusion

Effective communication is the key to individual and project success. If Communication is used effectively and judiciously, it could make a huge difference in the individual and the organization.

Words are the foundation of communication. "Body language" is an important part to sending and receiving messages. Your delivery includes your tone of voice, timing and tempo. Communication skills involve our ability to listen. Our communication must be effective to achieve success and happiness at work, in our friendships and our family relationships.

The types of messages you send to people are statements, questions, commands and warnings. Your words and gestures make up the elements of language. Your messages are communicated by your voice, touch, silence, gestures and written forms such as email, reports and letters. Communication is affected by emotions, as well as by physical surroundings. It is not only what you say but how you say it.

Individuals act as units to the projects. So effective soft skills for individuals help the smallest unit to perform at its peak with the best efficiency. Combined with the best communication mechanism chosen for the project as a whole allows the project as a whole and groups as a whole to reach common goals effectively.

Hence soft skills and communication mechanism is very critical and important for the success of an individual and the project.

5 References

Lot of literature is available for detailed study on any specific topic on communication and soft skills.

Websites:

www.TenStep.com

www.Techrepublic.com

Books:

Messages: The Communication Skill book by *Mathew Mackay, Martha David and Patrick Fanning*

People Skills: How to Assert Yourself Listen to Others and Resolve Conflicts *by Robert H. Bolton*