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6 Tips for Effective Project Communication

It seems many clients are tired of spending so much time clearing up miscommunications on a project, when they would rather see work completed. But to me, communication and project progress go hand in hand. Poor communication is indicative of a project manager's capabilities to coordinate, lead and effectively manage the project. While it may only be perception, it is the only thing folks have to go on. A strong communicator — even when communicating bad news — is seen as in control and can maintain the confidence of the organization. Even if you have everything together from a project standpoint, you can raise unwarranted concern if you do not communicate well. When there's poor communication, people tend to create their own assumptions about what is going on. Even worse, they seem to thrive on sharing this less-than-accurate information with everyone. Lack of communication can also lead to duplicate efforts in the organization. For example, matrix organizations are very common these days, with functional managers assigning team members to represent their specific interests on an initiative. The problem is, when marketing is assigned John Doe on Project A and Jane Doe on Project B, both of them tell the respective project managers that marketing needs requirement X. In turn, you have two

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separate project managers working on the same requirement for the same department. Need help honing your communication skills? Here are six tips to help: **1. Know your audience and tailor your communication accordingly**. Executives often don't care about the tasks of a project. They want to know the key items: Why are we doing this? What is the problem or opportunity? What are the benefits? What are the key dates and milestones? Will you make those dates? If not, why not? High-level, business plan communications usually suffice to answer the executives' questions. Sales operations analysts or field marketing reps, however, want to know why and how a project directly impacts them. They want to know whether or not you have taken their specific role into consideration when you thought about the latest and greatest process. The sales teams want to know that you had input from them when you decided to implement changes in Salesforce workflow. For these folks, you will want to reference the resource/s from their team that has participated and represented them during this Salesforce project. **2. Make sure you have the right audience.** The quickest way to fail in communication is by not including the right folks during the correct stages of your project. An example might include sharing endless details on marketing concepts with an operations audience or not including marketing during the requirements phase of a telemarketing campaign. Think about the organization beyond just your project. Even though a business unit may not have a functional member on the team, it doesn't mean it isn't interested in receiving project updates. **3. Don't over saturate your audience.** Recognize that your organization is burdened with email. Employees even ignore corporate messages these days. When you want to relay a message, keep the following in mind:

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> **A. Cadence**: Be cognizant of how many emails you're sending and how often. If you send an email every day, you will be set to auto-delete fast. If you're about to send an email today with an, "I will follow-up tomorrow," think about waiting until tomorrow to send the comprehensive message.
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> **B. Content**: Keep your message brief and valuable. Do not try and impress the organization with your project management terminology. Speak their language and tell them what matters to them, such as how this pending change will remove administrative tasks or increase revenue recognition. If you are asking something of them, be clear as to what you need from them and by when.
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> **C. Relationship**: If you want your message read, you either need a relationship with your audience or you need to leverage someone else who has a relationship with your audience. This isn't the time for egos and getting your name out there. If you aren't the one with the influence, let someone else deliver the message.

Recently, for example, I needed a few sales reps to participate in user acceptance testing. I knew if I sent the email, it wouldn't have had time for the preview pane to open it before hitting the trash, so I leveraged the regional sales manager to send the message. It was the line of business executive, but the team's direct manager who had the influence and a relationship. 4. **Provide enough time to receive the message.** A common complaint I hear is that people didn't have enough time to respond, question or support what was being communicated to them. If you are asking for feedback, asking managers to address their teams in support of a coming launch, or for folks to sign-up for training, you better make sure you provide them with enough time to do so. I don't think there is a magic number and it depends on the communication purpose. **5. Leverage the appropriate medium with virtual teams.** In today's global economy, virtual teams are extremely common. Even in smaller organizations, you see significant efforts to implement work-life balance options and virtual office solutions. Keep that in mind when you schedule meetings or updates. : **6. Be specific.** When you have to communicate a change or a delay, remember to be timely, thorough and concise. Communicate what the original plan was and the pending issue or change; the root cause of the issue or change; the impact of the issue or change, such as money or time; and the actions you're taking to correct the issue. Finally, offer to hear concerns and thank them for continued support.

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