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1. Active Listening

If project managers have poor interpersonal communications skills, their productivity will suffer simply because they do not have the tools needed to influence, persuade and negotiate, all necessary for project success. Lines of communications must be open between people who rely on one another to get work done. Project managers must be able to listen attentively if they are to perform to expectations, avoid conflicts and misunderstandings. Here are a few short tips to help enhance the communications skills.

- **Understanding your Communication Style**

Good communication skills require a high level of self-awareness.

Understanding your personal style of communicating will go a long way toward helping you to

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PM CONNECT

A quarterly newsletter that brings information on modern project management methods, practices and

2. Work Breakdown Structures

Sometimes project managers have a hard time getting a WBS started because they are not sure what to put at the very top and they are uncertain about how to break the work down from there. Although there are many ways that the WBS can be started, the ultimate focus is on objectives. The top level is the overall project goal, and then the next level describes the main objectives. After the objectives are described, all the activities can be defined that are required to build the objectives. The project schedule is ultimately made up of activities, but the activities need to be listed in the context of the objectives they are helping to build. There are a number of options for defining the WBS at the Objective level 1

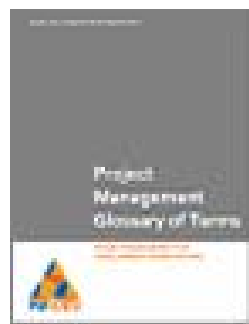
- Place the major project objectives directly at level 1, and break the objectives into smaller components on the next level
- Another option for level 1 is to describe the project by areas it will be involved, such as Nutrition, Water and Sanitation, etc. The next level should describe the objectives that the project will deliver.
- A third option is to look at level 1 in terms of the project life-cycle, for instance initiate, plan, implement, adapt and close. Again, if that is the best logical way to look at level 1, then level 2 should describe the deliverables produced in each life-cycle stage.

Level 1 can start with objectives or level 1 can describe another way to logically group major portions of the project. However, if you choose another way to initially organize your thinking of the project, you need to transition immediately from there to objectives and then move to the activities necessary to build the objectives.

When the team is creating the WBS, there are usually

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eBook—Project Management Glossary of Terms



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questions about how detailed the activities should be. The answer determines when to stop breaking the work down into smaller activities. Part of the answer is to utilize an overall estimating threshold. Other things to take into account include:

- The activity should contain sub-activities that are related and continuous. For instance, if you had an activity called 'Create Learning Strategy and Training Strategy', it probably should be broken down further, since the Learning Strategy and Training Strategy are not necessarily related and they are not necessarily continuous.
- The activity should be able to be completed by one person, or one group of people. If you have an activity that requires different people for different sub-activities, then it should be further broken down into the sub-activities so that a person or the same group of people can complete the entire activity.
- The activity needs to be fully understood by the team creating the WBS. If you have an activity that is not understood by the team, it should be further broken down into its sub-activities to provide further clarity.
- The work should be broken down to a level that makes sense for the project manager to control. A common rule is to break the activities that are larger than 80 hours and not break those that are less than 8 hours .

It is important that the WBS doesn't get too tall or too deep.



Depending on the WBS approach, it may take one to three levels to get to the defined activities. The general rule of thumb is that the number of levels should not exceed five. Smaller projects may not need more than two or three levels for each objective. For a very large project, the levels might be deeper. However, there is a point where the detail will be too complex to manage. If the WBS has five or more levels for an objective, the project may be defining the work at too low levels (tasks that take less than 8 hours to accomplish). Another issue is when the objective is defined too broadly. In that case, the objective can be broken up into two or three sub-objectives that are smaller but integrated.

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create good and lasting impressions on others. By becoming more aware of how others perceive you, you can adapt more readily to their styles of communicating. One way to do this is by making the other person more comfortable with you by selecting and emphasizing certain behaviors that fit within your personality and resonate with another. In doing this, you will prepare yourself to become an active listener.



- **Be An Active Listener** - People speak at 100 to 175 words per minute, but they can listen intelligently at up to 300 words per minute. Since only a part of our mind is paying attention, it is easy to go into mind drift - thinking about other things while listening to someone. The cure for this is active listening - which involves listening with a purpose. It may be to gain information, obtain directions, understand others, solve problems, share interest, see how another person feels, show support, etc. If you're finding it particularly difficult to concentrate on what someone is saying, try asking them to explain in more detail what they are saying, this will reinforce their message in your mind and help you control mind drift.
- **Use Nonverbal Communication** - Nonverbal behaviors help raise the channel of interpersonal communication. Nonverbal communication is facial expressions like smiles, gestures, eye contact, and even posture. This shows the person you are communicating with that you are indeed listening actively and will prompt further communications while keeping costly, time-consuming misunderstandings at a minimum.
- **Give Feedback** - What someone says and what we hear can be amazingly different! Personal filters, assumptions, judgments, bias, and beliefs can distort what we hear. Repeat back or summarize to ensure that you understand. Restate what you think you heard and ask, "Have I understood you correctly?" If you find having difficulties understanding the message ask for more information. Feedback is a verbal communication means used to clearly demonstrate you are actively listening and to confirm the communications between you and others.

3. Cost Accounting

Many projects have one overall budget that includes all of the project labor costs, travel costs, materials costs, etc. This works fine for smaller and medium-sized projects. However, as a project gets larger it helps to have the overall budget broken down into smaller subsets. This is similar to the concept of breaking down a project with long duration into a set of smaller projects. Having your budget allocated at a lower level allows you to keep better control of the details and it may point out potential budget trouble quicker than having everything rolled up into one consolidated project budget.



Cost accounts are used to allocate the budget at a lower level. Cost accounts are formally established in your organization's General Ledger so that your budget is actually allocated in each detailed cost account and the actual project expenses are reported at that level as well. The cost accounts can be established in a couple of ways. One way is to simply divide the different types of costs in separate cost account budgets. In this approach, the project manager could have a cost account for internal labor charges, external labor charges, travel costs, per diem costs, training costs, material costs, etc. Typical cost accounts are used to track budget expenses in the NGO financial system, also called the chart of accounts (COA).

- 50XX - Personnel Costs
- 51XX - Professional Services
- 52XX - Equipment Purchases (Expensed)
- 53XX - Materials, Services and Consumables
- 54XX - Travel and Transportation
- 55XX - Occupancy
- 56XX - Financing/Depreciation/Miscellaneous
- 57XX - Grants/Sub-grants
- 58XX - Contributions in Kind

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4. Responsibility Matrix

In a large project, there may be many people that have some role in the creation and approval of project deliverables. Sometimes it is straightforward, such as one person writing a document and one person approving it. In other cases, there may be many people who have a hand in the creation and others that need to have varying levels of approval.

For complicated scenarios involving many people, it can be helpful to have a Responsibility Matrix. This helps set expectations and ensures people know what is expected from them.

On the matrix, the different people (or roles) appear as columns, with the specific deliverables in question listed as rows. Then, use the intersecting points to describe each person's responsibility for each deliverable. A simple matrix is shown, followed by suggested responsibility categories.

	Country Director	Program Director	Project Manager	Project Team	Steering Committee
Project Charter	A	R	C	I	R
Communication Plan	I	R	C	R	I
Program Approach	I	A	C	I	R
Status Reports	I	R	C	R	R

R - Reviews the deliverable (and provides feedback)

A - Approves the deliverable

C - Creates the deliverable

I - Provides input

In the table above, the Project Charter is created by the project manager; approved by the Country

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With the objective of serving the needs of the global development community, **PM4DEV** was created to provide with expert project management consulting and training services based on a **customized** methodology that offers the tools and processes to plan, implement, and monitor projects in a more **consistent, reliable and predictable** manner. PM4DEV's methodology is based on a project management cycle that incorporates all the processes, tools and practices to **effectively** manage projects of all sizes. Organizations should have the ability to complete a project successfully by combining systems, techniques, and knowledge and controlling and balancing the constraints of time, cost, and scope in order to produce quality

**DOING THE RIGHT PROJECTS...
... DOING THE PROJECTS RIGHT**

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Director, reviewed by Steering Committee and the Project team is informed.

The purpose of the matrix is to clarify and gain agreement on who does what, and define the columns with as much detail as makes sense. For instance, in the above example, the 'project team' could have been broken into specific people or the person responsible for creating the Program Approach could have been broken out into a separate column.

After the matrix is completed, it should be circulated for approval. If it is created as a part of the Planning Phase and it should be circulated as a separate document.



The ability to gain clarity is vital for the matrix to be effective. It must reflect people's expectations and responsibilities. For instance, if the Country Director delegated the approval of Project Charter to the Program Director, that fact should be represented on the matrix for all to see and approve. On the other hand, if the Country Director agrees that he will approve the Program Approach, then, in fact, his approval is required, not that of a subordinate that was delegated the responsibility.

The matrix should be used to define the level of responsibility for critical actions, specially those that require an approval and review by the key stakeholder in a project. It is not necessary to use this matrix for all project activities, since it will be a duplication of efforts as that information is capture in the project schedule.

The matrix should be distributed by all people or groups involved, especially if they have responsibilities to create or approve a project document, failure to do that will result in delays that will impact the project schedule.

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Another way to set up the cost accounts is based on the WBS. After completing the WBS, the project manager can create cost accounts for each group of related activities. Another option is to set up a separate cost account and budget for each phase, stage or milestone (a milestone represents the completion of one or more deliverables.) This method allows tracking the costs to achieve a specific objective or milestone, something that the other method will not be able to do as it tracks costs associated with accounting codes.

If the cost accounts are for related sets of work on the WBS, the project manager has options to track different costs. The various types of costs can be tracked with sub account numbers within the cost account.

The more detailed the cost accounts are, the more work will be required to set them up and allocating and tracking the cost account budgets. However, if the project is very large and costly, the project manager will definitely want to utilize some aspects of this technique.

The points of view provides a summary of themes, that in PM4DEV's experience, have proved critical in the successful implementation of project management methodologies. It draws on the expertise of Project management professionals and provides a guide to deliver a methodology that increases the chances of project success. For more information about PM4DEV services, contact us at info@pm4dev.com

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