

## Getting the 'Soft Stuff' Right

Effective Communication is the Key to  
Successful Project Outcomes!

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## Agenda

- Perceptions of Success
- Communications Theory
- Symptoms of Communications Failure
- Defining Project Success
- Effective Project Communications
- Dealing with uncertainty
- Conclusion



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## Perceptions of Success

- Project # 1 - "on the edge of the possible"
  - Under quoted by a factor of 10 to get approval (ie, at 1/10<sup>th</sup> the expected price)
  - Over-ran the quoted price by \$95+ million
  - Was years late
  - Was a technical failure –  
\$millions have been spent on rectification
  - **Would you consider this project a success???**



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## Perceptions of Success

**Think of the most famous  
building in Australia**



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## Perceptions of Success



[www.GreenBuildings.com](http://www.GreenBuildings.com)



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## Perceptions of Success

- Project # 2 - "the largest single roofed structure in the world"
  - Completed on time
  - Built to 'budget' by the contractors
  - 3 times estimated cost due to site conditions
  - Was a technical success
  - **Would you consider this project a success???**



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## Perceptions of Success

### The 'Millennium Dome' London

- The press has called it a 'white elephant'
- Maintenance has cost \$30 million
- No 'long term' use defined to date
  - It will be the site for the ancient Egypt exhibition: *Tutankhamun and the Golden Age of the Pharaohs*, in 2007
  - It will host the Olympic basketball and gymnastics finals for London's Olympic Games in 2012.

## Perceptions of Success



## Perceptions of Success

- 'Successful' is subjective
- People have different views of success
- The same person can perceive success differently at different times
- However, success and fulfilled 'expectations' are closely aligned
- Is this building a success??

## Perceptions of Success

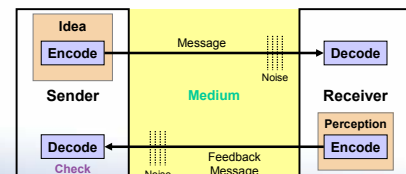


## Communications Theory

- Overview of Project Communications
- Communications Filters
  - Packaging
  - Pattern Recognition
  - Stereotypes
- Culture

## Communications Overview

- Sender / Receiver / Feedback  
Message / Medium / Noise



## Communications Filters

- Packaging



Where is the car?



Where is the dirt on the car?

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## Communications Filters

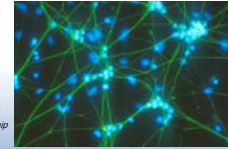
- Pattern Recognition



Every new stimulation of the brain causes synapse paths to form

Source: Rock, D., (2006) Quiet Leadership

To save energy the brain tries to deal with new stimulation through trying to match with previous patterns – this is the first and automatic response



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## Communications Filters

- Stereotypes (people packages) are based on personal attributes and differences
- **There are no positive stereotypes**
- They're part of the brain's hard-wiring
- For effective communication we need to be aware of our 'hard wiring'
- Some stereotypes (a joke!):  
A physicist, an engineer and an economist are trapped....

Source: Rock, D., (2006) Quiet Leadership

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## The neuroscience view

- We think in maps:
  - Repeated connections form paths (eg habits)
- Individual's life experiences create unique pathways in each individual
  - **EVERY person is different**
  - Different approaches to learning, problem solving and interpreting messages



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## The neuroscience view

- The brain hardwires everything useful:
  - Working memory (conscious mind: about 7 items)
  - Long term memory (unconscious mind: hardwires/automates to save energy)
- Packaging and filtering are its defences against sensory information overload



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## The neuroscience view

- Perception (our reality) is driven by this hardwiring:
  - Long term memory becomes the basis for how we interpret our world
- The brain will filter and sometimes distort information
  - Hardwiring (conscious and unconscious)
- **Understanding how the brain works is essential for effective communication**



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## The neuroscience view

- How we send and receive messages is also affected by:
  - The objectives of the communication (business or pleasure)
  - Our cultural background
  - Our preferences
  - How we are feeling at the time

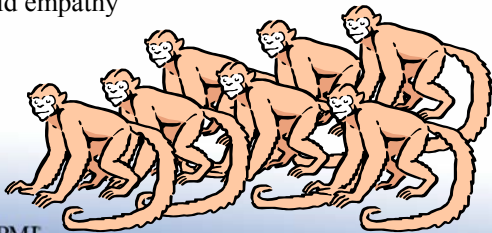


## Culture

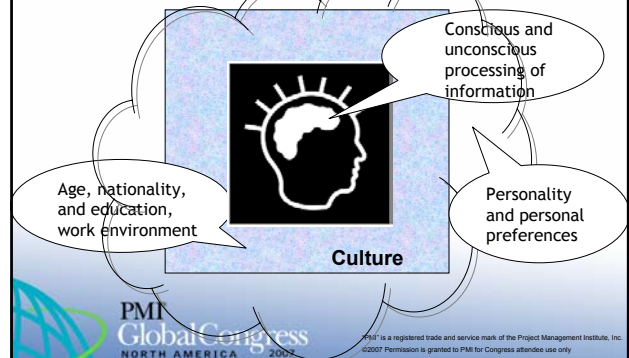
- Culture is: ‘how we do things around here’ and cultural norms are the ‘unwritten rules of behaviour’
- A person’s culture (national, professional, organisational) influences how messages will be sent and received (communication style)

## Culture

- Understanding culture and communication style prevents misunderstandings and helps build empathy



## Considerations for Effective communication



## Stakeholders

- Stakeholders are individuals or groups who:
- have an interest or
- some aspect of rights or ownership in the project, and
- can contribute (through knowledge or support), or
- can impact, or are impacted by, the project’s work or its deliverables.

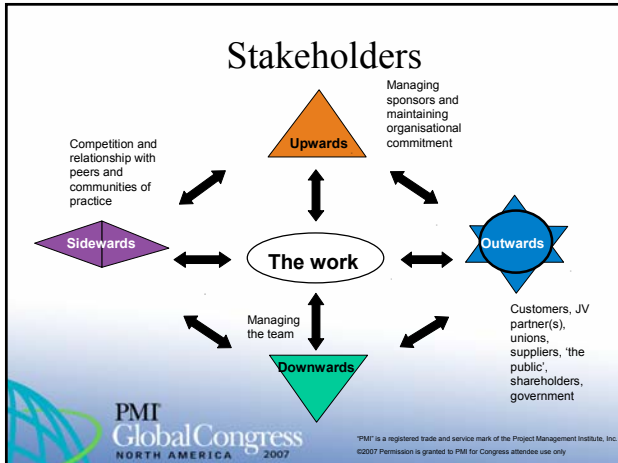
## Why Stakeholders matter



- They give and they take away!  
Money, people, support  
Without funding ....
- Without the right team members...
- Without practical support and advocacy...



But their influence and involvement fluctuates



## Symptoms of Communications Failure

- Inadequate Allowances
- Scope Inadequately Defined
- Inadequate Contingencies
- Successful Projects

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## Inadequate Allowances

- Time too short
- Insufficient budget
- Consequence: Causes project to over run
- Potential communication failures:
  - Project estimates not believed (**lack of credibility**)
  - Project estimates not requested (**lack of visibility or understanding**)

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## Scope Inadequately Defined

- Consequence: Causes project to fail to meet stakeholder expectations

Not necessarily a problem if:

- Adequate contingencies are allowed and
- The project works to define its scope

( ie, Effective Risk Management )

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## Inadequate Contingencies

- Consequence: Causes project to over run
- Potential communication failures:
  - False belief in accuracy of PM processes (**failure to communicate limitations**)
  - Lack of information on variability in environment (**failure to receive appropriate messages from the 'environment'**)
  - Lack of confidence in PMs to manage uncertainty and risk (**failure of relationships**)

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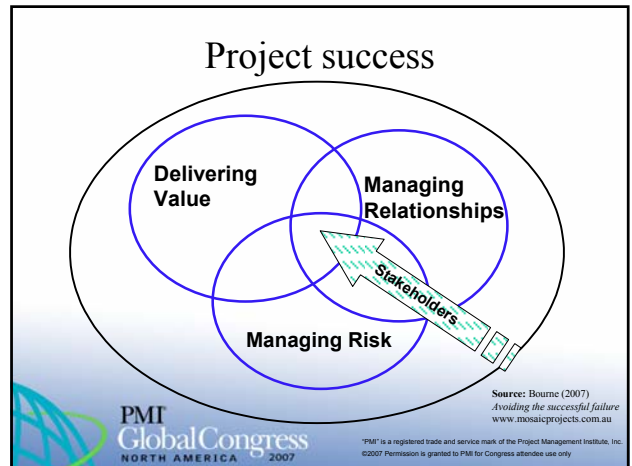
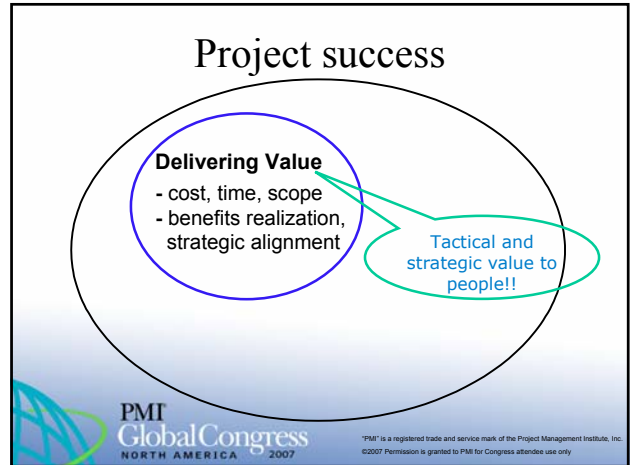
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## Defining Successful Projects

- The Three Pillars of Success
- Managing Stakeholder Expectations

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- ### Successful projects
- Meet or exceed key stakeholders expectations
  - Deliver the expected benefits:
    - Value (time / cost /scope)
    - Within an acceptable risk profile
    - Whilst maintaining effective relationships
  - **Note:** Stakeholder Expectations can be managed by effective communications
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- ### The Elements of Effective Communication
- Right message
  - Right messenger
  - Right medium
  - Stickiness
  - Communicate for Effect
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## Right message

- Relevance of message
- Accuracy of information
- Timeliness of information
- Clarity of information
- Viewed from the stakeholder's perspective

## Right Messenger

- Access to receiver
- Credibility
- Empathy / Personality Type
- Formal or Informal  
(same person or different?)

## Right Medium

- 'Dead tree media'
- 'Electronic portholes'
- 'Hot Air'
- How do you check
  - Feedback?
  - Timeliness?
  - Currency of data?



## Right Medium

- Face to face communications:
  - Words = 7%
  - Vocal tone (Paralingual) = 38%
  - Facial expression / body language = 55%
- Active listening is a key skill involving
  - Verbal listening - Summarise at intervals
  - Non verbal listening - Listen for the intention of the speaker

## Stickiness = SUCCESS\*

- Messages need to be 'sticky' to be successful
- SUCCESS =
  - S - Simplicity
  - U - Unexpectedness
  - C - Concreteness
  - C - Credibility
  - E - Emotional
  - S - StorieS

\* Made to Stick – Chip Heath and Dan Heath

## Communicate for Effect



\* [www.stakeholder-management.com](http://www.stakeholder-management.com)

## Communicate for Effect

- Focus on stakeholders that matter
- Communicate in a way that works  
**What is in it for them?** (mutuality)
- Communicate for a reason
- Monitor the effectiveness of the communication
- The **Stakeholder Circle**<sup>®</sup> is one tool designed to support these processes\*

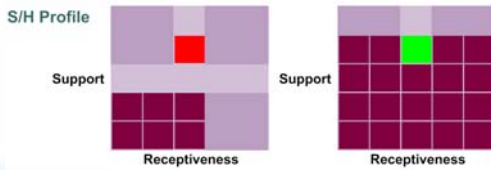
## Communicate for Effect

- Identify the key stakeholders and prioritize



## Communicate for Effect

- Monitor trends over time



The **Stakeholder Circle**<sup>®</sup>

## The Communications Environment

- Networks, Culture and Messages
- The project environment
- Influence Mapping
- Creating Change

## Networks, Culture and Messages

- The project is surrounded by a network of communications
  - To and from the project (mapped by Stakeholder Circle)
  - Between stakeholders (frequently unknown and unseen)
- The network creates, defines and maintains the surrounding organizational culture
- The communication network cannot be controlled by the project

## Networks, Culture and Messages

- The project is surrounded by a network of communications

**But it can be used and influenced**

- The network creates, defines and maintains the surrounding organizational culture
- The communication network cannot be controlled by the project



## Influence Mapping

- Direction of Influence
- Strength of Connection
- Degree of support
- Willingness to help



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## PMOs Are Useful!

- PMO is not clearly defined in the literature
  - PO for projects
  - COE (Centre of Excellence) for programs
  - EPMO (Enterprise PMO) for portfolio
- PMO provides support for:
  - Projects – PjMO
  - Programs – PgMO
  - Portfolio - PtMO

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A = Aware  
R = Responsible

## PMO support

	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Monitor and Control	Methodology and resourcing support	Mentoring and PM career support	Governance support/ Strategy alignment	Value delivery benefits realisation	Manage relationships
Project - PjMO	R	R	R?	A?	A	R
Program PgMO	R	R	R	R?	R	R
Portfolio- PtMO	R	R	R	R	R	R

Strategic Support Stakeholders

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## PMO - Attributes

- A successful PMO requires:
  - Executive sponsorship
  - Management buy-in
  - Clear mandate (Authority and autonomy)
  - All projects included
  - Project benefits managed and measured
  - Formal training on tools and PM competencies

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## PMO Communications

- PMOs improve communications by:
  - Validation, building confidence
  - Translation, building understanding (project speak to management speak)
  - Standardization of information
- KPMG and PwC surveys show PMOs are effective in improving project outcomes
- Communications are central to this outcome

For more see: [www.mosaicprojects.com.au/Resources\\_Papers.html#Proj\\_Off](http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/Resources_Papers.html#Proj_Off)

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## Creating Change

- Repetition builds belief
- Credibility is vital (messenger and message)
- Changing and creating cultural norms
  - Takes time and requires consistent effort
  - ‘One bad apple spoils the barrel’
- Work as a team, PMO and all of the projects
- Recognise degrees of accuracy and uncertainty – don’t promise the impossible

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## Dealing With Uncertainty

- Estimating Errors (time and cost)
- Dealing with Uncertainty
- Control systems don't control anything

## Estimating Errors

- All project forecasts are wrong!
  - Tasks will be accomplished quicker or slower than planned
  - Tasks will cost more or less than planned, etc
- Entering data into SAP does not change the price paid for goods and services
- Entering data into MS Project does not control the future

## Estimating Errors

- All project forecasts are wrong!
- But the data does create expectations**
- Tasks will cost more or less than planned, etc
  - Entering data into SAP does not change the price paid for goods and services
  - Entering data into MS Project does not control the future

## Dealing With Uncertainty

- Schedules, cost plans, WBS, etc have four primary purposes:
  - To help the project team reach agreement on a planned course of action
  - To help coordinate the work as it proceeds
  - To identify when actual progress deviates from the plan
  - To provide a basis for re-planning and re-organising work as needed

## Negotiate Bad News

- PMI's Code of Ethics require:
  - Timely
  - Honest
  - Accurate reporting of the facts
- Bad news needs to be negotiated with management not hidden
- Good management need 'bad news' to know where their help is required

## Control Systems Don't

- **Project 'control systems' don't control anything!**
- And neither do managers!
- People control their actions, particularly knowledge workers
- The project environment dictates many 'uncontrollable' variables

## Control Systems Don't

- Good managers lead, motivate and provide direction assisted by their project plans
- The 'project team' uses the plans to coordinate their actions and decisions
- The project plans also provide a tool for estimating the likely levels of uncertainty
- And then measuring the actual degree of variance as it occurs

## Control Systems Don't

- False attribution of certainty destroys the credibility of the plans when 'reality' arrives
- Whereas managing uncertainty effectively builds credibility
- But this requires the trust of senior managers (ie requires credibility)

A classic Catch 22

## Control Systems Don't

- Acknowledging uncertainty depends on the cultural 'norms' of the network surrounding the project allowing effective risk management to occur
- Particularly allowing the development of realistic contingencies and reserves

For more on this see: Risk Management and Complexity Theory - The Human Dimension of Risk  
[www.mosaicprojects.com.au/Resources\\_Papers\\_072.html](http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/Resources_Papers_072.html)

## Control Systems Don't

- Immature organisations seek certainty where none exists
- Mature organizations expect to 'manage risk' by calculating reserves and contingencies, etc
- **But the actual future remains unpredictable 'wise' organisations also know to expect the unexpected**

For more on this see: Risk Management and Complexity Theory - The Human Dimension of Risk  
[www.mosaicprojects.com.au/Resources\\_Papers\\_072.html](http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/Resources_Papers_072.html)

## Conclusions

- Successful projects are deemed to be successful by their key stakeholders
- Success = meeting or exceeding expectations
- **Stakeholder expectations can be adjusted/ managed by effective communications**

## Conclusions

- Effective communications require
  - Planning
  - Implementing for effect
  - Monitoring
- **There is no point communicating if you don't expect an effect!**

## Conclusions

- Credible communications must:
  - Recognise cultural ‘norms’
  - Recognise what is ‘real’ (and not promise the impossible)
  - Be supported by the ‘project management team’ within the organisation (PMO, other projects, etc)



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## Conclusions

- Changing culture and developing credibility is a long term team effort
  - A mature PMO is a key asset
- All communications must be open and ethical.
- A project cannot ‘win’ if its stakeholders ‘lose’



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## Conclusions

- **The ability to communicate effectively is a key prerequisite for achieving alignment and project success**

“This House believes a **project is only as good as its PR**”  
(APM UK – 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Debate 2005)

**Motion Carried!**

But only just.....



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- Session # COM02



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