SUCCESSFUL PROJECTS NEED EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Tackling a complex challenge with a simple solution

"90% of all management problems are caused by miscommunication"

DALE CARNEGIE

MISCOMMUNICATION PUTS PROJECTS AT RISK

FIRST, THE BAD NEWS

Ineffective communication is a huge challenge for capital projects in every industry. This challenge has negative impacts on budgets and schedules.

NOW, THE GOOD NEWS

There is a simple solution that is often overlooked.

PROJECT CHALLENGES

Ineffective communication often causes equipment and materials to be delivered incomplete, incorrect, or late. Consequently, projects experience costly delays, frustrations, misunderstandings, and rework.

Part of the challenge is that some industries and projects use the same phrases and terms interchangeably to describe different things. Conversely, some use different phrases and terms to mean the same (or a similar) thing. Calling the same thing by different names or different things by the same name invites misunderstanding.

Unfortunately, this is the nature of industry- and project-specific terminology. How we manage terminology can mean the difference between project failure and success.

EXPECTATIONS *VS.* REALITY

Expectations. New projects often kick-off with excitement and the hope that this one will be better than the previous one. Why?

The Project Management Institute's report *The Essential Role of Communication* revealed that ineffective communication:

- Has a negative impact on project success >50% of the time;
- Is the primary contributor to project failure 33% of the time; and,
- Puts 7.5% of project budgets at risk – that's $75 M for every $1 B.

Because lessons learned are being applied to the new project.

Everyone hopes that the communication of project requirements is aligned with the project teams' understanding. Kick-off and other meetings are held and everyone works hard to succeed.

DEFINITIONS FOUND ON THE INTERNET MAY NOT BE RELEVANT FOR A PROJECT.

Reality. Everyone assumes understanding and hopes for the best. Unfortunately, even with lessons learned *in place,* equipment and materials are produced and delivered incomplete, incorrect, or late.

Miscommunication strikes again!

The project teams' workarounds are typically expensive, jury-rigged, and temporary. So, more emails are exchanged and meetings held to clarify project requirements. Then everyone works hard not to fail, with their new understanding (which is tentative at best). Fundamentally, miscommunication and misunderstanding must be avoided in the first place!

According to The Classroom article *What Are the Causes of Communication Failure?,* three (of four) causes of miscommunication and misunderstanding are when:

1. Something obvious to someone may not be obvious to others;
2. The receiver of the message misses critical information; and,
3. Words used are inappropriate because of jargon or vagueness.

"I know that you believe you understand what you think I said, but I am not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant."
~ ROBERT MCCLOSKEY

*"With project success
at risk, the importance
of clear communication
cannot be understated."*

~ KT PROJECT

RECRUITERS MAY BE RELUCTANT TO HIRE PERSONNEL WITH TRANSFERRABLE SKILLS BECAUSE THEIR LIMITED INDUSTRY SPECIFIC VOCABULARY CANNOT BE OVERCOME QUICKLY ENOUGH.

IMPLICATIONS

Industry- and project-specific terminology is especially challenging for personnel who:

- Have experience, but need to confirm mutual understanding;
- Have transferred into a new company, industry, project, or role; or,
- Use English as a second language (ESL).

To be effective, communication in project documents must be clear, including:

- *Technical* such as instructions, plans, procedures, and specifications;
- *Procurement* for requisition and purchase; and,
- *Supplier* for information, record, and review.

Project communication must flow between the owner and the engineering and procurement (EP) company to the suppliers, sub-suppliers, and sub-sub-suppliers - and back.

It is unreasonable to expect everyone to have the same understanding of industry and project definitions. And yet, this assumption is routinely made when terms are not defined or understanding is not confirmed.

Ambiguous terminology frustrates project success.

FRUSTRATION AND AHA!

Project communication can feel like everyone is speaking a different language!

It is frustrating to discover others have a different understanding of project requirements.

The Construction Industry Institute's study *Achieving Zero Rework Through Effective Supplier Quality Practices* reported that *industry lacks a common language and each company uses its own terminology, which can be very confusing.*

Aha!

These phrases may mean different or the same (or similar) things:

- Construction travel sheet
- Inspection and test plan
- Inspection and test requirements
- Inspection plan
- Quality control travel sheet
- Quality control traveler
- Quality management requirements
- Quality plan
- Quality surveillance plan
- Shop traveler
- Surveillance plan

SOLVE YOUR COMMUNICATION ISSUES

A SIMPLE SOLUTION

A modern, up-to-date, and well-written glossary provides precise definitions for phrases and terms, including:

- Abbreviations and acronyms;
- Brand names, proprietary names, and trademarks;
- Company-, discipline-, industry-, and project-specific terminology;
- Expressions, historical use of terms, etymology, and social influencers of jargon and slang;
- Phrases and terms used by third parties; and,
- Preferred and non-preferred terminology.

Follow these simple steps to greatly reduce risk of ineffective communication by making a glossary your single authority for company, industry, and project terminology:

1. Purchase or subscribe to a glossary with standardized industry and project terminology;
2. Refine the glossary by adding or identifying preferred company-, industry-, and project-specific terminology;
3. Align business, project, and strategic documents using the preferred terminology;
4. Refer to the glossary in all documents using hyperlinks or verbatim excerpts; and,
5. Inform personnel about the use of preferred terminology and terminology used by others.

KEY BENEFITS

Implementing a glossary has major benefits, including:

1. Improved client satisfaction and team morale;
2. Improved on-boarding and communication;
3. Improved quality and reputation;
4. Increased profits (by saving money and time); and,
5. Increased understanding.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Contact the KT Project (see the last section of this article) to acquire the KT Project's impressive, industry leading glossary.

The KT Project Glossary is a 600-page compendium of business, career, engineering, industry, procurement, project, and scientific terminology. It is a high-quality, professional document that is available in customized (i.e., white labelled) or standard versions, and in digital or print formats.

The KT Project Glossary defines thousands of common, current phrases and terms that are useful for EP, owner, and supplier personnel, and others, including:

- Business development, marketing, and proposal specialists;
- Educators and students;
- Engineers (e.g., construction, electrical, instrumentation and control, mechanical, process, project, technical safety, and structural, etc.);
- ESL and inexperienced professionals;
- Executives, leaders, managers, and supervisors;
- Government and regulatory personnel;
- Industry organization, policy institute, and think tank experts;
- Sales and supply chain professionals;
- Subject matter experts and technical specialists; and,
- Technical writers and editors.

SET UP FOR SUCCESS!

ARE YOU OVERLOOKING A SIMPLE SOLUTION?

Ask yourself these questions:

1. Do your teams comprise personnel and stakeholders with diverse backgrounds and experience?

2. How could a glossary be used to mitigate costly delays, frustrations, misunderstandings, and rework?

3. How many industries, jurisdictions, and regions do you collaborate with, that use varying terminology?

4. How much easier would collaboration be if everyone understood when identical or similar terminology has an explicitly different definition?

5. How would a glossary need to work and what terminology would it need to include?

6. What percent of your project budgets are at risk due to ineffective communication (an industry average is 7.5%)?

7. What percent of your documentation is aligned with precisely-defined and preferred terminology?

LET'S PUT IT ALL TOGETHER

ABOUT THE KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER (KT) PROJECT

The KT Project is a premier provider of guidelines and training resources for capital projects of all sizes in a range of industries. The KT Project is based in Calgary, AB, Canada. To reduce your risk of ineffective communication, contact us at:

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Let the KT Project help you connect the dots.