

Reporting is not Communicating



Reporting and communicating are not the same!

Simply sending out information in a large complex document has very little to do with effective communication. Unfortunately, many projects don't appreciate this and their project communication plans are simply a schedule for the distribution of reports. Whilst this is a potentially useful activity, it contributes very little to the overall success of the project.

Communicating effectively with key stakeholders is the critical element in achieving a successful project outcome:

- It starts with understanding who the important stakeholders are 'at this point in time'
- Then you need to determine the reason you need to communicate with the person and designing a communication strategy to achieve your desired outcome – there is no point in wasting time communicating if you don't want anything
- Finally, as the communication strategy is implemented, you need processes in place to measure the effectiveness of the communication and make sure it is working effectively; there is absolutely no point in persisting with an approach that is not working!

Effective communication requires you to send a message that is received, interpreted, and a response returned to you by the receiver so you can check the receiver has understood the message correctly. It is a two-way process; for a communication to be complete the sender needs to know the message has been received and understood. Ideally, the communication will then be acted upon by the receiver to the benefit of the project¹.

Reports fulfil a different purpose. Well-designed reports contain useful information in a time series, this makes them a valuable data repository² and the process of gathering and reviewing the information can generate valuable insights for the project team to act upon. However, the data in the reports is passive, you cannot assume anyone will read, understand or using the information!

As a project artefact, reports have an innate value. Simply generating well designed reports will create positive emotional responses in the minds of many managers. Additionally, some people simply like getting reports and some roles associated with organisational governance are based on receiving and processing the data contained in your reports.

Reports also have an intrinsic value; the project manager feels comfortable because she or he has a 'proper report' that is part of the 'clothing' every project manager wears along with their Bar Charts and other expected artefacts. Senior managers experience positive emotions because the existence of a well-presented report suggests control, order and capability. Conversely, a project manager without reports is simply not behaving 'properly' and will be penalised for their non-conformance; to quote Mark Twain,

¹ See more on **communicating for effect** at: <https://mosaicprojects.com.au/PMKI-PBK-040.php#Process3>

² See more on **knowledge management** at: <https://mosaicprojects.com.au/PMKI-PBK-010.php#Process3>

“Clothes make the man. Naked people have little or no influence in society!” We need reports to conform, but generating reports is not communication!

To transform a report into a communication you need to either deliver them in person, or attach a note, highlighting specific issues or messages you want the receiver to action and seek a specific response to know the message has been understood. Without the feedback loop, all you have done is forward a message, you have no idea if the message has arrived, been seen or been understood, and without understanding there certainly won't be any action.

Communicating effectively is hard work. You need to focus your efforts on the people that matter and then communicate in a way that is likely to achieve your desired outcome. This requires effective stakeholder analysis so you spend most of your communication 'budget' on the people who are really important³.

For everyone else, forwarding your reports is an effective way to stay in touch and keeps the channels open for when you do need to communicate in the future. You cannot communicate if the communication channels are not open.

Communicating for effect is a focused discipline, you only have a limited amount of time and resources that can be used for communication and this 'budget' needs to be spent where it will achieve the maximum return. For everyone else, if you don't need anything in particular from the person there is no point in communicating, just send a report.



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³ For more on **stakeholder analytics** see: <https://mosaicprojects.com.au/PMKI-TPI-075.php>