

How to Make Your Virtual Team and Project a Success

How to Make Your Virtual Team and Project a Success

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Virtual Chapter Meeting
August 11, 2020



Presenter Information

- >35 years of projects experience including
 - Engineering
 - Construction Management
 - Project Controls
 - Estimating
 - Contracting
 - Portfolio Manager
 - Program Manager
 - Project Manager
 - Consultant
 - Instructor
- Project types include information systems, product development, construction and manufacturing



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Presenter Interesting Fact

I live in Del Webb Orlando, and I am frequently mistaken for the Governor (now Senator) of Florida – Rick Scott



So which one is Rick Scott?

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Virtual Team Defined

A group of individuals widely dispersed who work across time, space, and organizational boundaries



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The “Problem” with Distance

- Even before COVID-19, more than 66% of business professionals were engaged in virtual work – working at a distance
- Research has shown that distance does inhibit communication:
 - When located more than 130 feet apart, there is only a 5% chance of communication within one week
 - Only when the distance reduces to under 26 feet does the probability of good communication significantly increase

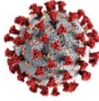
Presentation Topics

1. Reasons for virtual teams
2. Benefits of virtual teams – for the team members and organization
3. Top ten barriers that impedes virtual teams – and strategies for removing the barriers
4. Five keys for making virtual teams work

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Topic 1

Reasons for & Benefits of Virtual Teams

- Impact of COVID-19 
- Global economy
 - Many company projects have global implications
 - Need project team resources with global perspective to help ensure project success
 - Global teams bring unique viewpoints, knowledge and innovation to projects
 - Global teams most often mean virtual teams

Virtual Team Examples

- Custom-build portfolio management software project for international company
- Finishing equipment upgrades for all company sites world-wide
- Business Unit reorganization with world-wide locations
- World-wide manufacturing team coordinating production schedules and materials inventories

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Virtual Team Variations

- Team members working from home
- Team members traveling while working on project
- Plant start-up conducted “round the clock”
- Project being done at multiple plant locations

Topic 2

Virtual Team Benefits

- For the organization
 - Cost savings on office space, employee relocations, travel costs
 - More efficient project team members
 - Obtain best project resources independent of location
 - Global workdays – shorter schedules
 - More innovation (different perspectives)
 - Knowledge sharing

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More Virtual Team Benefits...

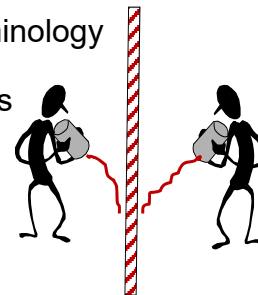
- For the individual
 - Safer work environment (response to COVID-19)
 - Better project opportunities
 - Work moves with the employee
 - Better balance of work & home life
 - Time savings – less travel
 - High level of autonomy

Topic 3

Top 10 Virtual Team Barriers

Communication Barriers

1. Lack of common language
2. Lack of understanding of “slang” & terminology
3. Lack of non-verbal communication clues
4. Lack of team interaction
5. Lack of information filters



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Barrier #1

- Lack of common language



Strategy:

- Check with each team member regarding their comfort level with English
- Listen to each team member to verify their understanding of English
- Check to ensure message sent is the message received using feedback & paraphrasing
- Document in writing all conversations

Barrier #2

- Lack of understanding of “slang” & technical terminology

Strategy:

- Avoid using slang with team members
- Explain slang terms when used
- Maintain a project dictionary of technical terms – especially acronyms

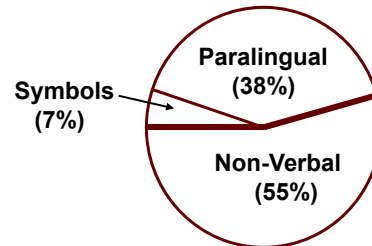
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Barrier #3

- Lack of non-verbal communication clues

Strategy:

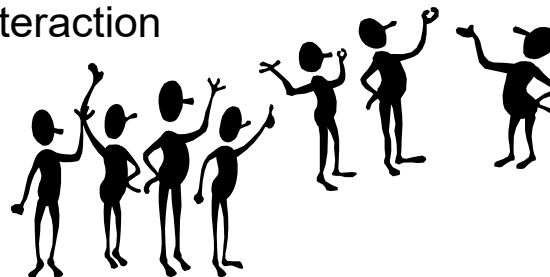
- Use some type of video conferencing whenever possible – such as Zoom
- Practice active listening
“You sound frustrated that ...”
- Be aware of different energy levels – it may be the middle of the night for some participants!



Albert Mehrabian, “Communication Without Words”; *Psychology Today*, September, 1968

Barrier #4

- Lack of team interaction



Strategy:

- Allow meeting time for team members to discuss something non-work related important to them – but enforce time limits
- Use virtual lunches as a method to “just talk” with team members

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Barrier #5

- Lack of information filters – *too little or too much information sharing*

Strategy:

- Develop a communications plan - upfront agreement with the team detailing how communication will happen over the project
- Use the communications plan to create the environment for collaboration and sharing

Top 10 Virtual Team Barriers

Organization Barriers

6. Business Unit Barriers
7. Cultural Barriers
8. Workload Barriers
9. Trust Barriers
10. Technology Barriers



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Barrier #6

- Business Unit Barriers

Strategy:

- Watch for filters placed by organizational management – and try to eliminate
- Find ways to make the project visible in the organization

Barrier #7

- Cultural Barriers

Strategy:

- Learn the cultural aspects related to team members and stakeholders
- Be willing to discuss the aspects of different cultures and how to work more effectively as a team
- Don't trivialize or make fun of any team member's culture

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Myths That Create Barriers

We're really all the same

- *No, but we can recognize differences without judging*

I just need to be myself there won't be problems

- *No, naivety is not a replacement for consideration*

I have to like the person to communicate

- *"Understand and respect" is a better term than "like"*

I have to adopt the culture of the other person

- *I need to "adapt", not "adopt"*

Adapted from Brake, Walker & Walker, 1995

Barrier #8

- Workload Barriers

Strategy:

- Check with all team members on their workload level – a local project may be getting more attention even though it's not as important to the company
- Confirm with resource managers staffing assignment commitments
- Watch for missed deliverables – may be a sign of work overload

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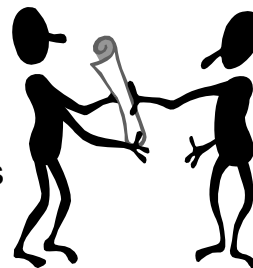
Barrier #9

- Trust Barriers

- Definition: confidence in and reliance on good qualities such as fairness and truth
- Synonyms include have faith in, believe, rely on, depend on or count on

Strategy:

- Show you trust your project team members
- It's all about you – the actions you take will determine if team members trust you



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Build Team Trust

- Trust is the pivotal, key ingredient
- Embrace respect of all team members
 - Suspend judgment – listen to different points of view
 - Take time to understand other team members
 - Avoid stereotyping
- Communicate openly and frequently
- Create an environment of trust by trusting others - Don't wait until they earn it



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Barrier #10

- Technology Barriers
 - Hardware/software obsolete or incompatible
 - Not knowing how to use the technology



Strategy:

- Purchase needed technology as part of the project
- Conduct training on technology being used

Topic 4

Five Keys for Making Virtual Teams Work

1. Project Launch the Right Way
2. Connect with Team Members
3. Lead by Example
4. Prepare Communications Plan
5. Maximize Communications

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1. Project Launch the Right Way

- Get Business (or Executive) Sponsor to attend and explain the business case and how the project aligns with the strategic plan
- Review pertinent project information (schedule, budget, etc.)
- Review team information
 - Have each team member share info on their background
 - Explain roles and responsibilities
 - Agree on a conflict resolution process
 - Explain the decision-making process

If Possible...Meet in Person

- Best practice – hold kick-off meeting in person
 - Team building event
 - Start work on the project plan
- Frequently not possible: option is use of video conference
- If possible – project manager should visit team member locations

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2. Connect with Team Members

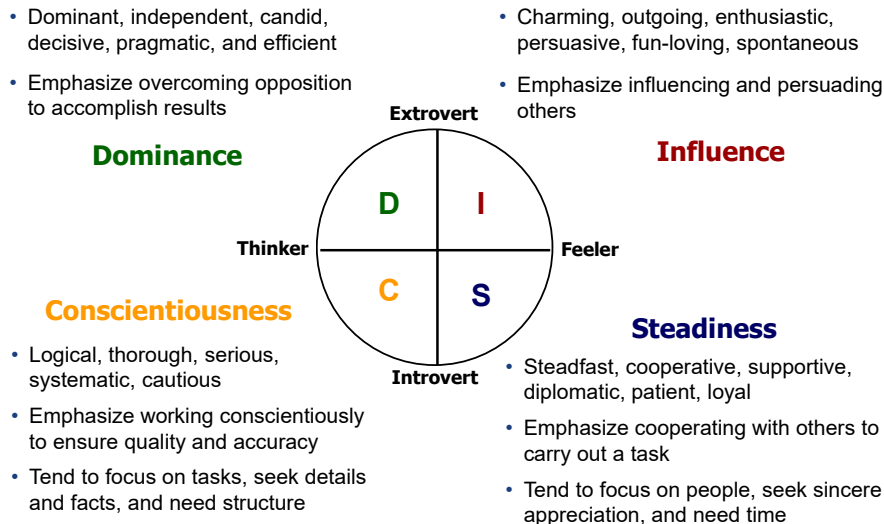
- Find reasons to communicate with each team member
 - Ask for information
 - Ask for their opinion
 - Simple “*thanks*” for getting an important task done
 - Congratulate for major achievement
- Ensure new team members feel welcome and are integrated into the team

Use of “Ice-Breakers”

- Helps with team building
- Examples, at the start of each team meeting
 - One team member talks about their hobby and interests
 - One team member starts with a joke or funny story – team scores
 - Project manager reveals two truths and the lie about a team member – team tries to guess the lie

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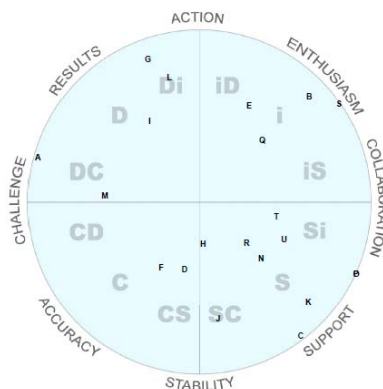
Understand Personality Styles



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Use of DiSC Model with Team



Sample Group Map



mark's Tendencies

- ☐ Tends to find the most diplomatic way to convey information
- ☐ Tends to hold back certain thoughts and feelings
- ☐ May come across as vague or indirect at times

Joseph's Tendencies

- ☐ Tends to get right to the point and say exactly what's on his mind
- ☐ Tends to not hold back his thoughts and feelings
- ☐ May come across as blunt or insensitive at times

Sample Comparison

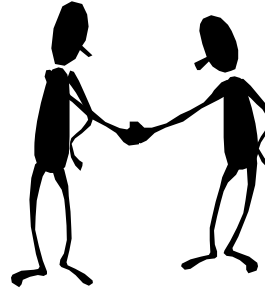
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3. Lead by Example

- Be honest – share good and bad news
- Keep your commitments
- Be consistent
- Be accessible
- Be responsive
- Be predictable
- Maintain confidences
- Watch your language



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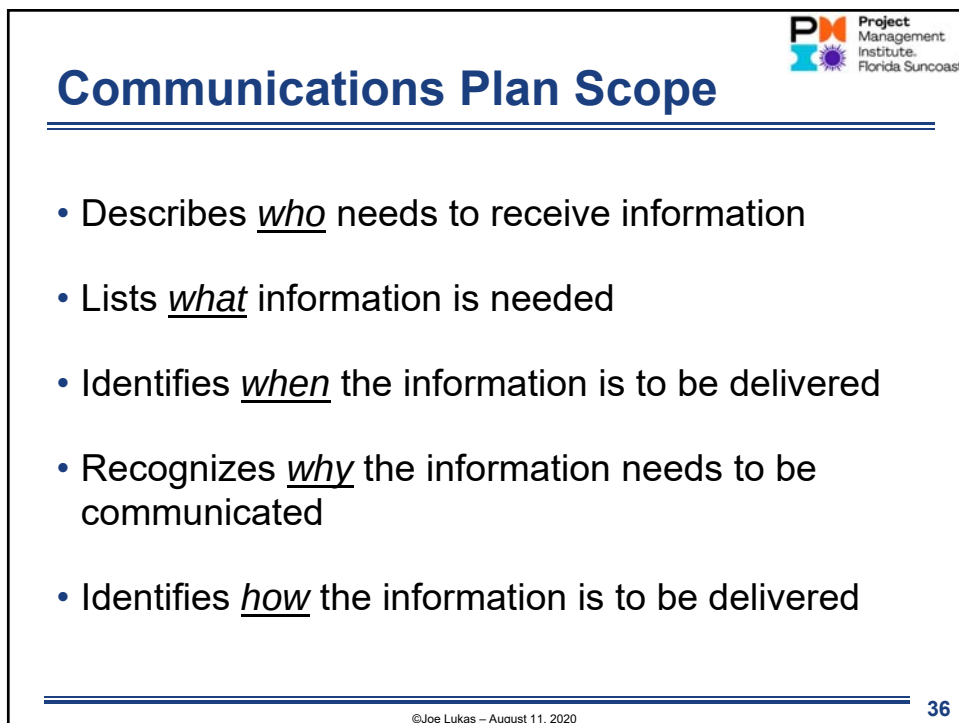
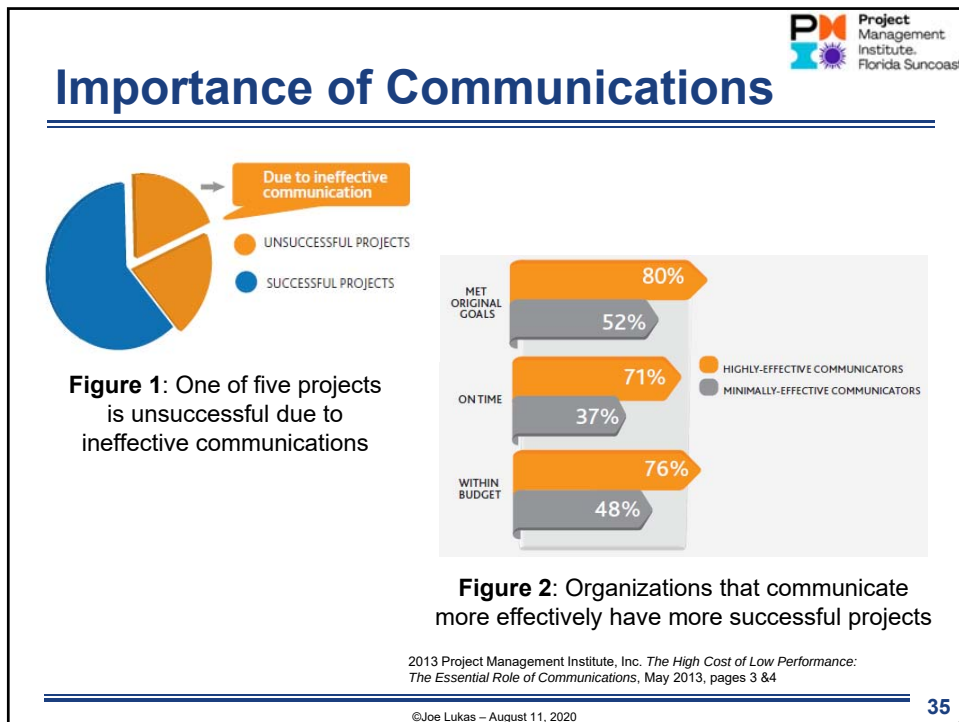
4. Prepare Communications Plan

- Stakeholder listing (and organization chart) is essential
- Make project information readily available – via intranet project file, or internet project file
- Ensure the change management process is defined, understood and used
- Use a survey to do a “pulse check” on how well the team is performing

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Communications Best Practices

- Keep your plan simple – ensure all necessary and sufficient communication is integrated
- Consider not only information needed to complete the project but other relevant related information to share
- Ensure everyone on the team is “first in communication”
- Focus on how to energize the team and create/maintain connections and relationships
- Consider one-on-one communication in your plan

Finalizing the Plan

- Assign responsibilities for delivering the communications
- Define a process of handling “ad hoc” inquiries
- Consider building an intranet/shared folder library and assign maintenance responsibility
- Solicit feedback on the effectiveness of your plan – define a process for updates

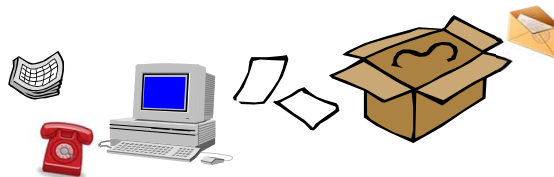
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Managing Virtual Meetings

- Send agenda >24 hours before meeting
- Start on time – end on time
- Make sure everybody participates - be aware of distractions (such as “multi-tasking” on a conference call)
- Summarize action items and decisions at end of meeting
- Publish meeting notes within 1-day

5. Maximize Communications

- Problem with conference calls
 - Nothing visual shared
 - No way to gauge participant attention
- Alternative: video conferences
 - Sharing visual information
 - Can watch participant involvement

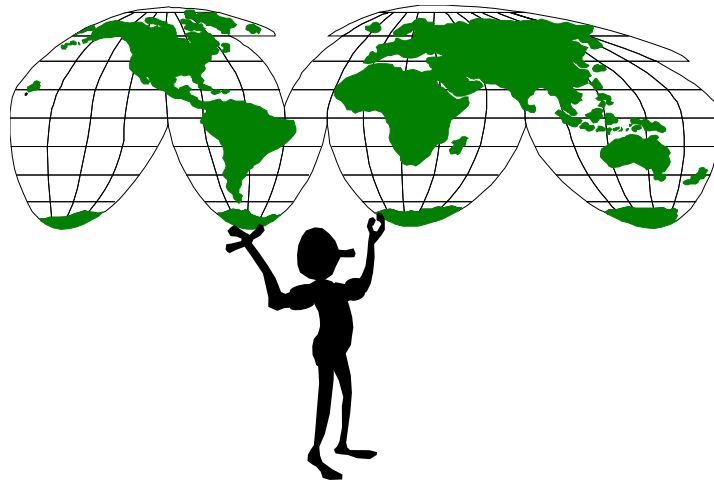


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Communication Tools

- Phone calls
- Text messages
- Emails
- Conference call meetings
- Video-meetings
- Shared project website
- Overnight delivery of information
- Posted pictures-video project updates

Wrap-up & Final Thoughts



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Making Virtual Teams Work

- People work better when they know (and trust) each other
- Anticipate problems – be proactive
- Ensure the team has training on the tools and processes
- Stay focused on the project objectives
- Encourage teamwork
- Share information
- Recognize accomplishments
- Communicate...communicate...communicate
- Follow through on your commitments

Questions???

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