

Communication Best Practices for BPI Project Success

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Overview

Communication is essential on *every* project and Business Process Improvement (BPI) projects are no exception. I might argue, as a matter of fact, that BPI projects require significantly more communication than many other projects. Communicating on the BPI project enables for socializing, or getting buy-in, to the project. It enables the project manager and the BPI project team to learn who supports the project (champions) and who is against the project (resisters.)

Let's define "socializing" as we'll use the term in this Article. *Socializing* is the art and process of getting stakeholders comfortable with a particular BPI project in order to gain their support and commitment for achieving success on the project.

Given that BPI projects *require* the involvement of the stakeholders – in documenting processes, discussing *could be* processes, testing *to be* processes, etc. – it is *essential* that they be engaged in the BPI project in the early stages. And that engagement – socialization of the BPI project – must continue throughout the project implementation.

Prepare Early for Communications

As a best practice, prepare for communications *prior* to the start of the BPI project. Long before the BPI project team begins to set up meetings to document current processes and gather information from stakeholders, they should be communicating the value and benefit of the BPI project.

Early communications on the BPI project should focus in these key areas:

- An overview of the BPI project and its importance to the organization as a whole
- The benefits of the BPI project to the stakeholders from an individual perspective
- A high level overview of key milestones in the project such as documenting of current processes, development of *could be* processes, development of *to be* processes, pilot group testing of the *to be* process, training options and implementation/roll out plans.

Through early communications, the BPI project team will begin to find out who supports the effort and who does not. Therefore, an early communication plan must include how the team will communicate with champions to keep them engaged and how they will communicate with resisters to convert them to champions.

Early communications in BPI projects enable for the following benefits:

- Increased commitment to the BPI project
- Increased likelihood that stakeholders will participate in the initiative
- Increased likelihood of BPI project success

Prepare for early communications by developing an overview communications plan with a focus on:

- Identifying the key stakeholders in the BPI project, then
- Categorizing key stakeholders based on impact from the BPI project, then
- Determining the best ways to communicate with each of the stakeholders either by group or individually
- Determining how the BPI project team will communicate with each of the stakeholder groups, e.g., stakeholder meetings, project portal, email, one-on-one meetings

For larger, more complex BPI projects, a stakeholder support team provides a point of contact for all questions and communications regarding the BPI project.

Individuals who are champions of the project will be able to talk about the benefits of the project to both the organization as well as the individuals and will help the BPI project team engage others in the BPI project. Stakeholder support team members should be comprised of representatives from each department or business unit impacted by the project.

The earlier in the project that the team prepares for how and when they will communicate with stakeholders, the more likely the team is to engage a majority of the stakeholders in the project. Once stakeholders are engaged, it is much easier to get information needed to manage the BPI project and bring it to a successful conclusion.

Communication Best Practices

Let's look at some best practices for communicating throughout the BPI project lifecycle.

Develop a project communication plan and keep it updated. As mentioned earlier, the BPI project team should be developing a communication plan *prior* to the actual project start and update that communication plan regularly throughout the BPI project. The more the team learns about the stakeholders and gathers more information about the project, the likely changes will need to be made to the communication plan. Certainly early plans are focused on identifying stakeholders, determining the impact the BPI project will have on the stakeholders as well as being utilized, to who are the champions and who are resisters. On a regular basis, for example at every team member, review the communication plan to ensure it still meets the needs of reporting on the project and engaging stakeholders.

Use a variety of channels to socialize the BPI project. A variety of channels keeps the largest group of stakeholders engaged as the team is communicating in ways that work for a variety of stakeholders. Channels for communicating on the project can include, for example, small group meetings, one-on-one meetings, casual conversations, project portals, company internal websites and emails.

Communicate through stakeholder support groups. Stakeholder support groups enable the project team to lean on a broader group to communicate about the BPI project. The more complex the project, the more stakeholders involved, the more likely that some stakeholders get "lost" and do not have sufficient communications about the project. Stakeholder support groups can be a point of contact for communications with a broader stakeholder pool – enabling for sharing information

on the project more easily and bringing concerns and inquiries back to the project team to ensure continuous engagement of stakeholders.

Use a phased approach for communications. Your communications will need to vary depending on the phase of the project. Develop a communication by project phase to better map communications to the particular phase of the project, thereby ensuring the right information is being provided to stakeholders at the right time in the project.

Check in with stakeholders. Be sure the communication channels being used are sufficient for the stakeholders to get the information they need about the project. Additionally, be sure that what is being communicated and when it is being communicated makes sense and is not too much or too little information. I have found checking in in-person is the most effective way to gauge the effectiveness of my communications with stakeholders; but certainly for very large stakeholder groups it may make sense to send a brief survey asking stakeholders about the project communications.

Effective communications requires the ability to:

- Listen carefully to others
- Initiate and maintain two-way conversations
- Be candid in communications
- Communicate in a non-confrontational way
- Be aware of non-verbal cues from stakeholders

Summary

The ability to communicate effectively and sufficiently about the BPI project is essential to engage stakeholders at the early stages and keep them engaged throughout the initiative.

Using a variety of channels to communicate enables for reaching out to and engaging a broader group of stakeholders. Everyone prefers to be communicated with in a certain way. Utilizing a variety of communication methods provides a better opportunity of capturing a larger group of stakeholders and keeping their attention throughout the project.

The BPI project manager does not have to be the only one communicating. Be having other team members as well as members of stakeholder support groups responsible for communications, more information is likely to get out to the stakeholders in a timely manner. Especially in projects where stakeholders come from a variety of locations, ensure there are points of contact for communication in those same locations. This provides stakeholders with someone nearby to whom they can ask questions and bring up concerns.

Develop a communication plan early on in the BPI project and be sure to update that plan as the project progresses and communication needs and expectations change. Communication is *not* once and done! Regular communications are essential for BPI project success.

For more on BPI project communication best practices as well as how to manage BPI projects, read Gina's book *Best Practices for Managing BPI Projects: Six Steps to Success* (J Ross Publishing, March 15, 2015.)

About the Author

Gina Abudi, MBA, President of Abudi Consulting Group, LLC has over 20 years' experience in leadership, project and process management. In addition to consulting with Fortune 500 and Fortune 1000 organizations, Gina provides workshops and educational programs to enable organizations to meet strategic learning objectives. Her book on *Best Practices for Managing BPI Projects: Six Steps to Success* was published by J Ross Publishing on March 15, 2015. Gina is contributing author to *Project Pain Reliever* (J. Ross Publishing, 2011). Gina blogs regularly at GinaAbudi.com. She can be reached via her website: <http://www.AbudiConsulting.com>.