

## Introduction

The quality and effectiveness of the communication between the project and the stakeholder groups is a significant contributing factor to project success or failure. Communication is about sending and receiving messages, ideally controlling the interpretation thereof, and having some influence of subsequent actions. In a SAP implementation, project communication refers to messages sent and received between the implementation project and the stakeholders. Communication seems best positioned within the Organizational Change Management (OCM) stream of activities. As with most OCM activities, it requires the support and assistance of both the business and the project team.

The Organizational Change Management team itself is responsible for the management and coordination of messages ensuring they are clear and well targeted:

1. Creating and distributing messages
2. Creating and maintaining an open feedback loop.
3. Preventing contradictory messages

It is important that the actual delivery of the messages, especially verbal or personal memo, is carried out by the sponsorship or leadership group rather than the OCM team.

The objective is to minimize information that may lead to confusion and thus inefficient and ineffective behavior.

One of the key success factors of communication is the perceived credibility of the message. If the stakeholder groups perceive the information as important, informative and authoritative, it is likely to be accepted and acted upon. If, however, the information is perceived as being trivial, or information is unavailable, the risks of inappropriate behavior will increase. Appropriate behavior, of course, is critical for the success of the project, and thus communication tends to be directed toward a critical stream of activities, and usually cross-referenced against risks listed on the OCM plan. However, communication is not only a reaction to risks, it also helps identify risks that then require appropriate behavior. Again, there is a link to the OCM plan. Please note, that the detail of the communication approach, stakeholder analysis, and messages across the SAP implementation phases, tends to require a separate communication plan which, of course, needs to be in line with the relevant activities on the OCM plan.

## The Communications Process

While OCM activities are highly dependent on the organizational and project requirements and conditions, there is one recommended process to collect and manage information towards a controlled communication effort. The process consists of three broad stages as shown in Figure 1. It is a continuous, evolving process, which impacts other processes such as sponsorship/leadership, team management and organizational optimization.

The communications process is, itself, also impacted by the other OCM processes and, as a result, needs a detailed and sophisticated plan in its own right that is a subset of the overall OCM plan. As it is an integral part of the overall OCM plan it is used to mitigate the risks on the project and is subject to change to reflect the emerging and evolving risks. Typically these risks might be:

- Lack of support for the project at the leadership level of the company
- Poor track record of success in the company at implementing significant projects successfully
- Unrealistic level of resource provided outside the project team

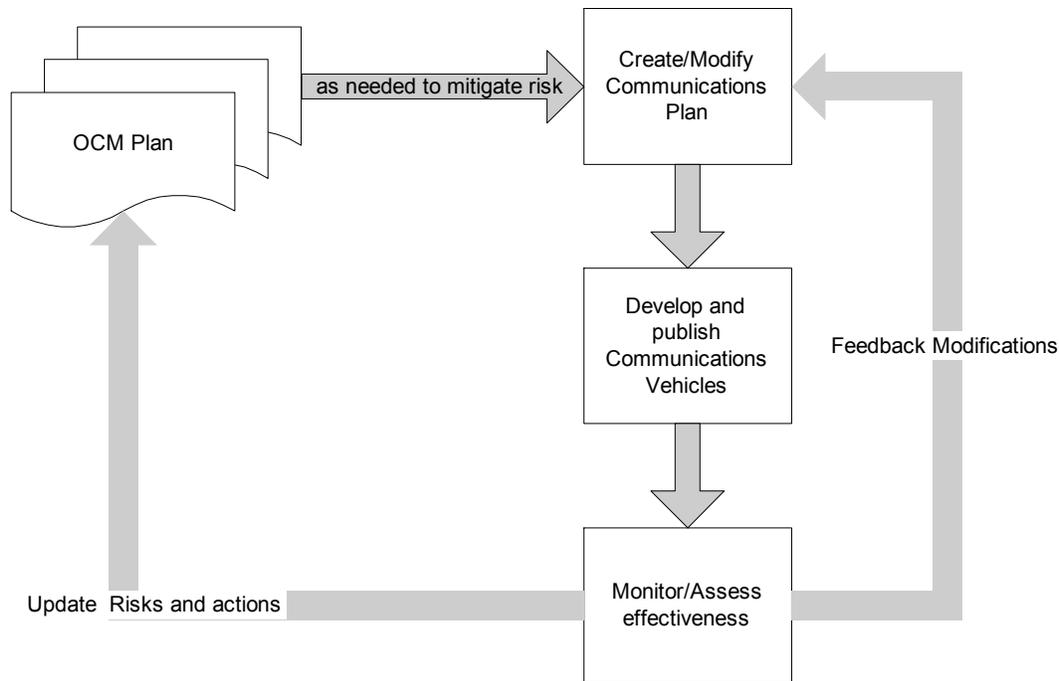


Figure 1 – The Communications Process

The steps in the process are:

## Create/Modify the Communications Plan

The first deliverable to control and manage communication is to create a communications plan. The plan needs to explain how communication is managed and monitored within the scope of OCM activities. Activities need to be risk-focused, need to allow for prioritization of mitigating activities (based on the severity of risks), and be linked to clear measurement of success.

**In order to decide on the appropriate actions, the communication plan at the beginning of the project has to include the following:**

- Information about the environment of the organization and the context of communications. For example, in an organization which is accustomed to formal briefing via memo it may not be appropriate to have face to face meetings. In a manufacturing environment where many of the shop floor workers do not have access to PCs or Email it does not make sense to have Email communications. The environment is often assessed through interviews with project team members, HR personnel or managers. The OCM team members should inquire about the most successful communications from previous projects.
- Strategy of communication for the SAP implementation. This is an important element of the planning activity. The strategy of communication for the project should include information about:
  - The stakeholder groups and their needs

- The expected messages to the different stakeholder groups at each phase of the implementation
- Recommended vehicles and their formats for communication (including brand creation) and how they mitigate specific risks
- Measures of success for the plan
- How other communications activities across the organization synchronize with this
- How the plan will be executed
- Guidelines about the use of a central communications function (if one exists)
- The role of external consultants
- The roles and responsibilities of the members of the OCM team
- The use of the organizational risk assessment (see risk assessment and OCM Plan White Paper) and of communications effectiveness assessments (see below) in modifying the actions of the communications plan

Once the plan has been created it needs to be agreed and signed off by the project team management and the sponsorship group. Updates to the plan do not necessarily need to be signed off formally but clear assignment of responsibility for risks and subsequent activities to mitigate these, does need to take place.

At periodic intervals, preferably in synchronization with the output of the organizational risk assessments and communication effectiveness assessments, the plan needs to be revisited, updated and modified to reflect the findings and need for communication. It is advisable to review and, as appropriate, revise the communication plan at least once every three weeks. Ideally, a review of the communication plan and activities should happen during weekly project meetings.

## Develop and Publish Communications

**This is the “doing” element of the communications plan and will result in the development and publication of the messages and vehicles described in the plan. The main activities will be:**

- Confirm the messages to be delivered and the target audiences
- Agree on the measures of success
- Create the message and vehicle for communication (e.g. newsletter, intranet, speech, memo, intranet)
- Gain approval and sign off the message and vehicle
- Publish/announce

Please note that, while the communication may not be created and may not be delivered by it, the OCM team should provide guidelines to those communicating and ensure the consistency of the messages across the organization. This tends to require involvement of OCM team members in many projects and company meetings, even if the objectives of a particular meeting are not related to change management.

## Monitor/Assess Effectiveness

**Having executed a part of the plan, it is important to gain feedback on the effectiveness of the individual communication activities. The three main mechanisms for achieving this are:**

- *The Organizational Risk Assessment* – See Risk Assessment and OCM Plan White Paper. This is a periodic assessment of the perceptions of risk to the project's success. Many questions on the Risk Assessment are around the quality of communication, especially in the early days of a project. The results of this assessment can be used as separate measures and/or traced over time.
- *The Communications Effectiveness Assessment* should be built into the communications plan. It is an assessment specifically designed to monitor the effectiveness of the communication vehicles and messages. This assessment is likely to focus on the interpretation of the messages by asking stakeholder groups about their understanding and awareness of project process, or monitoring behavioral changes expected as a result of the information received.
- *The Communication Effectiveness Measures* are built into the communications plan. Ideally the measures are quantifiable and allow for comparison and evaluation of the findings collected in the effectiveness assessment.

All findings from the assessments and measures should be consolidated and documented in detail on the communications plan, and cross referenced at a higher level on the OCM plan. As and where appropriate, subsequent actions need to be reviewed or planned and executed.

## Communication Goals by Phase

Communication depends very much on the organization and the nature of the project. The information on the communications plan (described above) should list the unique project communication approach and recommended activities. The recommended activities, communication vehicles, channels and messages to the different stakeholder groups can be grouped by project phase. The phasing of a SAP implementation project and subsequent project management activities are fairly standard and allow for some guidance based on communication goals for the project. Please note that each communication activity should be tailored for the stakeholder group it is addressing.

**The minimum/typical goals by phase are:**

### Project Preparation

The organization has no real knowledge of the project.

**During the project preparation, communication is typically aimed at gaining personal commitment from the members of the stakeholder groups. This is achieved when members:**

- Are confident that the organization and the deployment team can complete the SAP implementation

- Believe the SAP implementation will deliver a variety of tangible benefits to the organization
- Do not have inappropriate expectations
- Are willing to speak positively about the SAP implementation when they meet with their peers within and outside the organization
- Are willing to make the changes in the way they work and/or their organizational relationships
- Gain feedback of the OCM activities that have taken place

## **The goal of the communications at this phase is to:**

- Launch the project
- Explain the reasons why the company is embarking on it
- Provide an overview of the scope/timing of the project
- Describe its importance to achieving the company's vision
- Engage the organization in the project's delivery

An important point to note is that the communication process starts as soon as the project is announced. It is unlikely that communication planning will have been completed at this time. The announcement mechanism in itself is communication and needs to be managed to reflect positive and high-level support for the project without entering into too many (unknown at this stage) details. However, it is recommended that, once the communication plan is created, the announcement is listed and the goals and measures of this action are reflected on it. Additional communication may be required to mitigate the risks that were targeted by the announcement.

## **Business Blueprint**

**At this stage of the project only a minority of people in the organization will understand the project conditions and aims, including scope and timing. At this phase the messages should:**

- Reinforce the reasons why the company is carrying out the project and its significance to the company's vision
- Describe in more detail how the system is being developed
- Start to describe at a macro level how some of the company's processes and their associated benefits might change
- Celebrate/communicate successful progress to date

## Realization

**The majority of people in the organization should have a better understanding by now of the project but may not understand how it will affect them as individuals or the organization in detail. Communications should:**

- Reinforce the reasons why the company is carrying out the project and its significance to the company's vision
- Reinforce at a macro level how some of the company's processes and their associated benefits might change
- Describe at a micro level the process changes and how they affect individuals in the company and the organization itself – see also the Business Optimization White paper
- Start to mitigate some of the resistance issues that start to emerge as the system becomes closer for the organization
- Communicate learning points from the project
- Identify any new roles and provide a forum for feedback
- Celebrate/communicate successful progress to date

## Final Preparation

The majority of people in the organization should now understand the project to the extent of knowing how it will impact their stakeholder group. They should also be able to explain the project's strategic and/or competitive rationale for the company.

If any of the stakeholders may be concerned about the project's impact on the way the organization is structured and operates today, communication should:

- Reinforce the reasons why the company is carrying out the project and its significance to the company's vision
- Reinforce at a macro level how some of the company's processes and their associated benefits might change
- Reinforce at a micro level the process changes and how they affect individuals in the company and the organization itself
- Continue to mitigate some of the resistance issues that start to emerge as the SAP solution becomes closer for the organization
- Communicate learning points from the project
- Describe the support strategy for the SAP solution and how future changes will be implemented
- Instill user confidence
- Celebrate/communicate successful progress to date

## Go Live

**The SAP solution has gone live and users are starting to live with the implications. The goal of the communications program here is to:**

- Reinforce the reasons why the company carried out the project and its significance to the company's vision
- Describe at a macro level how some of the company's processes have changed
- Describe some early wins and the associated benefits
- Communicate learning points from the project
- Celebrate/communicate a successful conclusion of the project
- Collect information for future improvements