THE CURRENT STATE OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

Dr. Brantley, PMP and Dr. Ashlock
2016 Project Management Symposium
Research Question:

What is the current state of project management communication research?
Why ask this question?

Ninety percent of what a project manager does involve communication.

“In the project environment, the project manager is often the center of communications” (Mersino, 2007)
Bad Project Communication Is Harmful

- Charvat (2003) writes “[c]ommunication is the backbone on any successful project rollout. Without it, projects have conflict, delays, and failure.”

- McManus (2006) lists the following symptoms of poor project management communication: confusion or misunderstanding, duplication of effort, demand or delay, demotivation, inefficiency, and lost opportunity.
What Is Being Done OR Could Be Done To Improve Project Management Communication?
Research Methodology (1)

Phase One:
Comprehensive database search for the keyword “communication” (and variants) in the following three journals
Research Methodology (2)

Phase Two:
All business journals in the Business Source Premier database of EBSCOHost.
Compound search term: “communication” and “project management.”

Phase Three:
All journals in the Communication and Mass Media database of EBSCOHost were searched using the same compound search term.
Research Methodology (3)

Phase Four:

- 333 articles were retrieved.
- Duplicates, non-peer-reviewed articles, and three foreign-language articles were discarded.
- Leaving 272 peer-reviewed articles to categorize.
Research Methodology (4)

Phase Five:

Reading and Categorizing the Articles
Research Methodology (5)

Theoretical

Communication Model

Sender

Encode

Message

(Channel, All Senses can be involved)

Decode

Receiver

(Responses)

(Audience)

Feedback

Encode

Decode

Noise (Communication Breakdowns)
The Categories

- **Category Zero** – No or little relevance to the research question. These are articles that mention communication once or twice at most.

- **Category One** – Firmly grounded in the functional communication model. No new research in project management communication other than referencing the functional communication model.

- **Category Two** – Applied a contemporary research technique, method, or perspective to the functional communication model but the purpose was confined to exploring some aspect of the functional communication model.

- **Category Three** – Introduced a novel project management communication model or critical perspective on project management communication not based in the functional communication model.
## The Results (1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of Articles</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zero</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Results (2)

Category 0 - 32%
Category 1 - 47%
Category 2 - 13%
Category 3 - 8%
Total - 87 articles

Category 0 - 48%
Category 1 - 38%
Category 2 - 12%
Category 3 - 2%
Total - 185 articles
The Results (3) Category 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Technique, Method, or Perspective</th>
<th>Number of Articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actor-Network Theory</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complexity Theory</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnographic Observation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate Objects of Design</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge transfer, knowledge management</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Models</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Product Development</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Manager Influence Methods</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real options reasoning</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Network Analysis</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholder Focus</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storytelling</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Communication</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Results (4) Category 3

- Issue-Based Information Notation to map project meetings
- Knowledge Overlapping Seminar to demonstrate communication complexity
- 4I Model – (intuiting, interpreting, integrating, and institutionalizing)
- Ambiguity Acceptance
- Five System Communication Model that better captures the social coordinating functions of project management communication
- Koskinen’s Social Autopietic System – “meaning is not transmitted in whole from sender to receiver but emerges from the interactions of all members to the communications in a project”
- Gender-based project management communication
Future Directions for Project Management Communication
Practical Tips for Better Project Management Communication

✓ Multiple routes of communication (verbal, nonverbal, contextual, and so on)
✓ Ambiguity acceptance
✓ Mental models and perspectives
✓ Emotional Intelligence
✓ Psychological Safety – Google’s Project Aristotle
✓ Embodied cognition – visual communication
✓ Complex responsive processes of relating (co-creating the project reality)
Thank you!

Dr. Bill Brantley, PMP | bill@billbrantley.com