Communication Skills Is the Major Factor in Your Career Success

Ahmad Adel Gad

Outlines the common types of the communication according to the business prospective and the humanity prospective, explaining how they affect each other.

Describes the types of communication receivers and stake holders you may meet in your business, and how to deal with them wisely for the business prospective.

States rules of communication in different business cases.

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Communication Skills Is The Major Factor In Your Career Success

Ahmad Adel Gad
ahmad.adel@jemmail.com

Author

Ahmad Adel Gad was born in Egypt-Cairo on June, 1980.

He was graduated from faculty of engineering (Civil Engineering Department) on 2003.

He found himself in Software Developing rather than the civil engineering since the first year in the college as they were teaching them how to write a code since the first year in order to implement applications to support their work.

After he was graduated from college by two years he decided to shift to the Software Engineering.

On the early 2007, he attended a scholarship for Software Engineering in C#.

On the early of 2008, he had certified as Microsoft Solutions Developer (MCSD) for C# 2003.

On the middle of 2008 he had certified on (Microsoft Certified Trainer) MCT where he got an official license from Microsoft to deliver Microsoft official courses.

On 2004 he started to develop Desktop Applications for Windows with his partner the CEO **Wael Ibrahim Arafa** in his company [Arafasoft](#) and his role was the executive manager for the company.

Due to his wide horizons and his great communication skills, he was promoted quickly to the management and consultant positions adopting the management trying to adopt the PMP and Agile methodologies.

Currently, Ahmad is working as full time Development Lead in Software Engineering Company in Egypt. And he's working as freelancer in the following fields as training, consultation and developing with the two languages VB.Net and C#.Net:

1. *Windows Applications*
2. *ASP.Net Applications*
3. *SharePoint Developing/Administration*
4. *SQL Server Developing/Administration*
5. *AJAX Implementation (JavaScript/jQuery + XML Web Service)*
6. *Cryptography/Digital Signature Consultation*

Currently, Ahmad is officially certified as:
MCAD
MCSD
MCPD Enterprise
SQL MCTS
MCT

Introduction

I'm afraid that communication is not knowledge to study on books such as any other project management knowledge area.

Communication skills are earned by work experience in many different situations.

Communication is important for any employee not only managers, but it really gives a strength to a successful manager or a future one.

The managers may not be technical enough in order to automate their teams or their departments, but with their communication skills, they can control them and save their jobs.

In this article you will find an overview about the common types of the communication according to the business prospective and the humanity prospective, explaining how they affect each other.

Also this article describes the types of communication receivers and stake holders you may meet in your business, and how to deal with them wisely for the business prospective.

Types of Communication

In PMP methodologies, they state the types of the communication based on the work activities and the job dimensions such as:

1. **Internal Communication**

   It is different from job to another depending on the business, the role and scope of the employees as shown with the following scenarios:
   - Business communication between the members in the organization.
   - Business communication between the members in the same department.
   - Business communication between the members in the same project.
   - Business reporting of the manager from or to his subordinates.
   - Business communication between the employees and the HR department.

2. **External Communication**

   This communication is usually aiming the contacts between the organization and the customer, media, public or even between other projects.

3. **Formal Communication**

   Formal communication is referring to the business and the official documentations such as memos, reports and briefing.
   Those documents are mandatory to be written using the technical writing methodologies and rules.
   The business meeting is one of the most popular formal communications.

Ahmad Adel Gad
ahmad.adel@jemmail.com

It's forbidden to use slang or vulgar words.

Below are some examples to avoid in formal communication:

- When you talk to someone in a formal meeting or formal email you cannot call him as "guy", "dude," "buddy", "man", etc.
- When you speak to a lady, it is not appropriate to flirt to her.
- It is very strict to not open a discussion about politics, religion, ethnic or any topic could lead to racism direction.
- Flattering your managers is far away of the formal communication, but the funny thing, it's working with some employees, but I'm still assuring it's not formal at all.
- Some employees mix between the formal emails and the common words and phrases used in the online chat boards such as; "what's up", "gotta", "gonna", "wonna", "lol", "kinda", "sorta", "stuff", etc.; those words and phrases are not allowed in formal communication.

4. Informal Communication

This is typically a friendly communication or a communication to handle general discussions that is usually used out of the business scope, and in some companies it is restricted to be used during the work hours.

In some scenarios informal speech would be very useful for few minutes to break the ice between you and the audiences especially in meetings or teaching sessions, but in the same time it's much recommended to not use as possible as you can slang words, or phrases.

In some cases you can use the informal communication as friendly in order to get the support you need from some employee not assigned to your team, a peer project manager, some department manager or from the PMO himself.

Actually, when you are a project manager, you are responsible before your superiors to finish the assigned project within the planned time and planned budget scopes whatever the solutions or actions you may take, therefore, if you see that with some resource the informal communication type would be the appropriate way to get the required support from them, you should not hesitate to go ahead.

5. Vertical Communication

Vertical communication means the communication up and down between managers and their subordinates or managers and their higher managers, and vice versa.

Usually the formal communication is the appropriate type in this kind of communication.

6. Horizontal Communication

Horizontal means the communication between the peers in the same level.

It is usually internal communication between the same department members, team members or friends.

Usually the informal communication is the appropriate type in this kind of communication.

7. Official Communication

Official communication is very tight with the formal communication.
The official is commonly, aiming the management announcements, reports, evaluations, proposals, new letters, commitments, contracts, etc.

8. Verbal Communication

Verbal Communication is commonly stated as:

- **Oral Communication**

  Oral communications as the meeting scenario whether it's face-to-face meeting, online, voice call, video call, learning session, events, etc.
  This kind of communication is very useful in the following scenarios:
    1. Teaching session.
    2. Business meeting to discuss a specific plan or strategy.
    3. To come out with quick feedback and results.
    4. It's easy and fast for negotiation and brain storming to come out with final decisions.

  But also if this kind of communication is not professionally organized such as business meeting, it could be a waste of business time and it could not cover all the topics carefully. Usually the meeting time is limited in specific scope of time based on pre-defined schedule. Therefore, the attendees may not spill out all their ideas or comments due to the time and you get to request for another meeting.

  To be a successful manager, put in your mind that the time equals money; for example if you request for a meeting for you plus seven attendees for one hour only, that means you cost your organization a full business man day of eight hours. Not that only, the man day of each employee is deferring from an employee to another. That means, the business hour of one employee in the company may equal one man day of yours in cost, especially if he was one of the company heads.

- **Written Communication**

  Written communication such as brain storming is very useful to cover the lack of the oral communication.
  For example, it is mandatory to communicate with the planned meeting attendees with a prepared meeting agenda in order to make sure that, the meeting would cover all the goals and to keep it only on the specified scope.
  Also, the MOM (Minutes of Meeting) after the meeting is very useful to state all the discussed points of the meeting and the deliverables of this meeting.
  The MOM is very important to expose the professional project manager.

After each business meeting, someone get to write the MOM of this meeting carefully with the necessary details as much as possible.

This MOM should be sent to all the meeting attendees with approval and confirmation request via email or fax.

The confirmation that you should get back from them, is considered as a formal agreement between all the parties in such project like the stake holders, and that means everyone is committing it.

9. **Non-verbal Communication**

It is simply meant by the body language such as gesture, posture, head, waving, finger signal, eye contact, smile, voice tone, speech volume, facial expressions, etc.

Body language would be very useful on teaching session to attract your audiences and to break the ice and to kill the boredom.

The body language is usually not a formal communication, but it is very important to focus on your audiences to check their body language.

The body language exposes the mood and the impression of the audiences and attendees about specific meeting or session.

As being a teacher and a project manager, I can use the non-verbal communication as following:

- In meeting I can easily get feedback when I make a presentation about my proposal or my idea before the attendees speak up or comment, and then I can use it to control this meeting to my side.
- In teaching sessions, I can also get their feedback of my session minute by minute during the session and then, I can quickly revise my delivering techniques like for example using my body language to attract the audiences and get their attention back.

Types of Communication Receivers

The communication is designed with different models which are not covered in this version yet. We can consider the dialog as communication model.

In dialog, you have "**sender**" who encodes a message through "**medium**" (phone, internet, fax, etc.) to a "**receiver**" who decodes the message and then replies with feedback.

In communication, you get to know the type of the receivers in order to decide which communication types you should use before you communicate with them.

The receivers' types are also deferring from the business scope and the type of meeting.

The instructors should have enough experience to know how to deal with most of the types of receivers.

The project manager should have enough experience in order to communicate with all the stake holders of a specific project.

Some stake holders have more priority than others to communicate for discussion or for final decision.

You should care a lot for the feedback of some stakeholder or their suggestions, such as customers and managers.

Some stakeholders may waste your time and may distract you from the project scope and goals.

I will try to simplify it with samples using some communication types in some business type scenarios:

1. **If you are a civil engineer who is managing a construction field, what are the types of communication you may think of?**

   To get the answer you need to state all the stake holders you may communicate with; during this project as the following:

   A. **The workers**

   Usually, the workers are less education than you, therefore, you they need careful communication methods.

   Formal communication will never work with them therefore, some informal would be useful.

   Verbal communication is usually the shared communication there as orally with some non-verbal to explain their tasks to them.

   Strict oral communication would be preferred most of the time in order to control them.

   B. **The peer engineers**

   Informal communication would be very useful in such situation in order to gain their friendship and their cooperation with you.

   C. **The project manager**

   Formal communication with official reports is the professional thing to do.

   D. **The customer**

   If you get to deal with the customer direct in order to take his confirmation in some idea or some design you should know the profile of this customer first.

   Communication type could be different with the following factors:

   - **The gender of the customer**

     The physiological nature of the women brains are getting them to think in many things in the same time, while the man can only concentrate in one issue in a time and put this issue on a box and put all his focus on it, and it's too hard to get him out of this box therefore you may get less change requests from men.

     But the education factor may change this theory 180 degree.

     In some real scenarios you should deal with the spouse of the customer very serious and consider their opinions seriously if you found that, this spouse has more power than the owner itself.

   - **The age of the customer**

The age of the customer would give the customer different motivation for the project and the design.

- **The education level of the customer**
  Never do this mistake to try to show the customer that he will not understand you.
  In the same time the customer should know that you are an expert without saying or getting him that feeling that you're showing.
  With real scenarios, the customer could be architecture or a civil engineer that he would not expose that fact until he gets unsatisfied or frustrated of some issue.
  Therefore, try as possible as you can to get the profile of the customer before the first contact.

Wrong communication type would cost your organization a customer losing.
And in the other hand, good communication would keep the customer for further business or bring new customers.

2. **If you are an instructor and delivering a software developing session, what are the types of communication you may think of?**
   Usually it is a big challenge to satisfy all the audiences and it is almost impossible to satisfy all of them, especially with large quantity of audiences.
   In training, the verbal communication and the informal communication are the most recommended types.
   The speech tone/volume is one of the good techniques to attract the audience.
   You need from time to other in the same session to raise your voice volume up to pull the attention of the distracted or the sleepy audiences.
   You may need to move from the high volume to very low volume, such technique is leading them without intention to concentrate in what you are saying.
   Usually you use this technique when you want to deliver an important information or knowledge.

   Body language such as eye contact and walking inside the training lab is very important and mandatory to make each audience feel that you are giving them a care and concern.

   Also the type of the audiences in the same lab could be different as shown:
   A. **Fresh in field**
      The audience could be fresh in the specified field and the course topics are something new to them.
      In such situation you should move slowly in the beginning in order to gain their trust and satisfaction but in the same time try to do your best to control the time, because they would have much questions and inquiries.
   B. **Students**
      Students sometimes need more controls and organization inside the lab.

Ahmad Adel Gad
ahmad.adel@jemmail.com

They usually have brief and some knowledge they studied in the college and they come to take the course for further details and to get more practical implementations.

Some of them are getting emotional and attracted to the instructor as a big idol as they used to do with their teachers in college.

Emotionally communication involving would destroy your career very easy and very fast. Try as possible as you can to not being emotional with your audiences and treat them as customers, but in the same time try to get close to them when required for short terms to gain their trust and their attention when needed.

C. Junior

Usually, this kind is very peaceful because they come to learn more than the knowledge they already know.

This kind mainly doesn't want to spend time in self-study or searching, they want to upgrade themselves as fast as possible, therefore, they come to you and appreciate the effort of the instructors and they don't argue too much with them.

D. Senior

This kind mainly is a trouble maker.

This audience could be a senior developer, team leader, software architect or professional consultant.

If they felt that their technicalities are stronger than the instructor, the course will fail from the first session.

They usually interrupt the instructor a lot, and try to show their capabilities especially if the most of the audiences are seniors from different companies.

With this kind of customer, the instructor really should control the lab and showing them that he's the one who is controlling the lab.

You get to stick with the committed materials and topics.

This customer should get with any matter that you're technically stronger than them.

E. Manager

Usually managers don't do the work with their hands.

They may come to attend such courses to know only about the topics theoretically as an overview to know what their subordinates are actually doing and also to monitor them.

Therefore this kind of customer would be less interesting with your course and usually are ranked as peaceful audiences.

But if the whole lab with this kind, they may frustrate you with their careless, in this situation you need to decide if you can handle this situation or to reject this course.

F. Instructor

With this scenario the audience may attend this course in order to learn how to deliver it in future, or maybe he wants to implement the content of this course in some business case.

As being an instructor I know the feeling of this because I experienced the both situations as being instructor and an audience in some courses.

For me, I do appreciate the effort the instructor does because I feel how he feels, but some other instructors don't.

Ahmad Adel Gad
ahmad.adel@jemmail.com

Therefore, in such situation, you should be very careful in dealing with them, and try as much as you can to not showing that you do treat them as they are peer teachers, let them know smartly that you are the teacher.

Communication rules to follow in the training lab:

1. In real scenarios you could find a mix between two or more types of audiences.
   In this case, you need to make a wise balance to satisfy all the audiences.
   Not to move so slow, and not to move so fast.
2. You strongly need to stick with the official topics of the course to avoid any clash or any individual side requests.
3. In all scenarios make sure that they audiences know that you are controlling the lab and the course not them.
4. And in the same time make them feel indeed that you give them much care and much concern.
5. Try to share all of them in activities and put them into groups. Most of the audiences like such technique and it makes the time pass so fast without feeling bored.
6. Try to avoid talking about any topic out of the course scope even if it's related to the current topic, because some customers may drag you out of the scope and at the end they would give you bad evaluation.
7. If you found an audience asking too much, ask them politely to keep those questions to the end of the session.
8. In the break time, it's good to be friendly with them with some precautions:
   - Do not get into personal discussion about you.
   - Do not get into political, ethnic, religion, political or any topic would lead to racism discussion.
   - Do not ever talk with negative way about the company you are representing in this course or even the company you are working in if you are a freelancer.
     Those are some tricks in discussion, many instructors are falling on and it would cause them damage in their career.
9. Some audiences are not motivated to the course or even interested for personal or business issues.
   You will find them are busy with something online, making noise by their shoes or their pens.
   In such situation, use the body language such as the eye contact, try to share them in some activity or try to give them questions related to the topic to force them to concentrate with you.
   Usually you may need to do that with most of the audiences or even all of them.

3. **If you are a project manager and attending a business meeting to discuss the requirement of a new project, what are the types of communication you may think of?**

Ahmad Adel Gad
ahmad.adel@jemmail.com

The types of communication in such meeting are very obvious, formal, official and verbal as oral and written.

Some non-verbal could be useful if you give them some presentation.

The receivers in this scenario would be the attendees of this meeting, and they could differ in some meeting by the business type and the organization level.

Therefore, I would try to state all the possible attendees in any similar meeting and not necessary that we find all of them in the same meeting:

1. **The sponsor**

   They could be the sales employee or the contractor who brought the project.

   The sponsor is the one you should give them the most concern in this meeting and should focus on communication with him all the time.

2. **The customer**

   The sponsor usually is a delegate for the customer.

   If not, this would be your first target in communication.

3. **The PMO**

   In some organization structures they don't have Project Management Officers.

   The PMO would support you with the required resources and facilities you need in your project. Communication with them should be very official and formal.

4. **The organization owner**

   It could be rare in some organization to attend such meeting.

   It could happen that the owner himself who bring the projects using his relationships and connections.

   Usually, you don't communicate with the organization owner in huge companies.

   Instead, the PMO is the one who should communicate with them not you.

5. **The sales manager**

   It could be the sponsor in the same time.

   Therefore, your communication should focus on him.

6. **The IT/Technical managers**

   The technical feedbacks are very important in such meetings.

   Based on this opinions or their overview you may decide to accept this project or not.

   Also, you would know the resources, the facilities you need.

   Their feedback would support you a lot on the budget plan.

7. **The HR manager**

   It could be rare to share the HR manager in such meeting in such early stage of the project.

8. **The financial managers**

   It would be useful to share the financial manager especially if the company would handle costs for the project initiation.

9. **The secretary or assistant**

   Some managers are attending their meeting with some assistants in order to write notes. Usually you don't need to pay any attention for them.

10. **The MOM recorders/writer**

It is important to make sure that the Minutes of Meetings is covering all the points discussed in the meeting and the final decisions.

Therefore, you need to communicate much more with them to make sure they are not missing any tiny detail.

Make sure that after the meeting, all the attendees get a copy of this MOM and they must confirm all the points covered in this MOM.

By this confirmation that means you have got an official commitment from them on all the points stated on this MOM.

11. **External service provider**

The company may need some external support or service provider to use during the project.

The financial manager must attend such meeting.

12. **Internal/External Consultant/Expert**

Some companies would hire internal or external consultants/experts for internal auditing or consultation.

This person opinion would override the opinions of the internal technical/IT managers in some scenarios.

Therefore, you would need to communicate with them more often in the meeting.

4. **If you are a project manager communicate with the customer via emails, faxes or voice/video conference, what are the types of communication you may think of?**

Without much thinking, the formal official communication would be the only type you would use.

When you are dealing with the customer your email must be official and formal considering all the rules of the formal/official communication and the technical writing:

- Be concise in your email.
- Your goals should be covered very clear with simple points.
- Use simple words, your customer may not be native such as your language.
- Never use informal phrases or words.
- Make sure that you edited your email from the typos, missing words, grammar, punctuations, etc. such tool such as Microsoft Word is very useful for grammar and spelling checking.
- Don't use the commanding or promising words such as "should", "must", "will", instead of, use "would" or "may", "recommended", "preferred".
- What ever happen, don't lose your temper with the customer while you are replying an aggressive or offended email by them.
  If you could control the situation peacefully or professionally, it would be fine, otherwise, you get to escalate this issue internally to your direct manager and then throw this issue on him to handle it, and never escalate it to the customer managers by yourself, as I explained such decision is often not yours.

Ahmad Adel Gad
ahmad.adel@jemmail.com

- Don't ever ignore the customer communication such as emails, faxes, SMS, missed or missed calls.
  Whatever the situation, you need to reply to the customer ASAP.
  Such issue as ignoring or replying lately could let the customer feel that he is ignored and doesn't get the enough support and care.
  And in the other hand when you reply to the customer ASAP, you gain his trust and satisfaction, and you may control him in your side as you like.
  Whatever the situation or the request in his communication to you, you get to reply by political phrases such as; we are investigating your issue, your request has been transferred to the relevant department, we would update you very soon, etc.
- If you are managing a task for the customer, try to keep him up to date especially if the task would take long time.
- If the customer requested for the estimated man days for specific request or support, make sure that you give him accurate estimation considering a quick risk time plan.
- Try not to use "I" in your email, instead, use "we" as you are representing your company.
- Try not to let your team members to communicate with your customer/sponsor direct without coming back to you, unless it's necessary with prior permission from you for specific project, specific situation, specific contact, specific communication method and specific time.
  You should handle the communication personally in order to make sure that your project is not getting out of your control.
- Never involve in financial details with the customers unless you have the authority from your superiors or if you are responsible about the budget and financial planning as well.
- Don't try to get into the customer personal life or involve him into yours.
- If you intend to get long vacation for any reason, you don't need to explain to your customers the reason, and it's recommended not to do.
  It is professional to inform all your contacts about your unavailability duration considering the following:
  1. Stating the backup resources that should cover you in this unavailability duration.
  2. State a contact method for your organization's members to contact you in urgent cases.
  3. Set the auto reply for your emails stating the date of the return and the backup contact resource.
  4. Don't set the auto forward for your incoming emails to your backup resource.
     You may get an email from your manager or your subordinates with some details that, your per college (your backup resource) should not know anything about it, therefore, don't fall in this mistake.
- If you are using emails in communication, you need to determine carefully who should be stated in the CC and who should be stated in the "To" fields.

Ahmad Adel Gad
ahmad.adel@jemmail.com

Usually, the regular support requests' communication are handled by emails, faxes, phones, etc. are not fully monitored or reported.

Later if you want to know what are finished, pending, closed, etc., you would spend much time to search in your emails and usually you miss some item or more.

Therefore, I suggest adopting a ticket support solution to be published online as a service channel layer for the customer.

With this system, alerts would sent for with each status update for any work item, reports could be gathered very easy, all the customers would be collected in one system and could be filtered so easy.

With my experience, it's the most efficient solution for such scenario.

Conclusion

- The communication types are differing from business to another and situation to another.
- All of the mentioned types could be gathered into two or four types only, and the rest would be nested from them.
- Two or more types on communication could be combined to create new type to suit with a specific situation.
- The communication methods are varying a lot depending on the distance, the project, the business scope and many other factors.
- Humanity in communication such as informal communication is required sometimes as long as it's not hurting or offending anyone.
- Finally, the communication is usually a message you want to say by your tongue but you write it or announce it using some medium such as internet, phone, fax, etc. and received by a receiver human.

  This message is counted to your side or against you, where there are no any other valid choices.

  And as being Muslim, I have learned from my honest prophet **Mohammad** (صلى الله عليه وسلم) that, abusing your tongue would be the easiest and fastest way in life to prepare you for hell instead of heaven.

Ahmad Adel Gad
ahmad.adel@jemmail.com