

PROCESS OF COMMUNICATION PLANNING IN DISTANCE EDUCATION PROJECTS USING THE GOOD PRACTICES IN PMI PROJECTS

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SUMMARY

This article describes the process of actors and stakeholders identification in distance education projects (DE) for the elaboration of the communication planning used by the Federal Institution of Espírito Santo (Ifes). Nowadays, one of the problems in projects, in the most diverse areas, is the no identification of the actors, in time, in the planning process, being them in or out of the institution. As each project has different actors with different expectations. Their previous identification will make their expectations management easier and effective. Effective management means, in a certain way, controlling these stakeholders influence on the projects and keeping them informed about the actions taken and the obtained results. The proposed planning is based on the communication projects defined in "Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK)" established by "Project Management Institute (PMI)".

Key words: Strategic Alignment, Projects, Processes, Stakeholders, Stakeholders Analyses, Communication Plan.

1. Introduction

With the educational projects advent getting bigger and bigger, being in the public or in the private sector, that use the distance education tools, the implementation of an effective communication process between the main actors and *stakeholders* becomes fundamental for these projects success.

It identifies a distinction between the terms *stakeholders* and actors in the context of this article. The *stakeholders* are the ones who are interested or impacted by the project or that are out of the institution's scope. Now, the actors are the ones that belong to the institution's functional board.

It is important to conceptualize effective communication and efficient communication. The effective communication means that the information is provided in the correct format, in suitable time and with necessary impact. The efficient communication means to provide only the information which is necessary [2].

The *Project Management Institute* (PMI), creator of the *Project Management Body of Knowledge* (PMBOK, 2008), defines 421 management processes in its version of the PMBOK. These 42 projects are clustered in 5 groups: initiating, planning, executing, controlling and monitoring, and closing.

The 42 processes are divided in 9 (nine) knowledge areas: project integration management, project scope management, project time management, project cost management, project quality management, project human resource management, project communications management, project risk management, and project procurement management. The processes in the communication area might be applied in the DE projects and used for the communication strategies with the several actors and *stakeholders*.

The 5 (five) processes of the communication management area defined in the PMBOK are:

- Identifying *stakeholders*;
- Communication Planning;
- Information Distribution;
- Managing the *stakeholders* expectations and;
- Performance Report.

It is important to mention the process of scope management area: collecting requirements. It is through this process that the requirements and the expectations of actors and *stakeholders* are identified [4].

The communication planning must be initiated right in the beginning of the elaboration works of a distance course conception project.

The Distance Education Center (DEC) of the Federal Institution of Espírito Santo (Ifes) has been doing, since 2006, an implementation work of technical and undergraduate courses in the distance modality, by the Open University of Brazil (OUB). These projects interact with several actors and *stakeholders* with different requirements and expectations. There comes information, since the necessity of academic activities knowledge till financial information for these projects management. The distribution of this information must be very well planned so the ones involved can be notified in the right moment and with the correct information.

The effective communication establishes and keeps relationships among the participants of the project, giving a more professional character to the work that is being developed. Besides, the constant communication makes that new ideas come up and not identified risks in the planning be observed and mitigated in time.

The majority of the communication abilities are shared with the general and project managements. These abilities are also present in the communication management in distance education projects, once we have several elements involved in the process. Among these abilities we could point:

- Asking, investigating ideas and situations to guarantee a better understanding;
- Educating to increase the team knowledge, so it becomes more effective;
- Defining and managing the expectations;
- Persuading someone or some company to take an action;
- Defining and managing the expectations;
- Negotiating to get agreements mutually acceptable between the parts;
- Solving conflicts to avoid negative impacts;

In the communication in educational projects, many actors communicate to each other virtually. In one side, we have the DEC team composed by: the center director, the financial management coordinator, the material production coordination, the infrastructure coordinator, the virtual environment coordinator (LVE) etc. Each course also has a team composed by: course coordinator, facilitators coordinator, instructional designer, pedagogue, professors and facilitators. And the support unit for education in attendance has a unit coordinator and facilitators in attendance.

However, the communications don't restrict themselves to the internal universe of the institution. It is important that have the identification of the interested ones that are out of the education institution. Among them, we can point: City Department of Education, ,State Department of Education, journalism center (radio, TV and newspapers, Department of City Planning, Office of the Comptroller General, Office of the Attorney General and people in general.

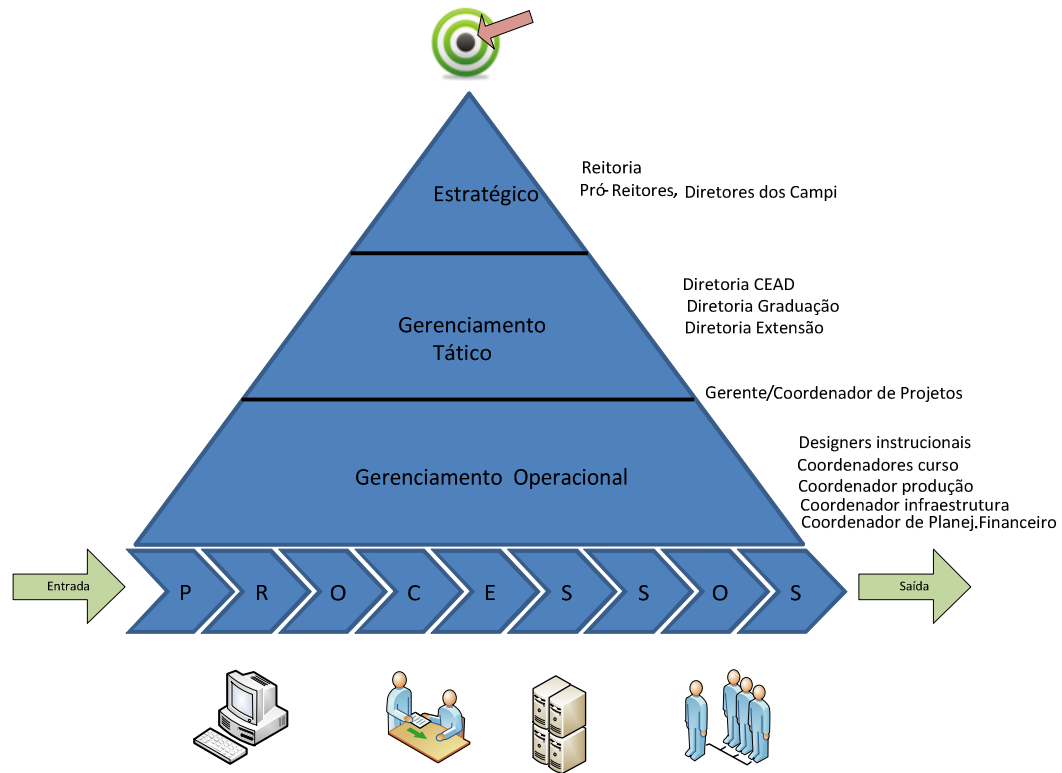
The several actors and *stakeholders* of the educational projects must receive information in time and with the necessary accuracy. Among some problems found, it can point: lack of communication about the distribution and the change of the number of places offered in a certain course, debated among the coordinators, the production sector and academic record; general procedures and guidance disagree about the course; even with the proposed qualifications, some actors don't know the limit of their functions; lack of changing experience among the actors, about decisions made and reached results, among others.

This article presents 3 (three) processes for the communication planning in distance education projects used by DEC/Ifes, based on the good project practices suggested by PMI.

2. The Identification Process of *Stakeholders*

This is the first process for the elaboration of a good communication plan. It is important to identify people or organizations that can be affected by the project and register important information of interests, involvement and impact in the project [2]. It is also necessary to separate the organizational pyramid and identify the exact position of the actors who participate of the DEC area,

The Picture 1 presents the organizational structure of DEC/lfes.



Picture 1: Organization Structure Separation

Subtitles:

Estratégico: Strategic

Gerenciamento Tático: Tactic Management

Gerenciamento Operacional: Management

Entrada: Entrance

Saída: Exit

Reitoria: Chancellor's Office

Pró-Reitores: Vice-Chancellors

Diretores do Campi: Campuses Directors

Diretoria CEAD: DEC's Board of Directors

Diretoria Graduação: College Board of Directors

Diretoria Extensão: Extension Board of Directors

Gerente/ Coordenador de projetos: Projects Manager/ Coordinator

Designers Instrucionais: Instructional Designers

Coordenadores Curso: Course coordinators

Coordenador produção: Production coordinator

Coordenador infraestrutura: Infrastructure coordinator

Coordenador Planej. Financeiro: Financial planning coordinator

The separation allows identifying the main actors and *stakeholders* in the communication process. It is important for his identification, to answer the following questions:

- “Who can be affected by this project?”, and;

- “Who will contribute with it?”

In Ifes structure, there are the Office of the Chancellor's Office, Vice-Chancellor's Office and the Campuses' General Directors, in the strategic level. The DEC's Board of Directors, College Board of Directors, and Extension Board of Directors are in the tactic level. The projects Manager/Coordinator links the tactic and the operational levels. The other actors (Instructional Designers, Production Coordinator, Financial Planning Coordinator, Course Coordinator and Infrastructure Coordinator) are in the same operational level.

The project management team and the administrative and pedagogic staff involved are in the operational level.

Once identified the actors and *stakeholders*, it must elaborate a strategy to manage them, or keeping them in a "comfort zone" in the project. This is because it can find actors and *stakeholders* that might affect the project in a positive or negative way. So, it must try to answer the following questions:

- Which information are important for the involved people;
- Who has the authority in the organization;
- When must this information be sent;
- What is the necessary feedback to identify the receiver's understanding about the message;
- How must the information be presented;
- Who are the responsible for creating the information;
- Why is it important;

Once answered these questions, it's easier to elaborate the plan of communication management. To make the information register easier, it's possible to use the proposed model [3], presented in Picture 2.

Instituto Federal do Espírito Santo		REGISTRO DAS PARTES INTERESSADAS	
TÍTULO DO PROJETO:		Nº:	FOLHA:
		DATA ELABORAÇÃO:	

Nome	Posição	Função no projeto	Informação de Contato	Requisitos	Expectativas	Influência	Classificação

Picture 2: Stakeholders Register Form

Subtitles:

Instituto Federal do Espírito Santo: Federal Institution of Espírito Santo

Registro das partes interessadas: Register of interested parts

Título do projeto: Project title

Nº: number

Folha: Page

Data de elaboração: elaboration date

Nome: Name

Posição: Position

Função no projeto: Job in the project

Informação de Contato: Contact information

Requisitos: Requirements

Expectativas: Expectations

Influência: Influence

Classificação: Classification

The field "influence level" concerns to the stakeholder or actor influence type in the project. The field "classification" can be a vision of the project manager. For example: neutral, pro, against, etc.

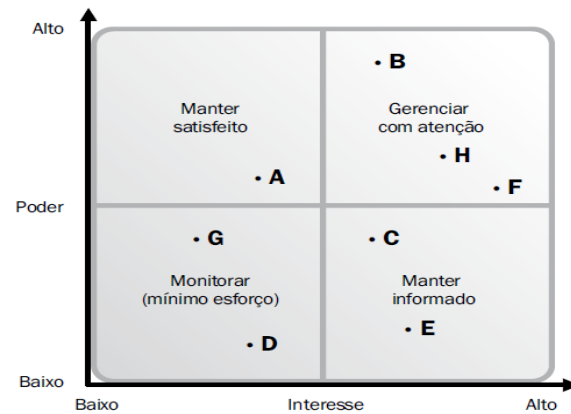
This form can be adapted to hold the important information for each institution, according to the strategies used.

3. The Process to Identify the Support or the Impact of the Interested Parts

In this stage, it is important to prioritize the principal parts to assure the efficient use of efforts to communicate and manage their expectations. According to PMI [2] there are many available models of classification, such as:

- Power/interest level, that groups the interested parts with basis on their authority level ("power") and their concern level ("interest") with the projects results;
- Power/interest level, that groups the interested parts with basis on their authority level ("power") and their active involvement ("influence") in the project;
- Influence/impact level that groups the interested parts with basis on their active involvement level ("influence") and their ability for changes in the planning or in the execution of the project ("impact");
- Relative importance model that describes the classes of interested parts with basis on their power (ability to impose their will), in urgency (necessity of immediate attention) and legitimacy (their involvement is appropriated).

The classification can be subjective (high, average and low) or numeric. Once the actors and *stakeholders* are classified, it is important that these ones be allocated in the classificatory quadrant, according to Picture 3 [2].



Picture 3: Classification quadrant based on power x interest

Subtitles:

Alto: High

Poder: Power

Baixo: Low

Interesse: Interest

Manter satisfeito: keeping satisfied

Monitorar (mínimo esforço): Monitoring (minimum effort)

Gerenciar com atenção: Managing carefully

Manter informado: Keeping informed

It is important to have attention with the project development, because some actors or *stakeholders* that are in a "comfort zone" in a particular moment, can pass to a "confront zone". This follow-up is the project manager responsibility, with the coordinators support and information, as in the tactic as in the operational level.

To make the records of adopted strategies easier, it can use the proposed model [3], according to what it is presented in Picture 4.

The strategies established in this form must retract how the interested parts will react or respond in many situations, to plan how to influence them to increase their support and mitigate the potential negative impacts, once they will happen. These strategies are really reserved and they shouldn't be communicated to all the actors that are part of the pyramid. It is a strategic tool that might cause embracement if the evaluated ones have access to it.

Instituto Federal do Espírito Santo		ESTRATÉGIAS DE GERENCIAMENTO DAS PARTES INTERESSADAS	
TÍTULO DO PROJETO:	Nº:	FOLHA: 1 de 1	DATA ELABORAÇÃO:

Nome	Influência	Avaliação do Impacto	Estratégias

Picture 4: Management Strategies Form of the interested parts.

Subtitles:

Instituto Federal do Espírito Santo: Federal Institution of Espírito Santo

Estratégias de gerenciamento das partes interessadas: Management strategies of the interested parts

Título do Projeto: Project Title

Nº: Number

Folha: Page

Data Elaboração: Elaboration date

Nome: Name


Influência: Influence

Avaliação do Impacto: Impact Evaluation

Estratégias: Strategies

4. The Process of Communication Planning

Once the actors and *stakeholders* were identified and the strategies to keep them in a "comfort zone" were defined, it is time to start planning how the communication will happen. For that, the proposed model [3] can be used, according to what it is presented in Picture 5.

Instituto Federal do Espírito Santo			PLANO DE GERENCIAMENTO DA COMUNICAÇÃO	
TÍTULO DO PROJETO:		Nº:	FOLHA: 1 de 1	DATA ELABORAÇÃO:
Mensagem	Audiência	Método	Frequência	Emissor
Termo ou Acrônimo	Definição			
Premissas ou Restrições da Comunicação:				

Anexe diagramas ou fluxogramas relevantes à comunicação

Picture 4: Planning of Communication Management Form

Subtitles:

Instituto Federal do Espírito Santo: Federal Institution of Espírito Santo

Plano de gerenciamento da Comunicação: Communication management plan

Título do projeto: Project title

Nº: Number

Folha: Page

Data Elaboração: Elaboration Date

Mensagem: Message

Audiência: Audience

Método: Method

Frequência: Frequency

Emissor: Emitter

Termo ou Acrônimo: Term or acronym

Definição: Definition

Premissas ou Restrições da Comunicação: Premises or restriction of communication

Anexe diagramas ou fluxogramas relevantes à comunicação: Attach diagrams or flow charts relevant to the communication.

In the form, it can observe the method field that identifies which mold will be used to send the message to the receiver (audience). It must have attention because the used method must be, in most cases, informed by the receiver. He is the one who knows the best way to contact it. Among the most common methods used, there are: email, telephone, official letter, memo, meeting, placard and others.

It also must be considered that the number of communication channels (who communicates with whom) increases as much as it increases the

audience and this can be a potential indicator of communication complexity. Observe the formula bellow:

$$\text{Canais de Comunicação} = \frac{n(n-1)}{2}$$

Subtitle:

Canais de Comunicação: Communication channels

In the formula we have "n" as being the number of actors and *stakeholders* being assisted by the project, therefore, present in the communication plan. If we have 4 (four) actors and *stakeholders*, we'll have 6 (six) communication channels. If this number increases to 20 (twenty), which is common in distance education (without counting the students) the number of channels increases to 190 (one hundred ninety). If there isn't a well elaborated communication planning, the projects might not attend to the established goals and targets.

So, the limitation of who "talks" to whom, is fundamental in these projects.

Together with communication channels and with the used method, it is the frequency that the communication happens. This also must be specified, in most of cases, by the actors and *stakeholders*. So, some information can have daily, weekly, fortnightly, monthly, etc frequency.

In the communication planning, the responsible for the emission of communications must previous know their functions.

The great concern here is to avoid the several problems that can happen because of the communication plan inadequacy, such as: delay in the message delivery, communication of information for the wrong public or lack of communication for some actors and important *stakeholders* [2]. It is the project manager's responsibility to keep them informed about the project development.

5. Conclusion

The distance education and the information and communication technologies (ICT) used for its fulfillment are more and more widespread and developed. Together with them, it increases the amount of involved actors and *stakeholders* and, as a consequence, it grows the necessity of a bigger planning and communication control between these agents [5].

This article presented one of the strategies used by DEC/lfes for the communication planning in distance education projects, with focus in three processes based on the good practices of projects, suggested by PMI: *stakeholders'* identification, support or impact of the interested parts identification and communication planning.

With the increasing offer of courses by DEC/lfes, the earnings that this technology has been provided are evident. Many communication problems that former existed having only one current course, are now minimized, even with many concurrent courses, or, with a much bigger amount of actors and *stakeholders*.

This and other models adopted by DEC are not static. On the contrary, they have been continually improved with the courses development.

6. Referencias

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