



TAMPEREEN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU
UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

BUSINESS SCHOOL

FINAL THESIS REPORT

Succeeding in Project Communication - Effective Tools for the Purposes of Change Management

Case Company: VR Ltd. - Passenger Services

Jonna Koivula

Degree Programme in International Business

December 2009

Supervisor: Markku Lampi

TAMPERE 2009



Author: Jonna Koivula

Study programme: International Business

Title of thesis: Succeeding in Project Communication - Effective Tools for the Purposes of Change Management
Case Company: VR Ltd. - Passenger Services

Date: December 2009

Supervisor: Markku Lampi **Number of pages:** 45

ABSTRACT

Communication is one of the most crucial operations in project management, not to mention change management. How well one performs in the communication activities often defines the success of a project or change operation. This thesis covers the best project communication practices, emphasizing change management operations. The work presents and highlights the communication plan as a central tool in managing the communication activities.

The purpose of the work was to define the underlying problem points which occur in the VR's project organization and to present suggestions for possible solutions. The aim was also to reflect the principles of a communication plan on the practical level of VR's project work. The need for the work was mutually defined and agreed between the author of this thesis and the representative of VR.

The problem points were defined both by personal observation and by cooperating with the project manager, who also commissioned and supervised the thesis. Literature and articles from the field were applied together with the internal corporate project material of VR, and author's own gained experience and knowledge.

As results for the defined problem points, reorganizing and specifying the tasks and responsibilities of assigned persons taking care of the communication activities are suggested to be done. One finding of the work was also to address and activate the communication plan more than it has been done earlier. The results of this thesis can be seen as a consultation work done for the client company. The thesis includes suggestions, which the client can use for their purposes in the extent they see necessary.

This thesis includes material under confidentiality agreement, why only the theoretical parts are included to the public version.

Table of Contents

1	Introduction	5
2	The Company	6
2.1	VR Group.....	6
2.1.1	Vision 2016.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
2.1.2	Mission.....	6
2.1.3	Strategy 2009-2012	6
2.1.4	Values.....	6
2.2	VR Ltd. - Passenger Services.....	7
3	Project communication.....	7
3.1	Communication in project management	8
3.2	Communication channels.....	9
3.3	Styles and tools for the communication channels.....	10
3.3.1	Upward channel	10
3.3.2	Downward channel	11
3.3.3	Lateral channel.....	11
3.4	Challenges to project communication.....	12
3.4.1	Political aspect	12
3.4.2	Cultural aspect.....	13
3.4.3	Linguistic aspect	13
3.4.4	Personal aspect.....	14
4	Change management	14
4.1	The role of communication in change management	15
4.2	Challenges to change management	16
4.3	How to overcome the challenges	17
5	Communication plan	18
5.1	What is a communication plan?	18
5.2	Why do we need a communication plan?	19
5.3	What is included to the plan?.....	20
5.3.1	Environment.....	20

5.3.2	Goals	20
5.3.3	Key messages.....	20
5.3.4	Audience	21
5.3.5	Communication activities	21
5.3.6	Timing and media	21
	List of references	23
	Appendices	25
	Appendix 1: Communication channels	25

1 Introduction

In this work the importance of well planned and executed communication in project management is addressed, not forgetting the aspect of change management in this particular case. Change management is addressed from the project management point of view.

The work is constructed of findings from the field literature and professional articles, aiming to find best practices and most suitable solutions to existing problems of the case company. The central focus point presented in the end part of this work is on communication plan, which plays an essential part in project management's communication activities. The emphasis will be on change management, which is one of the most important operations as a ground work of the communication plan.

There will be a general presentation over the company in question, after which dealing communication in project management, followed by change management practices, and the concept of communication plan.

2 The Company

2.1 VR Group

VR Ltd. is a subsidiary of VR Group and the biggest company inside it, also being the best known among the public. VR Ltd. provides rail transport services dividing into passenger and freight services (Railway services form... 2009). The year 2008 was a record year for the VR Group, when the net turnover rose as much as 14.7 % when compared to the previous year. The growth strongly reflected from the operations of VR Ltd, where the net turnover increased by 87.1 million euros, being total of 771.2 million euros in 2008 (Annual Report 2008, 16). The parent group of VR Group is the VR-Group Ltd., which is fully owned by the Finnish state. VR-Group Ltd. was incorporated in 1995, continuing the operations of the previously known Finnish State Railways (VR). (VR is fully state-... 2009.)

2.1.1 Mission

The mission of VR Group is described as follows:

- *"To provide its customers with high-quality and environmentally friendly transport services for passengers and freight, including added-value logistics services.*
- *To produce track construction and maintenance services that improve the punctuality and quality of service of rail transport.*
- *Main operating area is Finland, Russia and selected target markets in Eastern Europe."*(Annual Report 2008, 8.)

2.1.2 Strategy 2009-2012

The central themes of the VR strategy for the timeline from 2009 to 2012 are customer orientation, broadening the range of services and effective strategy implementation. What comes to the customer orientation, the goal is to forecast, understand and meet the expectations of the customers better. These operations will be strongly linked to the values and business approach in order to achieve fully committed personnel. According to the broadened range of services the company will e.g. aim in covering the whole transportation and logistics chain in Finland, Russia and some other selected countries. (Annual Report 2008, 9.)

2.1.3 Values

The operations of VR Group are founded on four values, which are:

- safety

- satisfied customer
- successful together, and
- responsibility

Safety stands for transporting both passengers and freight reliably and safely, preventing environmental risks, and also working continuously towards safety and punctuality improvements. The value of satisfied customer means working for the good of customers, providing services which are high quality and easily available, collaboration with customers and valuing the customers within VR. (Annual Report 2008, 7.)

The third value, successful together, is based on cooperation which is open, built on mutual respect and committed to achieving the common goals. Keys to success are dynamics, expertise, and innovation. Being successful stands for situation where the operations are profitable and meet the needs of the customers. The final value of responsibility points to each employee's own responsibility of the work results and quality, honesty and trust based work and recognizing the environmental responsibility. (Annual Report 2008, 4.)

2.2 VR Ltd. - Passenger Services

VR Passenger Services concentrate on offering a wide selection of services both in long-distance and Helsinki Metropolitan Area services. There are around 310 long-distance services operating daily and six of these run between Finland and Russia. Around 890 commuter train services operate in Helsinki Metropolitan Area every day (Railway services form... 2009). The number of journeys of the rail passengers was a record of 69.9 million in 2008, showing growth of 4.9% from the previous year. The total net turnover of the passenger services was 410.0 million euros, when it was 370.2 million euros in the previous year (Annual Report 2008, 16).

3 Project communication

Communication is an action between at least two persons, where messages are delivered, received and reacted to among participants. In project management, communication should be seen both as a resource and a tool (Ruuska, Project Communication 1996, 67). As a resource, communication can be paralleled to people, time, money and equipment. Just as well the use of time and work power has to be planned and targeted for the project; requires communication same kind of systematic resource allocation. Project communication is also a crucial tool in order to effectively exploit other resources. If you struggle with communication, you will probably struggle with the project as well.

3.1 Communication in project management

In his article dealing project communication, Kai Ruuska (2007, 13) lists five important factors for project communication.

1. Project communication is a supporting activity, with which it is made possible to create an end product from the project, and transfer it to both customers and end users.
2. In order to create a positive and reliable service profile, communication is needed for both profiling and being profiled.
3. Project communication is an informative tool, which communicates to all relative groups what is happening in the project.
4. Orientation activities rely strongly on communication. This is important when different specialists working with project are given proper orientation.
5. By the social nature of people, interaction with each other is needed in order to satisfy the social needs of human nature (Ruuska 2007, 13).

The importance of communication in project management often personifies. For example, as a project manager, your communication skills have a major impact on how you are able to “sell” the project for the stakeholders, and how you manage expectations. And not forgetting how your communication skills result in managing the project team, reducing unnecessary conflicts and even getting “forgiveness” because of communicating effectively (Horine 2005, 215).

For us, communication is an activity which we perform constantly and without putting much of a thought for it. This might be one reason why we often take it as granted and leave it without specific planning in project management. And yet, time and time again, the lack of, or poorly ran, communication is very often listed as an area needing improvement in the assessment sessions of finished projects (Project Management – Communication... 2002).

Project communication should be systematic, continuous, well planned and informative in the right way. It is easy to slide aside from the golden mean if the communication activities are not planned thoroughly enough; either you give too little or too much of information. With well constructed and implemented communication plan, project management can engage people to work for the project and this way smooth the overall project operations.

3.2 Communication channels

Communication runs through different channels, in various styles and by using different tools to be delivered. Now we will have a bit closer discussion about all above mentioned factors.

At the top level of how communication moves from place to another, we are dealing with communication channels. Jason P. Charvat suggests (2002), that there are three main upper level channels of communication in project management (see also Appendix A). These are named as upward, lateral and downward channels. The upward channel is about communicating to the senior executives and these messages highlight the issues, risks and exceptions.

The downward channel communicates to the project team, providing a direction. Central issues here are pending tasks, scheduled tasks, dates, and general team briefings. Communication running through downward channel requires delegation skills in particular. (Charvat 2002.) In this case we can apply the idea of downward channel for the end users as well, since we have to consider the project management operations as a part of change management. The end users (such as sales clerks and conductors in the case of VR) are affected by the outputs of the project and the upcoming change.

Last of the channels, lateral channel, is directed towards clients, vendors and functional managers. This communication deals of negotiations for resources, budgets, and time allocations, requiring diplomacy and tact alongside of the interaction. Communication plan is one tool to be mentioned in this context, although it also links all three channels together in one plan (Charvat 2002). In this case, we could sum up the lateral channel as external communications.

It is important for the project manager, or other person responsible for communication, to identify each channel level and adjust the appropriate communication styles and tools for each situation and message. By identifying the channels first, it is later easier to conduct the communication, since basic framework is already done. The starting point is to know your audience. A skill to be able to take the audience's perspective is a nice feature to have, and can be more than beneficial when implementing project communication.

3.3 Styles and tools for the communication channels

Once you know which channel of project communication you are operating in, you can start to figure out the suitable communication style and tool to deliver the message. Even though you now know your audience, there can still be differences on how people adopt information. Here we call the way people adopt the message as communication style.

The communication tool on the other hand stands for the form, in which the message is delivered, e.g. a meeting or an e-mail. Sometimes the tool to be chosen for delivering the message can be critical. If a wrong kind of tool is used for wrapping the message, it might imply to the recipient that the sender has a lack of interest to inform people, is arrogant in nature, or just hasty. For example, if the person receiving the message considers it to have a high influence on his or her work, but it was communicated using an impersonal tool (e.g. a note on a billboard), it might evoke the feeling that the management is neglectful and does not care for the personnel even that much, to deliver this kind of important message in person. This results in low motivation later to adopt the change and work in the changed operational environment.

Even though there can be diversities among your audience (determined by the channel) in the way people absorb information or in which form they wish to receive it, yet some outlines can be made. There are five different communication styles to be identified here: *readers*, *listeners*, *exchangers*, *manipulators* and *viewers* (Ghattas & McKee 2001, 70-71). Next we will concentrate on each style and how they could be input to the three different channels (by Charvati, presented in part 4.2) and which tools would be best to use (see also figure 4-1).

3.3.1 Upward channel

From the different communication styles, reader is probably one of the most common and can be seen in nearly every channel, but this one is emphasized especially in the upward channel of project communication. Readers prefer to receive their messages in printed form and require often very detailed information instead of brief summaries. Tools to be used for readers are different reports and e-mail updates (Ghattas & McKee 2001, 70).

Another style very often reflected in the upward channel is the listener. This style of person wishes to hear the message him/herself and rather the short version of the pig picture. It is often related into busy situation, where the message has to be delivered fast and concisely. Communication tools

preferred by the listeners include e.g. face-to-face reviews and telephone conversations. (Ghattas & McKee 2001, 70.)

The third style, exchanger, occurs probably the least in this channel, but is good to be noticed as well. The exchangers adopt the messages best through a dialogue, processing the received information and thinking up while talking. Meetings, conference calls and instant messaging are common tools for exchangers (Ghattas & McKee 2001, 70).

3.3.2 *Downward channel*

Like stated before, the downward channel consists of the project teams and in addition, the end users. This group of people most often consists of the styles of exchanger (presented in previous section), manipulators and viewers. Of course the most common style of a reader also exists in this channel.

The manipulator is a type of person who requires a practical approach into the messages. He or she understands the information best when the message is in concrete form and also prefer delivering it forward as a physical problem, instead of verbally describing it, or putting it down in words. (Ghattas & McKee 2001, 70.)

In a way the manipulator is very close to the style of a viewer, who then again wishes to receive the information in the form of drawings, videos, charts, models and diagrams. This group is the most far away from the style of a reader, and requires a visual message to best receive the intended information. The communication tools to be used for the downward channel audience include e.g. minutes, verbal exchange, project plan, presentations and briefs. (Ghattas & McKee 2001, 70.)

3.3.3 *Lateral channel*

The lateral communication channel is targeted to deliver messages for clients, vendors and functional managers, so in most parts to external parties. We could state that based on the target audience, the most common styles represented here are the reader and exchanger styles. For the nature of being in the external audience, the form of the message is often either in written form or delivered through meetings.

The tools to deliver messages in the lateral channel are very often statements of work, contracts of different kinds, e-mails and communication plan (Charvat 2002).

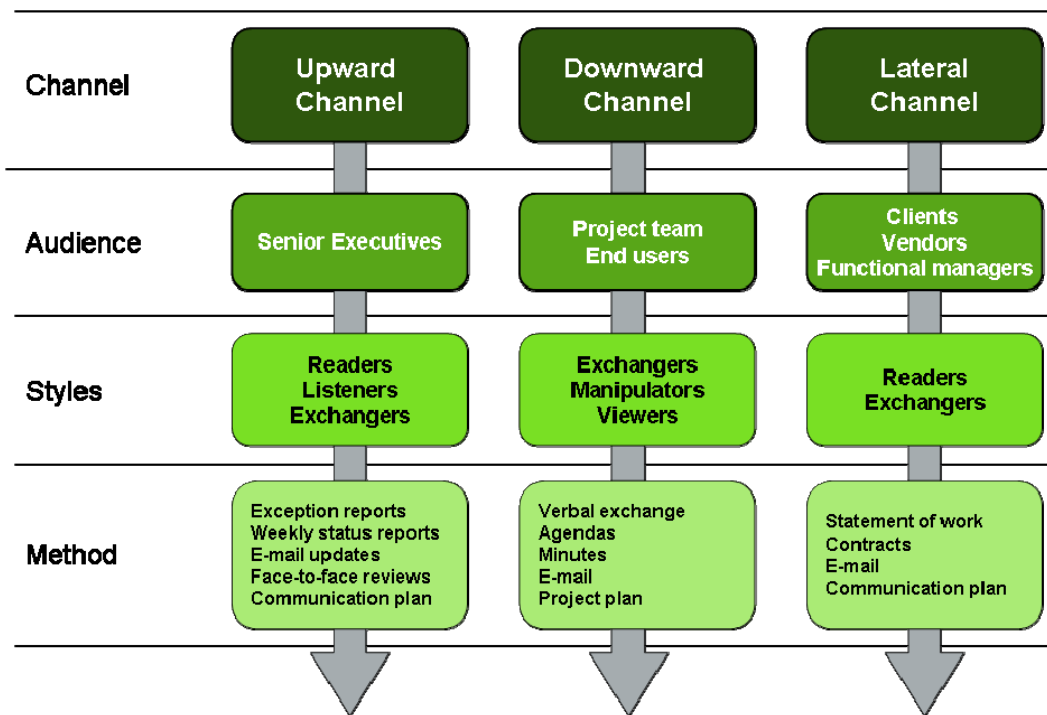


Figure 4-1 Communication channels, styles and tools

3.4 Challenges to project communication

Naturally there are some obstacles and challenges related to communication activities. Actually, communicating properly and extensively is a challenging task. But once you are a little bit aware of what kind of challenges you might run into, it is far easier to tackle them down, one by one. Next we will take a closer look of some of the most common obstacles which exist in project communication in particular.

3.4.1 Political aspect

Mr. Kailash Awati has listed three main obstacles to project communication in his article *Obstacles to Project Communication* (2008). These obstacles are named as political, cultural and linguistic challenges. According to Awati the political obstacle appears because of vested interests and power games, which can get in the way of communication. This exists especially at the higher levels of the organization, usually just above the one where the project itself is being planned and executed.

In large organizations it is very important to take into consideration the different hierarchical levels and their representatives, in order to assure that the message becomes presented and handled in the correct manner. Stepping on one's toes or getting lost in one's vested interests may harm the entity or even twist the outcome. Sometimes it is simply not possible to please every party and compromises are required.

Awati recommends as a solution to recognize the main political players well in advance and to see some special effort in order to gain their trust and to get them to work in favor of the project. He also addresses the importance of dealing the arising problems in the particular level they generate, in stead of taking the problematic issues up in the hierarchy right away. This way you promote cooperation at all levels and avoid stepping on anyone's toes.

3.4.2 Cultural aspect

According to Awati, the cultural obstacle arises from both organizational cultural differences and differences in geographically distributed project teams. In this thesis we will concentrate on a domestic point of view contemplating on the cross-organizational factors inside the company and among the external partner operators.

It is stated in the article by Awati, that the organization values and cultures, which both have an impact of their own to communication, can greatly vary from one to another between and even inside organizations. Independently operating departments can have different expectations and customs what it comes to communication and interaction. On another side, we might have a very open, flat hierarchical communication where anyone can state their opinion, and on the other side we might have very conservative, position related pecking order, where you have to know the customs in order to communicate "correctly".

In such cases Awati recommends the project managers taking the role of an intermediate, facilitating communication between parties. This requires a certain level of understanding the divergences inside the organization in order the project managers can effectively operate as an intermediate, and guarantee smooth interaction and exchange of communication.

3.4.3 Linguistic aspect

When issuing the linguistic obstacle, Mr. Awati's article underlines especially the specialized terminology which is used by different departments inside of an organization. Different terms can vary greatly depending on which department is using them, e.g. from the Marketing department to IT and so on.

Terms used in such documents that are distributed broadly around organization and even for outside operators, should be unite in meaning or at least every time explained in the context where they are

used in. Completely new terms might be born along the project, which then should later be embedded into the working community. In such cases the new term should be well in advance defined and recorded, and later correctly used in the right context.

3.4.4 Personal aspect

Of course all the previous mentioned aspects have an impact of their own when it comes to communication challenges, but in addition to those we cannot disregard the challenges we are facing at the very personal level of communication.

All past experience, assumptions and expectations affect on how the intended message translates into a perception of a single person (Horine 2005, 216). This basically means that whatever the learning styles (presented in part 4.3) and filters (culture, attitude, values and benefits) of a person are, they transform the past experience and assumptions to how the message will be received and how well it will be understood by the person. Also the communication skills and even the current state, whether physical, emotional, self-concept or noise, affect on resulting perception of the intended message.

The person being responsible for the project communication must be aware of and able to control these different challenges in order to deliver effective communications forward to the parties in question.

4 Change management

Change comes in many forms and sizes, getting a spark from either internal or external stimulus, in which change has to respond to (Newton 2007, 3-4). Because of a stated reason an organization can not continue the same way it has, and a change is required. These reasons can vary from strengthening processes to company merges (Newton 2007, 3). Whatever the reason is, people in charge of implementing the change in practice, must acknowledge the starting point; why do we need this change, the goal; what do we want to achieve with this change; and the impact; who are affected by this change.

What is important to understand in change management is the fact that it is a process, a tool and a technique to manage change at the people-side of the organization. Ultimately the change is targeted either to processes, systems, organization structure, or job roles. When the project management aims to develop specific plans and operations to achieve the certain change within the

set time, scope and costs, aims change management to offer sufficient support, address resistance and build the required knowledge for the people who are affected by the change (Creasy, 2007).

Usually the reason why the organization wishes to pursue towards change is to achieve an improvement in the organizational operations. This should be kept in mind and as a basic goal for the messages to be delivered when planning project communication; change is necessary for achieving improvement.

4.1 The role of communication in change management

If communication is important in project management, it can be said it is crucial in change management. Basic rule and conception is that you cannot over-communicate (Heathfield, 2009). Yet, very often people are very careful about what and when they are communicating about the change. Of course you must take caution on the communication activities, but too often the situation goes so that the official communication comes too late (because of too much of caution), when already some small drops of information have leaked out, resulting in rumors and most likely even greater resistance of change.

When considering the communication in change management, you should give a consideration to the factor, how much harm is done by communicating too little when compared to communicating too much. What well implemented communication does, is that it balances the view of those who complain about too little of communication with those who claim communicating too much within the same change project, resulting as an outcome where everyone have received the information what they needed right when they needed it (Newton 2007, 186). Carefully planning and timing your communication helps preventing conflicts and change resistance. Again, we come to the importance of communication plan, which is more closely discussed in chapter 6.

Because people are naturally interested to know how the change will affect their own work, what is expected from them both during and after the change, how their work and performance will be measured, and what kind of consequences will either success or failure in the process mean for them, communication should always be explicit and based on honesty (Jones, Aguirre & Calderone 2004). This doesn't mean that the messages should be delivered roughly as they are, but to keep it honest and at the same time to add the right kind of marketing aspect to it, in order to make it lower the change resistance among the audience. So in stead of just smashing the facts straight at the audience's face, expecting them to interpret it in the correct way, the managers should take the

responsibility of explaining the issues clearly, because the receivers of the message need help and are entitled to it (Eccles 1996, 159).

In change management it all starts from the vision and communication is the tool to make sure everyone involved with the change are aware of the vision and objectives related to it (Pendlebury, Grouard & Meston 1998, 268). If the target audience does not understand the reasons behind the change, it is very difficult to be implemented. In such case, it is also only reasonable, that people question the change in hand. If this happens, there has been a failure in change management. It cannot be addressed too much, that communication not only should be good in quality, but there should be plenty of it (Pendlebury et al. 1998, 270).

4.2 Challenges to change management

The main challenge to change management is basically the resistance of the people who are affected by the change. In the benchmarking study by Prosci (Change management – success... 2003), the five main obstacles in change management were listed as follows:

1. *Employee and staff resistance*
2. *Middle-management resistance*
3. *Poor executive sponsorship*
4. *Limited time, budget and resources*
5. *Corporate inertia and politics (Change management – success... 2003)*

A colleague of mine once said there is no change resistance, only questioning the change, which is exactly what the project needs. To think of it, I could not agree more. Of course the activities of change management aim at minimizing the resistance as much as possible, but what the question about the resistance is really about, is that the need for change has not been argued well enough by the people putting it into implementation. The resistance expresses the work which still needs to be done.

But whatever term you use about resistance, it still is a problem in change management and affects on productivity (Wynn 2005) and how successful the implementation of change will be. If we are facing a lot of change resistance in the implementation phase, the change management has not succeeded in the best possible way and we have to take some steps back in the process.

What are then the reasons for people resisting change?

Garrison Wynn (2005) has listed the eight most common thoughts behind people resisting change:

1. *"There isn't any real need for the change.*
2. *The change is going to make it harder for them to meet their needs.*
3. *The risks seem to outweigh the benefits.*
4. *They don't think they have the ability to make the change.*
5. *They believe the change will fail.*
6. *Change process is being handled improperly by management.*
7. *The change is inconsistent with their values.*
8. *They believe those responsible for the change can't be trusted."* (Wynn 2005)

Once you recognize and are aware of the possibility of this kind of thoughts, it is easier to avoid them in the first place. It is healthy to question the process and workers once in a while, and check whether the vision is still carried along and the primary target has not blurred. Taking the challenges into consideration well in advance, a lot of unnecessary extra work needed for later phases can be avoided.

4.3 How to overcome the challenges

In addition to the five top obstacles to change management, Prosci also has listed the top five success factors (Change management – success... 2003). These were listed in the following order:

1. *Effective sponsorship*
2. *Buy-in from front-line managers and employees*
3. *Exceptional team*
4. *Continuous and targeted communication*
5. *Well planned and organized approach (Change management – success... 2003)*

Since this thesis concentrates on communication in project and change management, it is the aspect we will also concentrate here the most. Even the first mentioned effective sponsorship holds the feature of communicating the clear understanding over the change's objectives and goals (Change management – success... 2003). An obvious success factor at place four is continuous and targeted communication. Again we can address the point stated before, that you cannot over-communicate, but it should be provided for the people when they need it. Timing is the key.

We once again come to well planned and organized communication activities. In chapter 4 (part 4.6.2) we discussed about assigning a point man to lead the role of head of communications. In addition to just one responsible person, Pendlebury et al. (1998, 113) also suggest nominating a whole team for the communication operations. According to them, the main role of this team is to assure the work is updated regularly and the needs for communicating are constantly reassessed.

Since too often people complain about the lack of communication afterwards, this team has the responsibility to coordinate all communication operations centralized and efficiently, on time.

One practical approach in the change management process could be evaluating the overall size of the impact of change on a practical level. For example by taking each job role which are affected by the change and then estimate the extent of the change, say, on a scale from one to five (where one is a minor impact and five is a major impact). The larger the impact, the more carefully addressed should the change management activities and related communication be. After an evaluation is done, it is easier to prioritize the changes and messages which should be communicated.

5 Communication plan

In the previous chapters we have already few times mentioned the communication plan, but not opened the concept any further. What is communication plan? Why do we need such a thing? Whose is it to take care of to create and supervise? As a project manager involved with change management, you do not later want to run into feedback, where the key words are random, unplanned, poor timing and vague message. Communication plan can be seen as a tool to fight against such words.

5.1 What is a communication plan?

Communication plan gathers communication related activities, goals, tools, audiences and timetables together in one place. It sets a framework for the communication tasks and gives a concrete conception otherwise of an abstract activity. By this I mean that communication can take place everywhere and all the time, also without planning, organizing or recording of such activity. In a communication plan this kind of "abstract" activity is put in a concrete form, where it is needed to be processed, planned, organized, implemented, and recorded.

In his article, *Communication plans are key to project success* (2000), Mr. Rick Freedman points out that the communication plan should be divided into project communication and constituent communication. He sees that the part of project communication deals more interaction activities needed for delivering quality engagement, whereas the constituent communication is focusing particularly on clients and stakeholders. In a way we could discuss the project communication as internal, and constituent communication as external activity, which both need to be addressed but dealt in different manners (e.g. see communication channels in part 4.2).

In addition, Shel Holtz (2004, 56) addresses the two distinct communication plans: general and special communication plan. According to Holtz, engagement to both plans by the people responsible for communication is required, since the general plan serves the communication activities throughout the organization, when the special plan concentrates on a specific field. In our case, we are discussing the special communication plan in the light of project management and especially in change management (Libretto-project). The essence of the project communication is the project plan, which should be remembered to be revised, reviewed and revisited throughout the project (Freedman 2000) – basic rule of project management also.

5.2 Why do we need a communication plan?

Since communication takes place everywhere and all the time both consciously and unconsciously, we need a helping tool to track and control this activity. The central purpose of the communication plan is to share the essential information for the target audience at the correct time (Kaushik 2009).

But it is important to remember, that the communication plan is not just a one-time-thing to get over with and then leave in the corner where no-one will take a look at it. Just like the project plan, also the communication plan should be visited, revised, and reviewed from time to time. Why? To name one crucial reason: the communication plan offers you afterwards information about your level of success in communication.

Robin Mayhall (2009) addresses the four important activities related to creating and implementing a communication plan. Firstly you need to describe the predominant situation and the needs for communication, which is called the **research** phase. Next you ought to **analyze** the targets and objectives for your communication and determine the target audience together with the tactics to be used. Thirdly you implement your communication plan, which is the phase of **communicating**. Finally you face the stage of **evaluation**: How did you achieve the goals and objectives determined in the beginning? Determine the level of success based on the results.

So in addition that the communication plan is a sort of a road map for your communication activities, it also provides indicators of your success. Since it is often difficult to find proper and useful barometers, use the work already done in communication plan to evaluate your work and get the best use out of it.

5.3 What is included to the plan?

You do not necessarily need any complex programs to create your communication plan, for example Excel works just fine for that. But what is important to understand, are the parts of which the plan is compiled of, and what the purposes of them are.

5.3.1 Environment

Like we already discussed, you should start by defining the environment, including the organizational culture, you operate in, and aim to understand it (Newton 2007, 190). Especially in the light of change management this is one of the main things to be aware of. When you know your environment you work in, you are able to alter the methods and nature of your communication to suite the situation best. Particularly in cases where external consultants are used in order to help your communication activities, it is important that central people inside the organization are tied to the work as well (Newton 2007, 190). Close operation with the staff is required so that the message outcomes are in correct form for the organization in question.

5.3.2 Goals

The environment analysis is more or less the background work for the communication plan and the next parts are actual elements of your communication plan. First you have the overall goals and vision, towards which the project and change are targeted to, so next you should identify goals for each and every message you list in your communication plan. Even though a goal is not actually a measurable, you can still tell whether or not it was successfully achieved, later when you evaluate the overall success in the project (Holz 2004, 60).

5.3.3 Key messages

The message you intend to deliver forward is a key element in your communication plan. Based on the message you determine the target audience, primal goal to be achieved with the message and other relevant things, which are presented in following parts. Sources for the messages can be various, from project plans to project outcomes, or status reports. When going deeper into change management in the means of communication plan, there are few focal points the key message should answer to. The message should express what is going to change, the reason for the change to take place, why the chosen change is the best solution for the situation at hand, and why this is the time to take action in the form of change (Newton 2007, 193).

5.3.4 Audience

Know your audience. That is the basic rule when preparing a presentation and can just as well be applied in your communication planning. Your audience is versatile, even if the message would be targeted just internally for the staff. But the nature of the message somewhat changes, when the target audience is top managers and not the front-line workers. It is recommended to segment your audience, after which it is easier to revise the message to suit the needs of the target audience – what do they find relevant and how would they wish to receive message (Holtz 2004, 61). Already the factor whether the message is intended to be communicated externally or internally affects on the final message. It is also important to notice that the communication is not just a one-way road, in addition of you delivering the message to the audience you have defined, it is also the audience you expect to give feedback and they expect you to listen (Newton 2007, 195).

5.3.5 Communication activities

The communication activities are basically the means how you get your message delivered and achieve the set goals. The communication activity can also be considered as a strategy (Holtz 2004, 62). In addition, the activities might also include some additional supporting material, which needs to be taken into consideration when implementing the actual message. For example, taking into account what would people need or want to know in advance, which interest groups should be tied to the message and how they should be consulted about it, or how feedback will eventually be collected, are all points to consider in your list of activities (Newton 2007, 196-197).

5.3.6 Timing and media

We have earlier addressed the importance of timing and also discussed the different tools to use for communication. So now you have got this far and you already know what is your message, to whom your message is targeted to, and what are the related activities in doing so. When deciding the point in time when to deliver the message, one core factor is the project plan and possible set milestones of a project. They often give a nice guideline for your communication plan, but are not dominant alone.

When operating in a change project timing the communication is critical and it is often very challenging to do correctly. You may not have all the detailed information about the change, when communicating about it can be timed too early, or you fail by communicating too late, when complaints about holding out the information on the staff will arise (Newton 2007, 197-198). If information leaks outside earlier than it was meant to, you most probably will face change

resistance and have to struggle more to “sell” the change, and possibly correct the misunderstandings. The critical factors are controlling the formal and informal communication regarding what will be communicated and when and the possible impact of other events taking place outside the actual change project (Newton 2007, 198).

The part of media we already discussed in chapter 4. What you need to do, is to evaluate the suitable level of media to be used for each key message and target audience you have in your communication plan. Consideration also about how people would expect to receive such information is in place, since it may affect on the receiving react. For example, if the message in question deals a major change, which will have a large scale impact on the target audience, it might be better to consider communicating it in person, in stead of impersonal written message. The choice will show to the receiver how much the sender of a message cares to deliver the information and in what value he/she thinks the receiver of the message is.

List of references

Annual Report 2008. [pdf-file] [referred to 15.4.2009]. Available:

http://service.vr.fi/vr_cms4/konserni/attachments/5gppd2hrk/5Gq9Ub7lj/VR_vsk_Eng.pdf

Awati, Kailash, 7.2.2008. Obstacles to project communication. [online] [referred to 15.4.2009].

Available: <http://eight2late.wordpress.com/2008/02/07/obstacles-to-project-communication/#comments>

Charvat, Jason P., 13.11.2002. Project communications: a plan for getting your message across.

[online] [referred to 4.6.2009]. Available: http://articles.techrepublic.com.com/5100-10878_11-1061894.html

Creasey, Tim, 2007. Defining change management: helping others understand change management

in relation to project management and organizational change. [pdf-file] [referred to 2.6.2009]. Available: <http://www.change-management.com/Prosci-Defining-Change-Management.pdf>

Eccles, Tony, 1996. Succeeding with Change: implementing action-driven strategies. London: McGraw-Hill.

Freedman, Rick, 25.9.2000. Communication plans are key to project success. [online] [referred to

6.8.2009] Available: http://articles.techrepublic.com.com/5100-10878_11-1028635.html

Ghattas, R.G. & McKee, Sandra L., 2001. Practical project management. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall.

Heathfield, Susan M. n.d. Communication in Change Management: communication is key in change management. [online] [referred to 4.6.2009] Available:

http://humanresources.about.com/od/changemanagement/a/change_lessons2.htm

Holtz, Shel, 2004. Corporate conversations: a guide to crafting effective and appropriate internal communications. New York: Amacom.

Horine, Gregory M., 2005. Absolute Beginner's Guide to Project Management. Indianapolis: Que Publishing.

Jones, John, Aguirre, DeAnne & Calderone, Matthew, 2004. 10 Principles of Change Management - Resilience Report. [pdf-file] [referred to 15.4.2009]. Available: <http://www.strategy-business.com/media/file/resilience-04-15-04.pdf>

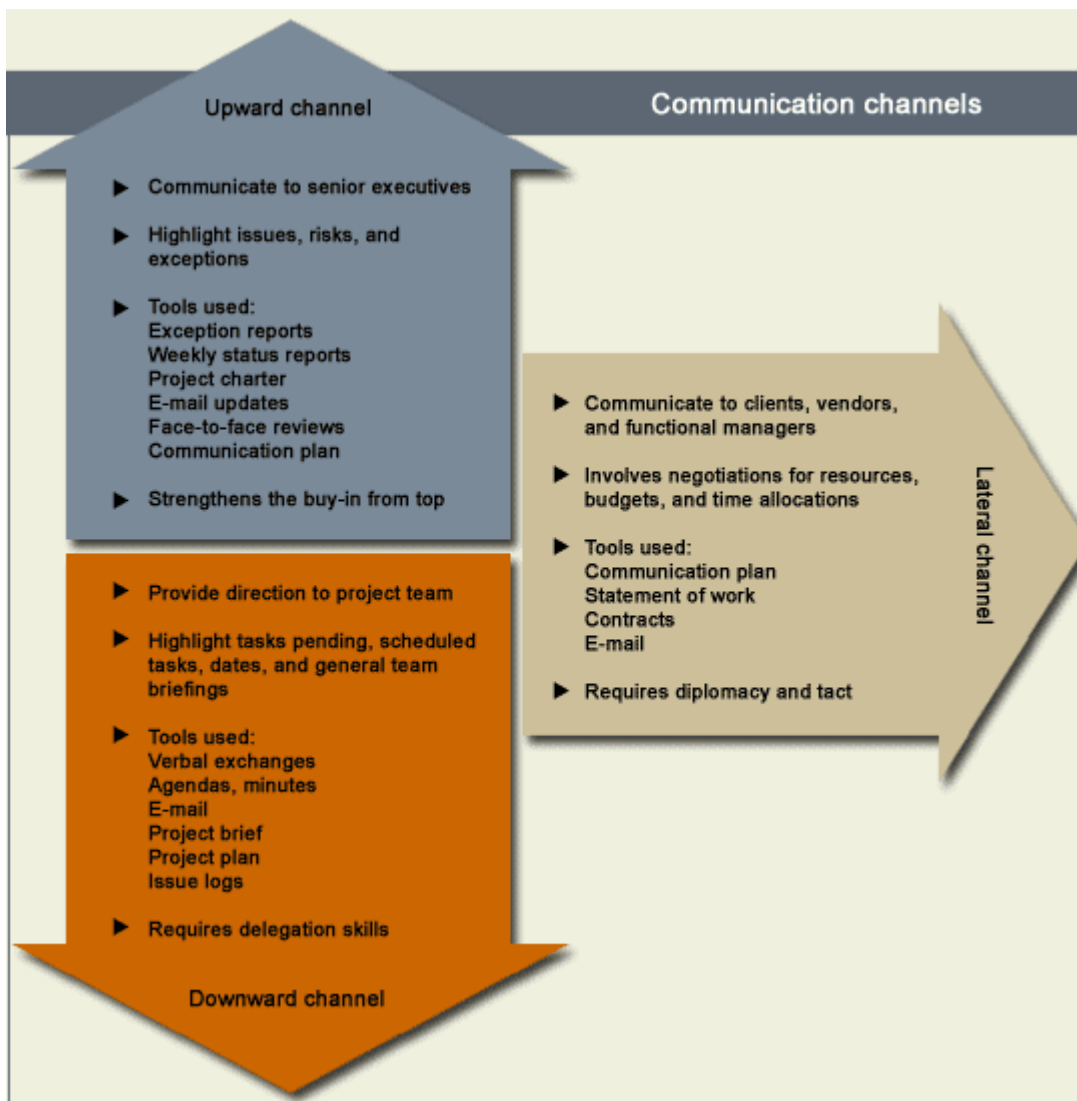
Kaushik, Preetam, 11.1.2009. Writing Effective Communication Plans: project management through communications. [online] [referred to 13.5.2009]. Available: http://business-project-management.suite101.com/article.cfm/why_is_it_important_to_write_

communication_plan

- Mayhall, Robin, 4.3.2009. Evaluate Your Communication Plan: ways to measure the success of a public relations campaign. [online] [referred to 13.5.2009]. Available: http://marketing-plans.suite101.com/article.cfm/evaluate_your_communications_plan#ixzz0FMwSB6PJ&A
- Newton, Richard, 2007. Managing Change Step by Step: all you need to build a plan and make it happen. Harlow: Pearson Prentice Hall Business.
- Project Management: Communication IS Critical 2002. [online] [referred to 21.4.2009]. Available: <http://corneliusassoc.com/CA/new/impact/April2002/pmcommun.htm>
- Railway services form VR Group's most significant business area 2009. [online] [referred to 15.4.2009]. Available: <http://www.vrgroup.fi/index/VRGroup/Businessareas/Railservices.html>
- Ruuska, Kai, 1996. Project Communication. [pdf-file] [referred to 4.6.2009] Available: <http://www.prodictor.fi/IC8.PDF>
- Ruuska, Kai, 2007. Projektiviestintä: väline ja voimavara. Hetky 3/2007. [pdf-file] [referred to 20.4.2009] Available: <http://www.prodictor.fi/hetky0907.pdf>
- VR is a fully state-owned company 2009. [online] [referred to 15.4.2009]. Available: <http://www.vrgroup.fi/index/VRGroup/Corporatestructure.html>
- Wynn, Garrison, 25.10.2005. Communicating Change Management: change is the same as it always was. [online] [referred to 27.8.2009]. Available: <http://www.wynnsolutions.com/article-change-management.htm>

Appendices

Appendix 1: Communication channels



Source of Figure: Jason P. Charvat, 13.11.2002, Project communications: A plan for getting your message across. Available: http://articles.techrepublic.com.com/5100-10878_11-1061894.html