Communication Plan for Rick Auto Enterprise   
  
Introduction   
  
  
  
As blood streams throughout the human body it provides oxygen to the body so that a human being can sustain his life similarly, a well designed communication plan is the lifeblood of various projects undertaken by different organizations. The importance of communication can be compared by the importance of a heart in the human body. As heart in the human body plays an important role of distributing oxygen throughout the body the project manager of a project constantly circulates project information from the external stakeholders to the project plan certification, to the internal stakeholders and to the project arrangement.   
  
  
  
The cycle of communication and information flow in every project is reiterative and continues all the way through the life of the project. Without proper information about a project, stakeholders and the project team can be left speculative about where the various things stand and what decisions have been made in regard to the project accomplishment. A well developed communication plan-like the project plan-is an essential part of the project. Project manager plays an important role in the development of communication plan as he knows each and every aspect of a project he is dealing with (Drinkwater, 2008).   
  
  
  
He knows about the important phases of a project and after identifying all the things he can establish the frequency, roles, responsibilities, addressee, and channel through which communication will be detached during a project. As a project manager is required to understand who is involved in the project, similarly it is important to comprehend what information is needed and the level at which they need to take delivery of it. Rick Auto Enterprise also needs to develop an effective communication plan for the up gradation of their legacy billing system.   
  
  
  
  
  
Need for Effective Communication Plan   
  
  
  
Rick Auto Enterprises (RAE) is taking a project to upgrade its legacy billing system which was installed originally over ten years ago and now it has been planned to upgrade according to the vendor's schedule. RAE is upgrading a new web-based version of the system, in addition to its mainframe legacy system update. The project undertaken by company if achieves success, will engross significant changes to the existing business processes of company, changes to existing jobs and as well as the creation of several new positions.   
  
  
  
This change will have a number of positive effects for company. Customers as well as auto brokers related with company will be able to view and pay their bills on-line, accessing a billing customer service agent when needed. This change in company’s legacy billing system will affect the billing, sales, and customer service departments and it is expected to decrease costs, improve customer satisfaction and reduce the number of days for outstanding accounts receivable. A well designed communication plan is necessary for company as it will have following benefits when it is applied to its knowledge areas:   
  
  
  
Project Integration Management: A well designed communication plan will help the company in integrating their different project activities by making an effective supply of information to various departments related with project of up gradation.     
Project Scope Management: An effective communication plan will provide a lot of scope for project as it will help the project manager in completing various activities by passing information to every one who is related to project.     
  
  
Project Time Management: Communication plan will prepare an outlay of information passing procedure which will reduce the time taken by various activities as after this communication plan everything will become clear to team members about from whom they can collect information and whom they need to report.   
  
  
Project Cost Management: Communication plan will save the cost of company as its plans and roles and responsibility of every member will become clear.   
  
  
Project Quality Management: Effective communication will maintain the quality of project undertaken by company as this will make everything apparent to every member. Team members will be encouraged by getting information and this will result an increase in their productivity.   
Project Human Resource Management: With proficient communication plan team members included in the project can be managed efficiently by project manager because they all are clear about their duties and reporting pattern.   
  
  
Project Communications Management: This area of project is very important which can be successfully completed by project manager by making an effective plan.   
  
  
Project Risk Management: Effective communication plan can minimize the risk involved in the project of legacy billing up gradation.   
  
  
Project Procurement Management: Clear communication pattern helps the company in procuring various materials required for project (The Project Management Body of Knowledge, 2008).

Formation of a Communication Plan:   
  
  
  
A company whenever planning to develop a communication plan needs to consider many factors and it has to keep in mind, some definite steps. The communication plan designed by company should be based on the size and intensity of the project. Company should understand the needs of stakeholders and after identifying these needs it should develop an appropriate plan for communicating progress-information, successes, risks, and changes related with project undertaken by company for the up gradation of its legacy billing system (Drinkwater, 2008).   
  
  
  
Company executives and project manager should keep in mind the functional word “appropriate” which is related with creating the plan document of communication plan. They should be careful in preparing their communication plan and they should not over-communicate immaterial information, or else, stakeholders and the project team may become plagued with information and start paying no attention to pertinent future information. Following are the major steps which a project manager should follow at the time of preparing a communication plan:     
  
  
  
Project manager should identify the various project stakeholders.   
He should determine the communication needs for each stakeholder so that he can accomplish his goals and objectives related with the project of company.   
  
  
He should identify the objectives of each stakeholder so that their communication needs can be decided by company.   
  
  
After identifying the needs of various stakeholders project manager should add the various communication activities.   
  
  
Project manager should verify the impacts of information which can be either direct or indirect.   
  
  
An efficient planning to develop a communication plan for a new project is very essential for the success of a project. This communication plan develops an appropriate method of communication between the project stakeholder, customers and team members. A competent communication plan enables a company to think through how it can communicate most efficiently and successfully to their various project components. It will allow the company to deliver information regarding the project in the right format, at the right time and with the right contact.   
  
Objectives of Communication Plan   
  
  
  
A project communication plan is the written approach which is used to provide right information to right project stakeholders at the right time. Each stakeholder whether internally or externally of a project has different necessities for information as they all take part in the project in diverse ways. Rick Auto Enterprise is planning to prepare a communication plan for its project of up gradation so that it can achieve its goals and objectives of establishment of  web-based version. Following are the major objectives which led to the preparation of communication plan by Rick Auto Enterprise:   
  
  
  
·        Setting and receiving agreement on aspirations.   
  
·        Coordinating with various people like stakeholders, customers and team members related with project.   
  
·        Discovering and solving problems coming in the commencement of company project.   
  
·        Managing expectations of various persons who had made contributions in the company project (Project Communication, 2008).     
  
  
  
Types of Project Communication   
  
  
  
Ineffective communication plan of a project is the principal cause of its failure. According to a survey it is found that a project manager of large complex project spends 88% of their total time on communication with his project team. It is important for the project manager to have a clear communication plan that can be cited by all concerned parties to find out how the project is making headway.   
  
  
  
Modern technology has facilitated qualified to stay connected from anywhere in the world. Project Manager of RAE can effectively use this technology to make certain that the project communication is sent out on a regular basis and it is concise and readily obtainable for the persons related with project of legacy billing up gradation. Web sites, emails, and consultation calls play an important role in the making of a strong project communication plan which is necessary to the success of its billing system. With this communication plan company can direct their stakeholders by how they are pretentious to the different outlets of project. A communication plan can be designed for various persons who are as follows:   
  
  
  
Internal communication: Internal communication plan can be developed by company within its project teams so that following communication needs of company can be fulfilled:   
  
  
  
This communication plan describes the role and responsibility of each team member which are involved in this up gradation project from different departments of company.   
  
  
This will help the company in establishing coordination among the various team members working on this project.   
  
  
Internal communication will provide the status information which will be helpful in identifying the progress and problems related with this project of company. It will help team members in taking corrective actions.   
  
  
This communication plan will provide the authorized information which will describe the various decisions made by customers, sponsors and upper management related to the project and its business environment. With this information team members can easily maintain synchronization between various project decisions.   
  
  
Internal communications plan developed by the company can be performed principally through team meetings, memorandums, voice mail, and e-mail. Project manager of this legacy billing up gradation need to be capable in directing meetings and making settlements on various disagreements.   
  
  
  
External communication: Every component and every stakeholder of company’s project plays a minor role but all of them are important for company as they provide resources to the company for undertaking their project. Company should be proactive in making external owners of the project successful because they are very important for company.   
  
  
  
Change management: Company should set up an appreciation procedure so that rapid communication can be made with upper management when a project begins to run over cost or schedule. Project manager should be prepared to manage change whether internally or externally.   
  
  
  
Close-out reporting: The deliverables of the company project should be prepared so that they can serve close-out purposes which are as follows:   
  
  
  
Conclude the project in the eyes of its stakeholders.   
Present an erudition opportunity for every one (Project Communication, 2008).     
  
  
Elements of Communication Plan   
  
An appropriate communication plan has four elements which are required to be considered by every project manager before making a communication plan and these elements are as follows:   
  
  
  
Audience: The audience obtains the communication from the project manager or the concerned person from project team. The listeners are made up of the center team, project stakeholders and project sponsors. Each of these sorts of audience needs different sums of communication. A project stakeholder will require less communication facilities than a constituent of the core project team. RAE should prepare their communication plan by considering the various requirements of their audience.   
  
  
Frequency: The frequency is the amount of time per week, month or year that the communication will be issued for various members. Team meeting generally happens weekly in every company undertaking a project. Though, a project subsidize meeting might happen once a quarter. When the project is operating easily, the meetings will be short but it is necessary that the meetings occur on a normal basis. Billing department of company should make a decision on the frequency of their communication plan.   
  
  
Location: The location of the communication is significant as it describes how the information will be communicated. Email is of course one of the more often used forms of communication. Virtual meetings are fetching popularity for projects with a distributed team. RAE should use various communications tools so that it can efficiently distribute the information throughout the various departments.   
  
  
Agenda: The agenda explains what will be communicated to project related persons. The latent audience can evaluate the agenda of each action and judge for themselves where they need to be or what email list wants to be subscribe to. Good communications are extremely important for the warm atmosphere and good efficiency in the workplace. Incapability to communicate efficiently with the colleagues and bosses might direct mistakes that could lead to poor output. Effective communications are an unconditional necessity for company in building up trust, friendship or associations in life.   
  
  
Following are the elements of a communication plan that need to be illustrated to the stakeholders of company so that they can gain guidance about various meetings or email they would like to scrutinize on a standard basis (Phillips, 2003).   
  
  
  
Communication Planning for Rick Auto Enterprise   
  
  
  
A communication plan can be designed for Rick Auto Enterprise by preparing a communication matrix which describes the various persons or departments involved in the project of up grading its legacy billing system. This communication plan involves audience, message, method and frequency of message for different persons which are as follows:   
  
Core Project team: It involves the billing and sales departments and the method to deliver the message of tasks and project progress in various team meetings, task related meetings and individual meetings. These messages can be communicated regularly and frequently or whenever it is required.   
  
Project steering team: This team requires messages for policy related issues and project progress. They can gain knowledge about these areas with emails and consensus meetings which should be arranged regularly or once in a month.   
  
  
  
Governing Bodies: Governing body for this project is the director of billing department who wants all the information regarding the project. He can be communicated information with the help of board meetings which should be held once in a quarter of project.   
  
Billing & Sales Department: These are the persons who will be mostly influenced by this project and they want all the guidelines of this project which can be communicated to them by meeting and open discussions with them so that they can achieve their goals (Directory Services - Communication Plan, 2008).   
  
Process of Communication Plan   
  
Rick Auto Enterprise is upgrading its legacy billing system which is of course a complicated project and demands a due care from all the members involved in this project. Company should design an appropriate plan or procedure at each phase of their project so that they can easily divide their various activities of this project. They should follow an appropriate method which involves following steps:   
  
  
  
Who to talk to:   
  
It is necessary for the company to find out whom they need to talk. Project members of this project need to talk with the various key stakeholders. Company should clearly identify their stakeholders and their various expectations from this project.   
  
  
  
What to tell them:     
  
After deciding, who to talk to project manager need to decide about the information required by various stakeholders. Stakeholders of a project are probably not interested in financial reporting unless it will have an impact on the budget accessible for testing. Having identified each stakeholder, company should identify why they are stakeholders and what they need to know in that role. Too much information can be as bad as not enough. Company should try to keep the information limited to what each person or group might need to do their job. If people ask for more, by all means company should give it, but they should try to start with a clear definition of what goes to whom.   
  
  
  
When to tell them:     
  
Company should make a decision on time to describe all the information to various persons related with this project. For a schedule, this time might be weekly. For a financial summary it might be monthly. Company executives should look at each piece of information, and identify how often it varies significantly. This will determine their timing.   
  
  
How to tell them:   
  
Each project has a number of communication events. These may be weekly reports, project board meetings, newsletters, or a myriad of communication activities. Each of these must be designed to fulfill its purpose. There are two basic ways which can be used by companies to inform people:   
  
  
  
It can use a medium that relies on: "Push" where the information is pushed to them in a memo, email, or presentation   
It can use a strategy of “Pull" where the information is available but they have to go find it. A web site is a good example of "pull".   
  
  
Who to tell:   
  
Everything a company wants to convey cannot be conveyed by team members some aspects involve senior managers to make major announcements. It also ensures that senior management has a higher level of commitment. If the director of billing department, stand up in front of a group of people and announce something like a date to go live can bring a lot of support to meet that date (Turbit, 2008).   
  
  
  
Guidelines in Preparing Communication Plan   
  
  
  
A communication plan should cover the following headings which is very necessary for a communication plan:   
  
Audience-Who will receive the information provided by communication plan.   
Reason-Why company is communicating with planned persons or stakeholders. Why they are the stakeholders.   
Event-The communication plan should be in form of weekly report or a presentation in front of the board.   
Responsible-Who is accountable for preparing and arrangement the part of communication.   
Medium-The way in which all the information will be delivered to various members of project.   
Timing-How often this communication plan will be presented to various members.   
Content-What information will be provided in this communication plan. This communication plan should deal with the reason the audience will be interested in the project (Turbit, 2008).   
  
  
Following are the specific guidelines which a communication plan designed should follow and there are also some general guidelines which are as follows:   
  
  
  
Project manager should communicate with all the affected parties of company project.   
Every message designed by company should be audience-specific.   
Company should try to take advantage of all of the methods of communication available to them.   
They should choose a communication method which is appropriate to its environment and message which is being delivered and appropriate to the audience receiving the message.   
Project manger should set appropriate expectations related with the various requirement of project.   
They should provide regular, unbiased reporting of project progress to its various members.   
They should try to communicate what other people need to know before they need to know it.   
Company management should meet frequently and regularly with project managers regarding the developments and tactical concerns of company project.   
Company management should offer various opportunities for private communication as suitable.   
They should hold project-wide meetings at important milestones (Directory Services - Communication Plan, 2008).   
  
  
Conclusion   
  
  
  
A well designed communication plan is very important for every organization undertaking a project to improve its present processes and operations. This communication plan should be designed in a manner which is able to understand the needs of various stakeholders.   
  
Scaling of the communication plan properly to fit the audience is obligatory for the continued success of a project. The ability to communicate with individuals on various levels with various project interests is important for successful project management.   
  
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