

The role of communication in your projects and small organizations ¹

Lack of communication is causing you lost opportunities in your project and organization

By Angelica Larios, MBA, PMP

Small businesses and medium size business projects can lose a source of competitiveness by not communicating accurately. Business owners, executives, administrators and project managers seldom forget that an internal source of innovation and competence comes from inside the organization. Employees and project members are our best way to improve quality and customer experience.

Business, in general, faces a lot of challenges. If we think of our project regarding small business, we can find common ground with business owners. When thinking about challenges small businesses face, it is not uncommon for them to focus on external aspects such as competitors and a changing economic climate and forget about internal issues. The reality is small businesses also should focus on challenges that occur in the inner environment as they grow such as communication and innovation. Project Manager is as well involved in the dynamics of their projects that could forget to search the team to find other ways of thinking.

Small companies are great because they boost the economy, just in America, they represent 89.6% according to the U.S. Census Bureau. In Latin America, between 90 and 95 percent are small enterprise managed by their owner or relatives that might don't have enough preparation to build the business.

If we talk about projects, there are over 800,000 Project Managers Professionals (PMP) in more than 207 countries are running projects on the entire planet. These facts represent a loss of competitiveness if small companies and projects don't learn how to communicate and how incentive employees/team members to improve their jobs and, a tremendous opportunity for PMPs to help the business to grow and enhance results in excel projects results. Soft skills will go a long way in negotiation with the customer, stakeholder, and development teams. Sometimes getting the right message across can save a lot of trouble while gathering requirements and defining scope. Communication is a two-way process, and listening is equally important. Soft skills are more critical than baselines!

Assumptions are communicated in the form of a business philosophy being transmitted via different instruments or to employees via internal communication. The fundamentals of a

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company should be written down in vision, mission and values statements and documents relating to corporate identification.

Communication problems arise in any organization no matter the size; communication problems can generate difficulties or issues challenging to handle for the owners. The difference is that a small company/projects probably does not have procedures in place to let the business communicate properly. Small companies might dedicate their resources focus on selling instead in improving internal communication.

However, it is true that internal communication generates ideas and ideas can become an innovative process, product or service, or the adoption of new technologies and knowledge. Therefore, internal communication plays a central role in creative and innovative business.

Informal communication is vital to any business

Communication is the way to establish standard rules and common ground between bosses and employees, customers, providers, etc. Communication is essential for any organization because it represents fundamentally how the business behaves, it helps to model the culture of the team and establishes what is critical for them too. Communication in the project jargon is considered as a knowledge area for the project standard.

In a small business, communication is relevant because the owner holds the primary process, and most of the times, it resides in their heads. This aspect also happens if the project manager does not communicate properly, the status, risks, issues, might rest in their minds. Communicating what they are looking for, what is the vision that they see for the business/project, what is the long-term strategy that is pursued are fundamental for the healthy development of the firm itself and the development of the employees.

In a consulting or service provider business, it is essential to be aware of other needs of the customer and to provide additional alternative solutions. For example, a company that offers software related solutions can provide an administrative process consulting as a complement to their core business. This information comes in an informal way of communication that can lead to the generation of a new line of business. Such is the case of companies like IBM that started selling computers and machines, nowadays offer another type of services such as global services and cloud provider. Small businesses can improve their business by communicating and hearing what customers want.

Other companies have diversified their core business by attending another unattended market. With a communication plan put in place, leaders, executives and project managers can hear from employees which niche to visit and how to improve current service and products.

The importance of dialogue

"The initial task of the language of leadership is spark energy and initiate forward motion" is what Stephen Denning says in this book "The secret language of leadership." If for a leader dialogue is the tool to motivate others; for employees, is the way to be taking into consideration. By dialoguing, employees can express their ideas, concerns, what they see of the operation of the business, the performance of the project or the result of a product, for good or for bad and to learn from the head what is expected from he/she.

For the dialogue to be productive, is mandatory to listen actively, to pay close attention to what others need and have to say. Learn how to overcome differences, find common ground, build meaning and purpose, and set directions together. Leaders and followers, bosses and employees, need to be able to think together as a group, as a team, as committees, or even as communities. Doing that will help the communication and in consequence the innovation in the business.

Ask Questions

Asking questions is a valuable tool for leaders to start a discussion, to discover the rationale behind certain situations, to promote dialogue, explore what others are thinking. Instead of making assertions, is better if the leader and project manager open himself to the conversation by asking open-ended questions and let others express their ideas, concerns, feelings, and others. For example, an owner of a business that is facing an issue with a customer and doesn't know how to solve it; instead of asserting that is the employees' fault or lack of commitment, the dialogue can start by asking an opinion. What do you think about this particular situation? A PM can ask How do you feel about not delivering in time? Do you think is correct to get out of original scope? In this way, it is possible to get other's insights.

Dialogue comes from a Greek word that implies interchange of ideas. They thought that individuals were not intelligent enough if they didn't share thoughts with others, by reasoning together is how the truth can be obtained. By questioning each other, is possible to dissect and analyzed ideas and understanding.

Level with people

This aspect is another crucial step in developing the communication inside your business. Level with others means to stay in the same degree of experience and maturity to establish a conversation with others. Being open to let others know where you stand and what you think, at the same time allow others to likewise speak freely to you, will generate trust and confidence in the leader and the organization. No hidden agendas will benefit from leveraging a frank conversation with the team.

In other words, level with people can be understood in a sympathetic way of communication. As the owner or the lead of business is essential to feel how other feels. It is to understand needs and feelings of the other to respond adequately to them. For example, a small business or project might be confirmed by young people collaborating with them as a part of their school development. Young are centered in other reality than adults; young may want to transcend, to help others, seek for their destiny, contribute to the community. As the leader of the business or project is vital to give them a sense of fulfillment, level with them is to understand their needs and what they are looking for and how it will fit in the business. Hearing from them will also help the company to give other sense.

Show vulnerability

When improving communication inside a business, the leader or project manager needs to show his human side. A genuine approach will help to enhance conversations; the openness of the leader establishes a link with others. When the leader shows himself humble and in need of help, guidance, or confessing not knowing any situation; followers, employees, customers will contribute to promoting conversations.

Asking for direction and advice is a form of showing vulnerability without losing control. Some leaders feel afraid of showing not in control of any situation, not knowing all answers; however, when the head of the business asks for opinions and guidance, not only improves the relationship with others but also opens the door to a new way of communication and inspire others to open themselves as well. By being genuine in the interaction with followers, the leader leaves other to take control of another destiny, other unsuspected or even unknown ways to do business.

When the PM allows himself to ask for guidance, let others show different paths that he/she is used to taking, learning becomes another way to exchange opinions and ideas and communicate.

Incorporate Feedback Appropriately

Employees, collaborators, followers and team members can be eager of sharing information, and their reality is our responsibility as leaders to listen carefully and to help others continue the conversation by accepting and inquiring what they are telling us.

As it has been discussed, there are several forms to approach and open the communication between leaders and followers. When asking for feedback, this will be another method to obtain what others are willing to say. The opinion of others not only can help or benefit the business and the outcome of the project but also the leader itself.

At the end

Communication, is a link to the best version of us, is not only the transmission of meanings but also the joint construction of meaning. Communication is not just about understanding a formula

on how a message multiplies by the number of listeners or the fact that it can be transformed. Communication is recognized as a suitable dimension to the success of organizational change, leadership transformation, and business success and it is considered essential to building change readiness, reducing uncertainty, and as a critical factor in gaining commitment. Communications and organizational change are inextricably linked processes where relevant aspects of our organization improve dramatically.

If as owners of a small business or project managers in charge of delivery or implement a critical aspect of the business, are willing to have a conversation with others, to tell stories, communication and trust will improve and in consequence the way of doing business. As a result of excellent communication, risk and issues are informed in time and manner without being scared of being punished or fired; services and products might improve, new knowledge and technology can be adapted for performing a better job. The relation with our customers gets better, and the perception of our services and care will increase.

By improving our communication, the way of interacting with others there are many benefits for the business. Trust and confidence will grow with the leader and the employment. Employees can know where the leader stands for and what are the plans for the future of the business/project and how they fit into it. Improving communication will help our business not to lose more opportunities.

Another consequence of good communication plan is the possibility to innovate the process, the way to operate the business, the employees can find ways to improve their day to day job. To the outside, employees can communicate how to offer a better service, that is what customers are expecting from us.

Communication will help small business owners and project managers to do better!!!

About the Author



Angelica Larios

Mexico City, Mexico



Angelica Larios, MBA, PMP, is a project manager with more than 20 years of experience in implementing software projects related to business intelligence, planning and budgeting, and financial consolidation solutions based on software applications to support the business decision process. She is the owner of ALACONTEC, an I.T. consulting company founded in Latin America. She has held several professional positions in private and public organizations, such as the Health Ministry in Mexico as I.T. director, and as a business manager for several firms in Mexico.

She holds a master's degree in business administration and a bachelor's degree in computer science from National University of Mexico (UNAM) in addition to her studies in project management and her Project Management Professional (PMP)® certification, which have helped her to consolidate her career and have a better understanding of what businesses and projects need nowadays. She is a doctoral student in strategic leadership at Regent University, VA, USA; she is a PMI volunteer since 2007 starting in the local Mexico chapter, being Past President and and currently serves on the Board Volunteer Advisory Committee (BVAC) that supports the PMI Board of Directors (2016–2018).

Angelica can be contacted at angelica.larios@gmail.com