ADVANCED PHOTONIC PROCESSES FOR NOVEL SOLAR ENERGY HARVESTING TECHNOLOGIES

Struggling with team communication issues. How to prevent scheduling conflicts and delays.

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OUTLINE

- Reasons of communication issues

- Examples (cases)

- Breakout discussions

- Prevention strategies

- Wrap-up & key takeaways

"What's one word that describes your team communication lately?"

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Unclear or Misaligned Objectives and Scope

❑ **Vague Goals:** If the overall project goals are not clearly defined, specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART), different bodies will interpret them in their own way, leading to divergent paths and wasted effort.

❑ **Scope Creep:** Without a well-defined scope, additional tasks and features can be added without proper evaluation, leading to budget overruns, delays, and frustration as different parties perceive the "true" scope differently.

❑ **Conflicting Priorities:** Each partner often has its own internal priorities and agendas. If these aren't harmonized with the project's overarching objectives, departments might prioritize tasks that serve their individual goals over the collective project success.

❑ **Unmet Expectations:** When expectations about deliverables, timelines, and responsibilities are not clearly set and agreed upon by all parties from the outset, disappointment and conflict are inevitable.

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Communication Breakdowns

❑ **Lack of a Communication Plan:** Without a clear strategy outlining *who* needs to communicate *what*, *when*, and *how*, information flow becomes haphazard, leading to missed updates, assumptions, and misinterpretations.

❑ **Ineffective Communication Channels:** Over-reliance on certain channels (e.g., email for urgent matters) or a lack of appropriate tools can hinder effective information exchange.

❑ **Information Overload/Underload:** Too much irrelevant information can bury critical details, while too little information leaves parties in the dark.

❑ **Poor Listening and Feedback Mechanisms:** If parties aren't actively listening to understand perspectives and there are no robust feedback loops, issues can fester and escalate.

❑ **Language Barriers:** In international or diverse teams, actual language differences or nuances in communication styles (e.g., direct vs. indirect communication) can lead to significant misunderstandings.

Unclear Roles, Responsibilities, and Authority

❑ **Ambiguity in Accountability**: When it's not clear who is responsible for what, tasks can be duplicated, overlooked, or fall into "gaps" between responsibilities, leading to blame and frustration.

❑ **Overlapping Responsibilities:** If two or more bodies believe they are responsible for the same task, it can lead to turf wars, inefficiencies, and resentment.

❑ **Lack of Defined Authority:** Without clear lines of authority for decision-making, progress can stall as parties wait for approvals or dispute who has the final say.

❑ **Siloed Working:** When bodies work in isolation without proper coordination or understanding of how their work impacts others, conflicts arise from a lack of integrated effort.

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Cultural Differences (Organizational and National)

❑ **Varying Work Ethics and Norms**: Different organizations or cultures may have distinct approaches to deadlines, quality, hierarchy, and problem-solving, which can clash.

❑ **Communication Styles:** Some cultures prefer direct communication, while others favor indirect or high-context communication, leading to misinterpretations if not understood.

❑ **Decision-Making Processes:** Differences in how decisions are made (e.g., hierarchical vs. consensus-driven) can cause frustration and delays.

❑ **Attitudes Towards Conflict:** Some cultures may be more open to direct confrontation, while others prefer to avoid conflict, which can make resolution difficult.

❑ **Trust and Relationship Building:** In some cultures, building personal relationships is paramount before effective collaboration can occur.

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Case 1: The Missed Update

A key team member finishes a crucial part of their work, which another team member is dependent on. Instead of updating the shared project management tool or notifying the dependent person directly, they assume the other person will "figure it out" or check on their own. The dependent team member then wastes time waiting or starts their part of the work based on outdated assumptions.

Communication Issue: Failure to provide timely updates, assuming others are aware of progress, lack of transparency.

Consequences: Project delays, missed opportunities, increased frustration, decreased productivity.

Case 1: Information Sharing

Implement a Centralized Knowledge Base

What: Use a tool (e.g., Notion, Confluence, Guru) to store all project documentation, policies, meeting notes, and frequently asked questions in an easily searchable format.

How it helps: Provides a single source of truth, reducing repeated questions and ensuring everyone has access to the latest information.

Regular Stand-up or Check-in Meetings:

What: Regular Short meetings (especially effective for agile teams) where each member briefly shares what they worked on, what they plan to work on, and any blockers.

How it helps: Fosters transparency, allows for quick identification of dependencies and potential roadblocks, and encourages proactive updates.

Case 1: Information Sharing

Cross-Functional Collaboration Tools:

What: Utilize project management software (e.g., Asana, Trello, Jira) that allows teams to track tasks, assign owners, set deadlines, and see overall project progress.

How it helps: Provides visibility across departments, helps break down silos by showing how different pieces of work fit together.

Scheduled Information Sharing Sessions:

What: Dedicate specific meetings or recurring agenda items for different teams or individuals to share updates on their work, learnings, or challenges.

How it helps: Ensures important information isn't missed and promotes a culture of shared knowledge.

Case 2: The Passive-Aggressive Feedback

A team member is consistently late with their deliverables, impacting the rest of the team. Instead of addressing the issue directly and constructively, their teammates make passive-aggressive comments in team chats or privately vent to other colleagues, creating a tense and uncomfortable atmosphere.

- **Communication Issue:** Avoidance of direct feedback, fear of conflict, lack of established feedback mechanisms.

- **Consequences:** Unresolved issues, decreased morale, resentment, breakdown of team cohesion.

Case 2: Feedback & Conflict Resolution

Foster a Culture of Psychological Safety:

What**:** Managers and team leaders should actively encourage open communication, make it safe to ask "dumb questions," admit mistakes, and voice concerns without fear of retribution.

How it helps: Builds trust, encouraging direct and honest feedback, and making conflict resolution more constructive.

Establish Clear Feedback Mechanisms:

What: Implement structured opportunities for peer feedback sessions.Provide training on how to give and receive constructive feedback.

How it helps: Creates a safe space for addressing issues directly, prevents passive-aggressive behavior, and promotes growth.

Train in Conflict Resolution Techniques:

What: Provide workshops or resources on active listening, empathy, non-violent communication, and negotiation skills.

How it helps: Equips team members with the tools to address disagreements respectfully and find mutually agreeable solutions.

Case 3: The Invisible Work Package

Scenario:

In a Horizon Europe project with ten partners, one academic partner is tasked with developing an internal data validation tool. However, because their deliverables are not public-facing or directly connected to milestones, their work receives little attention in meetings.

Other partners assume they're not making progress. The WP leader, feeling undervalued and excluded from major discussions, becomes disengaged and delivers late, triggering a domino effect on dependent tasks.

Communication Issue:

Lack of visibility for supporting roles

Unequal airtime in meetings

Assumptions about progress

Case 3: Strategy

Task Visibility Reviews: Include a short "progress radar" in every WP meeting where each team shares what they're working on—even non-critical tasks.

Rotating Meeting Chairs: Give every WP or task leader the opportunity to chair a meeting, which increases awareness and respect.

Peer Showcases: Allocate 10 minutes in monthly meetings to let quieter partners demo or explain their progress, reinforcing their value to the group.

Making Communication Work for Your Team: Key Takeaways

◆ **Keep it Clear**

•Don't leave things to interpretation—say what you mean.

•A shared plan for who communicates what, when, and how is your best defense against chaos.

◆ **Make Work Visible**

•If others don't see your progress, they might assume there isn't any.

•Use short updates, visual boards, or demos to show what's happening—even behind the scenes.

◆ **Choose the Right Tools for the Job**

•Match the tool to the message: not everything needs an email.

•Keep one place where everyone can find the latest info.

◆ **Build Communication into the Culture**

•Start meetings with check-ins, not just task lists.

•Give space for feedback, questions, and clarifications.

•Take turns leading meetings to hear different perspectives.

◆ **Be Proactive, Not Reactive**

•Set expectations early and revisit them often.

•Don't wait for problems—check in on how communication is going.

•Reflect together mid-way through a project, not just at the end.

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