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Management of Communications in IT Projects

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ABSTRACT

Recent surveys finds that poor communication is a feature found in many organizations and is the major cause of problems in projects. Parallel with this, the management of communication continues to be forgotten by project managers in their activities as managers.

Many problems that occurred in projects have, as influential factor, a transmission and information flow not qualified, between the project manager and all its stakeholders. So, the scenario of this article is characterized, which addresses the main problems encountered in projects of Information Technology (IT) and suggests improvements that can be applied in other projects that tend to have the same challenges. All suggestions should be considered from different perspectives and considering the singular characteristics of each project and also the technology of the environment where the same is inserted.

Key-words: Project management, Communication, Information Technology.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to a study of Benchmarking in Project Management carried out by Brazil PMI in 2008 (Project Management Institute – Brazilian Chapters, 2008), the most aggravating problems encountered in the projects of Information Technology are related to ill-defined scope and resources available for project incorrectly. These

problems affect, in general, more than 50% of the organizations that performed the research.

It can be argued, however, that communication problems are directly related to many of the problems found in IT environments. Considering that problems of scope are often found, it is important to note that poor communication made between the project manager and stakeholders, certainly affect the requirements elicitation and can have serious aggravating for the project. The communication also has great influence on the project team, for improperly can cause a negative effect on cooperation and productivity of these. In addition, in IT projects is remarkable interaction between professionals from different areas, which can lead to gaps in communication processes. This paper focuses on understanding the process of communication of information technology project and addresses major problems that affect their projects and the importance of communications area in the management of these.

The paper is structured in four sections. The first section presents a summary of the theoretical discussion about the communication process in projects. Next, we present a synopsis on the importance of communication in project environments. The third section discusses the problems faced by many Brazilian organizations in their projects, aiming at identifying suggestions for improvements. Finally, the last section presents the final considerations about the held survey.

2. COMMUNICATION PROCESS

Communication has become a competitive advantage for professionals within organizations, as a common weakness occurred is still the quality of the act of communicating.

In general, Gasnier (2008) identifies in the process of communication the following basic elements: sender, recipient, purpose, channel, message, protocol, perception, barriers and feedback. According to the author, communication is the process of transmission and understanding of information, whether ideas, concepts,

data, instructions, warrants, notes, stories or lessons, in both directions and through the use of symbols whose meanings are common to those involved.

In the process of communication the sender is responsible for generating the message determining how it will be understood by the receiver. One of the biggest challenges in effective communication is to stimulate, capture the receiver and continue with his attention. In the process of communication the sender is responsible for generating the message determining how it will be understood by the receiver. One of the biggest challenges in effective communication is to stimulate, capture the receiver and continue with his attention. The receiver, in turn, is responsible for ensuring that the information was received in full and correctly understood (PROJECT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE, 2004). This is the simple way to describe the concept of communication but although it is simple to understand, the practice is a complex process, but is not always considered the importance of the key elements of communication: sender, message and receiver. That said it can be shown below in Figure 1.

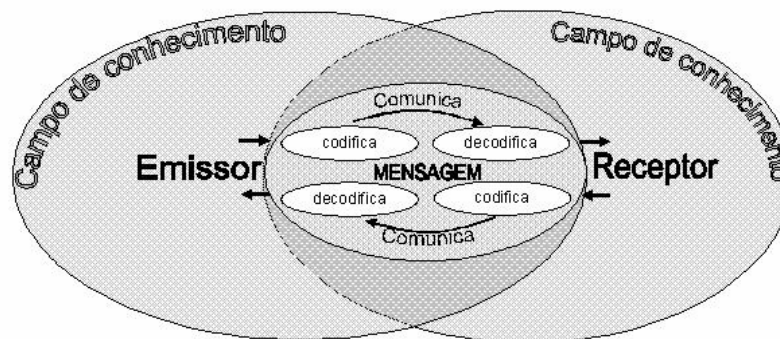


Figure 1: Diagram of communication.

Source: Rezende (2009).

The communication always needs to be clear, concise and appropriate for each situation (Mulcahy, 2008). It can occur vertically between the project manager and his superiors, horizontally, between the project sponsors within the organization itself or between the organization and its suppliers. These characteristics of the communication must be observed to apply the appropriated methods of communication to each situation. The lack of effectiveness in the communication process may be due to the

emergence of barriers in communication. As explains Penteadó (1980), barriers to communication can be easily detected in the organizational environment, highlighting the problems of centralization of information and issues involving dubious interpretations. He still preaches that communication skills, in which consist of the ability of a group of encoding, transmitting and decoding information requirements are necessary but not sufficient for effective communication process. He still preaches that communication skills, in which consist of the ability of a group of encoding, transmitting and decoding information requirements are necessary but not sufficient for effective communication process. We need that sender and receiver are imbued by a shared sense.

Failures of communication are the main threats to the success of projects, mainly in IT.

According to Ribeiro and Albuquerque (2002), among the factors that create communication problems, three stand out:

- Non-involvement user at all stages or phases of the project;
- Lack of support from senior executives, and;
- Survey of inconsistent requirements;

The lack of involvement of all stakeholders in the project since its inception, often cause extensive communication problems for the project, especially when actions are taken without the consultation of end users.

The main problem of lack of support from senior executives is when they do not formalize the responsibilities and authority of project manager, generating instability and therefore to the same interference in the conduct of its activities.

According to Andrade *et al*, (2009), means that the main source of communication problems opened the survey scope. Requirements properly collected and documented are important for a good definition of scope. Therefore, know to interpret accurately the needs of the User is essential for effective communication. A communicative approach implies the participation and involvement of all stakeholders from the stage of gathering requirements, researching their desires and expectations.

These desires and expectations are translated into requirements to be met by the project, with objective criteria validated with the stakeholders that would define the end of its execution, if these requirements have been met or not.

Another point to consider is that projects involving information technology are well suited for any area or department. When IT professionals need to talk with professionals from other areas, there is often communication problems because of technical language used. Companies are already realizing that internal communication is the key relationship and it is important to increase motivation, productivity and therefore essential for the evolution of the business.

Therefore, the implication is that to improve communication, should talk so plain and openly about everything that involves business, using then a language that everyone understands. It is more than merely raise the client's needs, is to understand and reach the core of this business.

3. THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION IN PROJECTS ENVIRONMENTS

Recognize communication as a process, knowing its elements, ways of communicating and involved parties, is the first step towards the implementation of a system for efficient management.

In project management, commonly all forces are focused on the administration of term, scope and cost. The administration of all these areas requires of the project manager numerous skills and techniques so that all elements are coordinated. But only the coordination of these areas of knowledge does not always guarantee the success of the project. A good communications plan can be decisive for the success of execution and control of the project. A communication plan well-developed includes important factors such as information management, expectations of stakeholders, content and accuracy of the information.

It is important to know what will be managed, ie, one can not manage what you do not know. The current era of information has a huge amount of data larger than the

cognitive capacity to absorb, and this excess of information affects the ability to transmit them and organize them effectively.

The PMBOK (Project Management Institute, 2004) considers the area of knowledge "communication" as being vital for projects and their success. Therefore, communication is considered vital and critical in project management, is however often neglected.

Effective communication between all team members serves as a facilitator for problem solving and decision making in a more agile. It is very important to keep the team together and provide the high performance of the same. Appropriate offers several benefits to the project, on the other hand, if poorly designed or provided in excess, can cause the critical damage.

4. MAIN PROBLEMS IN IT PROJECTS

The sector of information technology is not mature in the design of projects compared to other market segments. One of the sectors that work for more time of formal and organized manner in the management of projects is the construction, where is very common that developments occur in the initial planning. One of the known reasons behind this fact is a function of time that is spent on details of the design of the project prior to construction. The flexibility to change, although there is, it is less during their development (Ballard, 2000).

When it focuses on projects of Information Technology, we face with constant changes experienced by the business environment and imposed the reality of corporations and speed to accommodate these changes in a more flexible way. There isn't another sector that has developed and evolved so much in a rhythm as devastating as the technology (IEEE, 2001). And particularly when it comes to software development this development has consequences that are mirrored in the environment of projects.

According to a study of Benchmarking in Project Management carried out by Brazil PMI in 2008 (Project Management Institute – Brazilian Chapters, 2008), more

than 50% of more than 50% of the problems encountered in the projects are due to constant changes in project scope and scope not defined properly. Another problem often identified in 45% of companies interviewed by the study mentioned above is related to limited resources and their own involvement in several projects simultaneously. Figure 2 illustrates these main problems encountered in organizations.

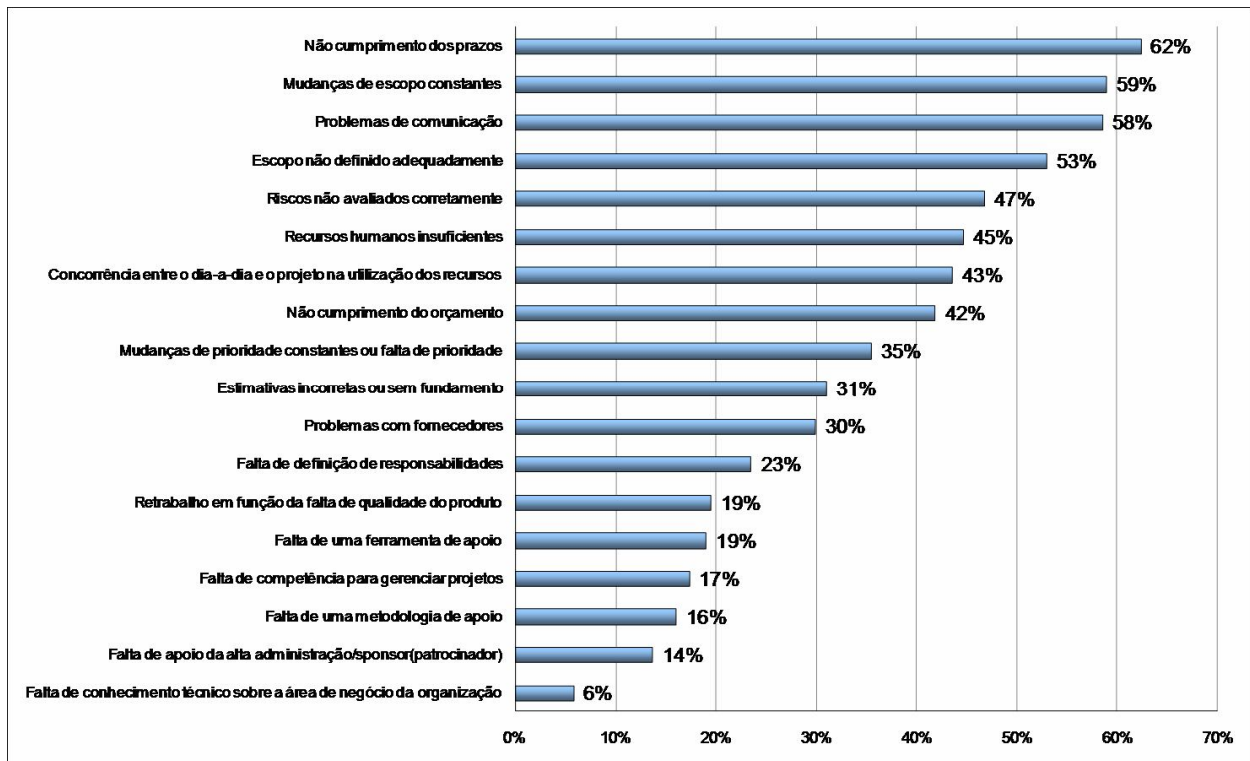


Figure 2: The problems that occur more frequently in the projects in organizations.

Source: PROJECT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE - *Chapters Brasileiros* (2008).

The change in the scope of the project along the same stems often several challenges to the project manager. Despite the change of scope is common, occurring with constancy can increase the probability of risks to the project which cumulatively tend to be quite considerable.

User's involvement is considered critical to the smooth running of the project. It is of utmost importance his participate, not only because this is the ultimate consumer of

the product, but also to enable them to participate in the planning of the project to be developed since its early stage. Too often users consider the IT area too costly or too slow. For this idea does not become true, it is important that the users of the project, participate from initial conception of it until its conclusion through all stages of the life cycle of their development. The proper involvement of all users makes the requirements analysis and project planning more consistently, as well as serve as a foundation for further control of its implementation, change's management and maintenance.

Some solutions can be taken to improve problems related to project scope, such as:

- Make a good scope management, with clear processes and well-defined help minimize the changes that occur over time;
- Have good communication with the stakeholders of the project. This makes the expectations related to the project are well understood, providing a scope documented and clear to all;
- Invest time in planning is needed to ensure a good management of the project scope, and;
- Set priorities properly is important to guide the project manager in the event of a change in scope. The priorities will guide to check that it is more important to keep the schedule, constraints and costs or meet a new scope.

Another relevant problem to the projects concerns the struggle for resources and their own involvement in various projects. Project managers often face the problem of having responsibility for certain factors of the project, but have no authority over the resources of this. Facts like this can be alleviated with the proper performance of the executive body resolving potential disputes over resources within the organization. In the case of companies with organizational structures non-projected, formed structures by weak matrix or functional this problem is even more aggravating.

5. CONCLUSION

It is apparent the importance of a good communication in project environments and consequently the organization as a whole.

In any organization there will always be differing opinions, disagreements and misunderstandings among professionals trying to explain his ideas. However, when it comes to projects, it is essential that everyone knows the project objectives and for what purpose it was proposed.

Thus, attempts to minimize the most of the problems that occur throughout the project, seeking to deepen the knowledge related to this and trying to resolve all plausible differences that may occur.

The research Benchmarking Project Management conducted by PMI in 2008 revealed several problems faced by Brazilian companies. It is important to generate a discussion on this article, the point of increasing the maturity of organizations and their managers to get more and better communication on their projects.

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