Communication in Project

Unit 1: Foundations of the Communication Process

Course N°1. Introductory Course: Strategic Issues of Communication in Project Management

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Course du 2nd semestre présented to the students of L2 MPC

1. Introduction: Communication as the "Cement" of a Construction Project

- In the construction sector, a project is not merely an assembly of concrete, steel, and technical blueprints.
- It is, above all, a temporary convergence of various stakeholders with often conflicting interests.
- While the engineer masters the strength of materials, the project manager must master the flow of information.

The Cost of Silence and Broken Information Flows:

- Sector statistics show that nearly **60% of delivery delays and budget overruns** on construction sites do not stem from technical failures, but from communication breakdowns.

- An un-updated execution plan that is delivered late to the site supervisor can lead to the demolition of a freshly poured structure.

- A lack of transparency between teams leads to heavy legal disputes and paralyzes operations

The Posture of the Construction Project Manager:

- Tomorrow's manager can no longer lock themselves into a purely technical or administrative role.
- They must act as **an orchestra conductor** and **a communicative leader**.
- Their **ability to translate the requirements** of the (Client) **Maître d'Ouvrage - MOA** into **clear directives** for the Project Manager/Architect **Maître d'Œuvre - MOE** and the construction companies **determines the success of the structure.**

2. The 4 Major Strategic Issues in Construction

- Political, Regulatory, and Governance Issues.
- Human, Managerial, and Change Management Issues.
- Financial and Commercial Performance Issues.
- Risk Management and Crisis Communication Issues

2-1- Political, Regulatory, and Governance Issues :

- 1/ **Alignment and Permits:** Ensuring transparent communication with public authorities to secure building permits, comply with local urban planning regulations, and meet environmental standards.

- **2/ Key Interface Management:** Maintaining a formal and rigorous channel with the Client to secure phase approvals (schematic design, detailed design) and avoid late scope modifications, which are major sources of extra costs.

2-2- Human, Managerial, and Change Management Issues

- **Safety and Site Culture:** Communication on a construction site is a matter of life and death. Morning briefings (*toolbox talks / safety quarters*) must be clear, impactful, and sometimes multilingual to be understood by all workers and subcontractors.

- **Social Climate:** Uniting multidisciplinary teams (architects, structural engineers, site managers) who do not share the same professional culture. Healthy communication prevents inter-company conflicts on the ground.

2-3- Financial and Commercial Performance Issues

- **Milestone Valuation:** Cleverly communicating project progress (e.g., completion of the structural shell, topping-out ceremony) to release progress payments and reassure investors and banks.

- **Variation Order Negotiations:** Knowing how to document and formalize requests for modified works to defend the project's financial interests without breaking the partnership relationship.

2-4- Risk Management and Crisis Communication Issues

- **Social Acceptability:** Managing the impact of the construction site on its surroundings (noise, dust, truck traffic). Poor communication with local residents can lead to legal appeals and site shutdowns.

- **Handling Unforeseen Events:** Knowing how to react immediately in the event of a serious workplace accident, unexpected soil contamination discovery, or the bankruptcy of a major subcontractor, by locking down external communication to protect the reputation of the companies involved.

3. Stakeholder Mapping in Construction

- A construction project involves a multitude of actors. To avoid information overload or overlooking a key player, the project manager uses the **Power / Interest Matrix** adapted to construction.

- This strategic tool classifies stakeholders based on two axes:

- **Power (Vertical Axis):** The stakeholder's ability to influence the project, block decisions, cut budgets, or halt construction (e.g., authorities, client).
- **Interest (Horizontal Axis):** How much the stakeholder is affected by or cares about the project's outcomes (e.g., local residents, future users).

- By crossing these axes, we obtain **four distinct quadrants**, each requiring a tailored communication strategy:

Quadrant	Power / Interest Level	Construction Sector Examples	Strategic Communication Approach
1. Manage Closely	High Power ⬆ High Interest ⬆	The Client (MOA), Lead Architect (MOE), Building Control Body.	Active Partnership: Bi-directional communication, weekly coordination meetings, comprehensive reports. They must validate every milestone.
2. Keep Satisfied	High Power ⬆ Low Interest ⬇	City planning departments, utility companies (Water, Electricity, Telecom).	Public Relations & Compliance: Formal, structured communication. Keep them satisfied to secure regulatory approvals and prevent them from blocking the project.
3. Keep Informed	Low Power ⬇ High Interest ⬆	Local neighborhood associations, nearby shopkeepers, future buyers.	Dialogue & Pedagogy: Regular updates to reduce anxiety and resistance (public town halls, site newsletters). They lack direct power but can cause PR crises if ignored.
4. Monitor	Low Power ⬇ Low Interest ⬇	Standard material suppliers, non-critical tier-2 subcontractors.	Minimal Supervision: Automated or standard contractual tracking. No specialized reporting needed; simply monitor schedules and delivery terms.

- **High Power / High Interest (Manage Closely):**
  - *Actors:* The Client (Client/MOA), the Building Control Body, the Lead Architect.
  - *Strategy:* Weekly coordination meetings, strict financial progress reports, and schedule updates.
- **High Power / Low Interest (Keep Satisfied):**
  - *Actors:* City planning departments, utility companies (water, electricity, telecom).
  - *Strategy:* Formal communication, strict compliance with administrative procedures, invitations to milestone ceremonies.
- **Low Power / High Interest (Keep Informed):**
  - *Actors:* Neighborhood associations, future users or buyers of the buildings.
  - *Strategy:* Public information meetings, on-site information boards, construction newsletters detailing high-nuisance phases.
- **Low Power / Low Interest (Monitor with Minimum Effort):**
  - *Actors:* Standard material suppliers, non-critical tier-2 subcontractors.
  - *Strategy:* Automated delivery schedule sharing, standard contractual clauses.

4. From Project Management Plan to Communication Plan

- The communication plan is not a cosmetic option; it is a contractual and operational document.

- **The 5Ws (Who, What, Where, When, Why) Applied to the Site:**
  - ***Who emits?*** The project director or site manager.
  - ***To whom?*** To the design team or execution teams.
  - ***What?*** Service Orders (OS), site meeting minutes, modification forms.
  - ***When?*** Daily (safety briefings), weekly (site meetings), monthly (financial reports).
  - ***How?*** EDMS (Electronic Document Management System) software like BIM 360 or Procore, physical signage, synthesis meetings.
- **Pace and Traceability:** Everything written serves as evidence in construction. **Strategic communication involves formalizing every decision (via email or signed meeting minutes) to protect the project against potential post-delivery legal disputes.**

Detailed Practical Exercise: The "ATLAS RESIDENCE" Case

- **Project Background**
- You represent the Project Management / Owner's Representative (AMO) team for the construction of the **"Atlas Residence"**, a **120-unit residential complex** located in the city center, right next to a primary school and a dense commercial area.
- **Budget:**
- **Project Duration:** 24 months.

Current Crises at Month 6 (Structural Shell Phase)

At the sixth month of the project, the team simultaneously faces three major crises:

- **Human & Safety:** The masonry workers' union is threatening to strike because the safety instructions on the scaffolding are not translated into the language of the majority of the workers on site, creating an atmosphere of insecurity.
- **Political & Neighborhood:** The parent-teacher association of the adjacent school is threatening to block site access with protests. They denounce the continuous rotation of concrete mixer trucks during children's drop-off and pick-up hours (8:00 AM and 4:00 PM), endangering the schoolchildren's safety.
- **Financial & Contractual:** The Structural Engineering Consultant has just discovered unexpected soil instability in the North zone. The foundations must be modified (switching from shallow foundations to deep piles), which will cause an extra cost of **5 milliard** and a **4-week delay**. The Client currently refuses to sign the financial variation order.

Students' Mission (In groups of 4 or 5)

- Each group represents the project management cell. You must design and formalize a **Strategic Communication Response Matrix** by completing the deliverable below.
- **Expected Deliverable (Students' Worksheet)**
- For each of the 3 crises, the group must write a structured action plan including:
- **Target Audience Analysis:** Who must you contact first? What is their level of influence on stopping the project?
- **Key Message:** What is the official project stance? (Write the exact text of the message or crisis press release).
- **Channel and Timing:** What medium will you use (Crisis meeting, Registered letter, Press release, Signage)? At what precise moment do you intervene?
- **Resolution Indicator:** How will you measure that the communication worked and that the risk is mitigated?