Voices

In the Trenches

Your project team members don't need to know every
Here's how to determine the right amount of information to
person, says John Tukums, PMP.

Finding the Perfect Fit

As a project manager, I have never complained about having a complete or "perfect" set of information about a project. Give me everything, and I will figure out where I need to focus.

Yet the same amount of information can overwhelm specialized team members. The challenge for the project manager is to find the right balance between too much and too little information for team members.

A bottom-up approach of slowly ratcheting up access to additional information and keeping information silos at the onset takes too long and erodes too much trust. Team members may feel you are withholding information.

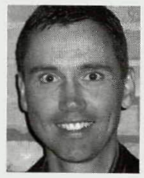
How Much Information Is Too Much?

Because every team member is different, the quickest way to find the right level of detail for individual team members is through a top-down approach to dispensing information. A bottom-up approach of slowly ratcheting up access to additional information and keeping information silos at the onset takes too long and erodes too much trust. Team members may feel you are withholding information.

Instead, I often initially provide too many details—a little bit of an "information overload"—at the beginning of the project, which allows the individual team members to prescribe the level of information they require for their own personal communication style and individual work effort.

For example, some team members with whom I work are meticulous and home in with incredible speed and mental agility on the creative information and direction needed to execute. Others are extremely cerebral and try to see the big picture before they begin assimilating information.

On one particular software project, I attended a meeting to share my experience working with the client. One project team member was a senior partner and big-picture thinker. I shared the traditional requirements for the project, as well as a deeper registry of information that included anecdotes and financial insights entrusted to us by the client. As this big-picture thinker asked further questions and gained insight, you could see a mental map forming. By the end of the meeting, the information was finally distilled down to its core.



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How Can the Perfect Set of Information Be Used?

Here are quick-start ideas to establish and utilize a perfect set of information:

1 Compose detailed contact notes for conference calls and/or face-to-face team meetings. Break the notes into the main topics of the discussion, followed by sub-bullets denoting each person who contributed to the discussion. For example:

Analytics Discussion
Steve: Captured feedback from usability
Angela: Proceeding with second phase of analytical effort

2 Take ownership of setting up—and more important, keeping up-to-date—a central data repository of project information that enables multiple team members to access, publish and download project working files.

3 Deliver project communications, including contact reports and status updates, scaled to each project team member. From time to time, sprinkle in extra information that you entrust to the team. This offering might be some financial information for a non-financial person or some creative information for a non-creative person. Extra information creates a deeper level of trust and exposes team members to new ideas.

Once a project manager discovers how and when to share a perfect set of information, he or she will gain the trust of the team, and facilitate dynamic communication and high-quality work. Ultimately, our teams can have a greater impact on our organizations' bottom line. **PM**