**Module IV: Educational project as a method for integrating knowledge and didactic cooperation**

Topic 4.3 – Communication and its role in educational project

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_3yAODXnAsg>

**TEAM COMMUNICATION AND PREDISPOSITIONS AS THE MOST IMPORTANT ELEMENTS OF EDUCATIONAL PROJECT**

Communication in the project is one of the most extensive area within the project. It covers  both formal and informal communication, as well as messages communicated within and around the project. Due to its important role in managing the project team, it is so important to plan properly future communication. The task of a teacher who guides students through a learning process led through project education is to create a way of communicating that information was clear and for all team members. Communication planning should start with analysis and specify roles in the project. The next step is to create messages addressed to people who will play those roles and plan methods of transmitting information:

* Who needs to receive this information?
* When should he/she receive the information?
* In what way I have to receive data information?

Gathering the information needs of those involved in the project and determining the appropriate means of communication is an important factor in the success of the project. First, it is necessary to identify the stakeholders. Stakeholder of the project is a person or group interested in the project and its results. The organization of the project, i.e. the roles and tasks of individual people, is closely related to the communication planned in it. Before starting work,  people responsible for specific tools or possessing specific knowledge are settled. There are a few sample questions that might be worth answering in order to construct an optimal communication plan:

* Who will receive the information?
* How detailed will the information be?
* When will you receive the information?
* How will he/she receive the information?
* From whom he/she will receive information?

These steps are often presented in a diagram form:

When planning effective communication in the project, the teacher must also take care to define a specific form of documentation of the progress of work, so that individual and group results can be assessed. This requires the planning of widely understood documentation, both formal and informal, i.e.

* Project documents, e.g.:
* correspondence,
* notes,
* documents describing the project,
* Reports from the project and presentation of the project

If the teacher is just introducing a teaching method through an educational project and has not had the opportunity to observe beforehand which solutions are effective and which of the theoretically known methods should be adapted to the group. In this case, the key is to check the functioning of the planned communication from time to time. A good way is to introduce experimental, pilot documentation workflow. If there are errors or delays, you should plan the corrections and only after they have been made, implement the system in the project. Indirect communication should be carefully planned, which gives the group coordinator - in this case the teacher, the possibility to exercise greater control over it. Much more difficult element is to control the course of direct communication. Meetings of a project team members are an essential part of running any project. They are designed make the communication more clear and give equal knowledge about the project to its members. One of the most important areas of communication between project participants is informal communication, i.e. direct conversations and phone calls.

Despite the theoretical awareness of the importance of an effective flow of information in the project and the impact it has on its implementation, communication is still one of the most often underrated factors. In practice, there are many situations that disrupt the process of effective communication, including:

* shortened or cancelled appointments
* ignored reports
* no time to ask questions
* there is no person who can answer
* too much details
* too little details
* no goals set

Each institution that uses the project implementation method tries to improve the processes taking place in teams in order to improve the achieved results. When the project coordinator realizes that communication issues are negatively affecting the pace and quality of project implementation, he should take steps to improve this.

The scope to which the communication improvements will be made should be determined. Project communication should start before the project starts and end after its formal closure. Information about the projects is not only to the members of the project team, but also to all people who were affected by the project in some way, at every stage of its implementation i.e. before the start, during its implementation, as well as after its closure.

1. You should adjust the content of the message to the recipient. Proper communication management in the educational project requires from the teacher to take appropriate measures, thanks to which the information provided will not only be a "data stream" directed towards the student, but will add value to the project. Each team member must understand own role and why his involvement in the project is particularly important. Customize the content of your message to the recipient in an effective way that allows you to achieve this value.
2. It is necessary to build communication channels and use them effectively. This is where the right people convey the right content to the right audience. Communication channels should be defined before the project starts.

There are many considerations when it comes to the proper use of communication management systems in a project. What they have in common is that they are all equally important and affect the comfort and quality of the team's work. Even very small things are important in communication, such as, for example, the use of appropriate phrases when communicating the content of tasks and instead of demotivating phrases such as "error" or "needs to be fixed" or the use of attribute functions (such as status, priority or category). The influence of details proves that while the issues of using communication tools are not the most interesting, they certainly should not be underestimated. Managing communication in the project is the first step to saving energy, which can be used for the implementation of subsequent tasks in the learning process. It is undoubtedly a complex process and each time requires taking into account the specifics of the group of students, their needs and the situations in which they find themselves. Despite the necessity to put effort on the part of the teacher to ensure the highest possible level of communication in the project, managing it is an effort worth making. In the case of an educational project, the teacher is responsible for this quality of communication. Project learning will not be effective if it is not properly managed. Therefore, despite the illusion that it is the group that carries out all the tasks, and therefore "learns by itself", the participation of the teacher, the leader, who controls the entire process, becomes indispensable in this teaching method. This is where the teacher must be able to lead a group process.

**The essence of the group process in project work**

Group formation and group dynamics is a completely natural process. These are the ways of influence division, communication, implementation and accepting the roles and many, many others. Group gives you the opportunity to share experiences, receiving feedback, creating ideas, share thoughts and emotions. Belonging to the group should give a sense of support and enable joint analysis of experiences. Group raises confidence and a sense of security, and above all, its members can plan actions to resolve tasks in the project. The teacher is also a member of the group, even though his job is to coordinate group processes externally. In interaction with team members, he more or less consciously takes on a role that makes him a full participant in the group process. The difference is that the teacher, having knowledge of the processes taking place in the group, should approach the task consciously and control the course of the group's coexistence . Group process begins at the moment when a group of people meet in the same place due to the common goal. The first  phase of formation of a group is called forming. At this stage of development of the group its formation begins. This is the stage of preparation that ends with the participant's decision to participate in the group.

Already at the beginning of this stage, the team subconsciously starts creating its own definition of what a "group" is. In theory, the concept of a group can be broken down into its size, roles, status, group purpose, interactions and norms. Participants from the very beginning:

* define a common goal
* participants establish the functioning norms specific to this group
* roles, specific for this particular group, appear
* the first interactions between the participants take place
* an internal communication, specific for this group, is created

The smaller the group, the easier it goes through the subsequent phases of the process group. If the group rotates, and there are new people, each new participant complicates communication processes that take place in the group, which disturbs the interaction and slows the processes of decision making and problem solving . In each group, the roles take on a specific character. The roles played may change as you move from environment to environment. Schein (1980) argues that people behave in a previously learned manner, which results in playing a similar role in the next group to which they begin to belong. Therefore, it can be concluded that the roles played by a person are one of the greatest determinants of his behaviour in a given situation. A group role then is a repetitive behaviour of a participant, revealed by him in the same way in different groups (Paszkowska -Rogacz, Tarkowska, 2004). These roles are generalized and described by many authors, thus on this basis there can be created the most commonly described in the literature way of describing the group roles, together with practical use for teachers and other group coordinators. For seven years, Meredith Belbin observed the work of various groups, including project groups, and on this basis he formulated the thesis that it is almost impossible for one person to combine all the skills of an "ideal" project coordinator, but it is possible to create an ideal team. Thus, among others in teaching through the project, based on observations of the behaviour of team members, it is possible to predict the effectiveness of their actions. The author distinguished nine roles, each of which is an equally important element in the team's work. With the participation of each of them, the project has a chance to achieve real success and the learning will become truly effective.

**Group roles**

1. **Coordinator (Natural Leader)**

*A balanced person, extroverted, strongly dominant. He has a clear predisposition to be a Leader, although he does not always fulfil this role. He sets goals and implementation plans and coordinates the efforts of all team members. It does not require absolute obedience, but dominates by its prestige and the respect it evokes. Prefers an individual approach to work and people, therefore attaches great importance to communicating with others and listens carefully to the opinions of colleagues. It does not order, but explains and proposes. It intervenes only in critical cases. He asks questions more often during discussions than states or makes his own suggestions. He listens, summarizes the team's ideas and, if necessary, makes a firm decision after listening to all the views of all team members. The coordinator is not extremely intelligent or creative, but thinks positively and knows how to make the best use of the potential presented by the team and the strengths of its individual members. Willingly delegates. He can be seen as a manipulator and a person who "blows" his work to others.*(Team development as a strategic goal of human resource management, 2012, p. 21)

1. **Locomotive (Despot)**

*A strongly dominant, extroverted person. According to the observations of some researchers, an efficient team can be led by two leaders. The Coordinator takes responsibility for the social aspect, while the task is managed by the Locomotive. Depending on what is the priority at a given moment, the team as a group of people or a task facing it, only one of the above-mentioned people may occupy a dominant position. The primary role of the Locomotive is to inspire action and encourage the team to "fight". It shapes the team's efforts. It unifies ideas, goals and plans so as to create a coherent, feasible project that can be implemented quickly. He has a very high motivation, need for achievement and an equally high level of energy. He is goal-oriented and sometimes goes for it no matter what are the means. His personal commitment and contribution to the team's work are very large. However, he does not like activities that require meticulousness and monotony. It presents a directive approach to employees. He is incapable of understanding people and showing them warmth. Intolerant of people who are indecisive, slower thinking and tired faster. Rather straightforward and critical, he is not ashamed to show strong reactions. It is easy to provoke him to explode. Due to the strong focus on competition and victory, a few people with the characteristics of a locomotive can make the team unproductive.*(Team development as a strategic goal of human resource management, 2012, p. 22)

1. **Thinker (Creator)**

*A dominant, introverted person with a very high intelligence. He is a source of original solutions, inventive strategies, an extremely creative, brilliant and innovative person. Indispensable in situations when other team members have the impression that they are stuck in a dead-end street. However, he has a tendency to ignore details and the practical side of his projects. There is also a risk of being drawn into an idea that he finds fascinating but not directly related to the band's priorities. He likes to work independently and follows his own rules. He is an introvert and the way he is treated by other band members is extremely important to him. He is sensitive to prudent praise, while he himself can be harsh and unceremonious especially to those who have been critical of his ideas. He is often too busy to communicate effectively with others, and he is also "in the clouds". Having more than one Thinker on the team is not beneficial because of the interpersonal conflicts that may arise between them.*(Team development as a strategic goal of human resource management, 2012, p. 23)

1. **Source finder**

*A balanced, dominant, extroverted person. He is very interpersonally gifted, outgoing, friendly to ideas and solutions outside the team. He is rarely found at his workplace, and if he is there, he is probably talking on the phone. He eagerly goes to conferences and trainings. He also contacts in person with people from other departments or outside the company for information. He tries to be up to date with the current state of knowledge, he also knows the latest rumors.*(Team development as a strategic goal of human resource management, 2012, p. 23)

1. **Value Critic (Analyst)**

*A highly intelligent, balanced, introverted person. A man of high intelligence and insight, absent in the analysis of the facts, pros and cons of each proposal and in the final reaching the optimal solution. Not very creative, but critical of others' ideas. He is not an opportunist, but he asks difficult questions and only expresses doubts about proposals that he reasonably suspects are wrong. He does not show great enthusiasm and commitment to the team's work. This allows him to distance himself from his colleagues and calmly, objectively assess their actions. Has the ability to absorb and analyse a large amount of information and select the most important from the team's point of view. Being very critical is sometimes depressing and discouraging on others. Although he may lack joy, warmth, imagination and spontaneity. It is solid and independent in its opinions. It also has the advantage that without it, the team would function much less effectively - it is rarely wrong in its opinions. Not everyone can forgive him ...*(Team development as a strategic goal of human resource management, 2012, p. 22)

1. **Producer (Organizer)**

*A balanced person who puts himself in control. It transforms the ideas and goals of the group into the practical language of the individual tasks. As an excellent performer of projects that others have invented, he is one of the core focus of the team. Well organized, conscientious, detail-focused. At the same time, he is able to align his goals and plans with the direction set by the team. It is indispensable in situations where you have to face aspects of your work that others find difficult or of little interest. It's hard to discourage him. If any of your coworkers do not know what was decided at the last meeting and what to do about it. The producer is the person to whom he can turn for guidance. Prefers order and clearly defined structures. Only large, unannounced changes to the plan can upset its balance. This makes it inflexible, especially in relation to spectacular ideas that do not immediately translate into practical actions.*(Team development as a strategic goal of human resource management, 2012, p. 24)

1. **Team Soul (Group Player)**

*A balanced person, extroverted, not very dominant. Its main role is to neutralize personal conflicts and problems, and thus obtain the best possible cooperation within the team. He puts these goals ahead of his personal ambitions. Easily establishes contacts. Has well-developed interpersonal skills. He is a good listener and encourages others to express their views. It unites and harmonizes the group, using diplomacy to balance the friction caused by the Locomotive, Thinker or Value Critic. He is sensitive, caring, aware of the individual needs and fears of his colleagues and informal relationships that bind them. Liked, popular, loyal to the entire team, which does not mean that he cannot take a specific position in a conflict situation. The contribution of the Team Soul to the activities of the team is not as visible as the other team members, but in the long run it is of great importance. It is the "glue" that binds the band members together. His role is especially valuable when working under strong pressure or when the team is struggling with a difficult problem for itself. His reluctance to compete and open conflict sometimes makes it difficult to make quick, unambiguous decisions. He's too easily influenced.*(Team development as a strategic goal of human resource management, 2012, p. 21)

1. **Meticulous performer (Perfectionist)**

*An energetic, introverted person. He works hard and conscientiously, and pays special attention to details. He will not rest until he has personally verified that the task has been fully completed and that no detail has been left out. Since this is almost impossible, he tends to worry unnecessarily. It is a necessary supplement to every team, especially in the phase when the first enthusiasm for a new project has passed and the routine activities related to its implementation begin. Focused on details, he sometimes loses sight of the main purpose they serve. He is reluctant to delegate his duties to others, but not to collect the entire prize, but only because he does the work personally, is sure that it will bring the expected results. It is characterized by persistence, a high level of internal motivation and self-control. At the same time, he is less tolerant of less conscientious and careless colleagues*. (Team development as a strategic goal of human resource management, 2012, p. 24)

The teacher, aware of the distinguishing features of each role, should skilfully manage the process and use its predispositions in particular phases of the project:

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| --- | --- |
| TASK PHASE | KEY ROLE |
| Team building  | Coordinator and Locomotive |
| Ideas creation | Value Critic |
| Planning, settling aims and methods  |
| Establishing contacts with company’s surrounding | Source Finder, Team Soul |
| Organizing work, checking and supervising | Coordinator, Producer |
| Task implementation | Producer, Meticulous performer |

It often happens that a person combines several roles. Everyone can distinguish the dominant one that they most willingly take, feel good in it , and thanks to that works most effectively. This gives you the ability to adapt, and when situation requires, e.g. when a team has fewer than 9 people and is the noticeable that some role is missing. The teacher leading the project as a method of teaching students should take into account both: the previously discussed learning styles and preferences in playing roles in the group. This is a particularly important if you are creating a team that has to operate in rapidly changing conditions. The teacher coordinating the work of particular team members, besides of perceiving the strengths of individual roles, should also accept their possible drawbacks. This will help to achieve balance and carry out tasks effectively. By organizing the group, the leader assigns tasks according to individual predispositions, because without proper organization of duties it is impossible to carry out any task . On the other hand, supporting the group, regardless of the phase it is in, and building the atmosphere, will improve work and help to achieve success in teaching through an educational project.

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Rozwój zespołu, jako strategiczny cel zarządzania zasobami ludzkimi. „Podniesienie kwalifikacji pracowników firmy System Rewident Sp. z o.o.” Warszawa 2012

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