SUBMITTAL EXCHANGE®

5 Fundamentals for Efficient Project Communication

collaboration | automation | accountability | reporting capable | automatic archive

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How Efficient Are You?

Professionals in the construction industry would likely agree that there are many processes in construction that need to be more efficient, including the process of construction administration. With resources stretched thin, trying to increase your organization's level of efficiency during construction administration can be a challenging task.

An AIA study conducted a few years ago found that 30% of all construction projects they looked at were behind schedule. Falling behind schedule can be attributed to many issues, including those issues that are in our control (effective communication between team members) as well as out of our control (the weather). Most understand that increasing efficiency will save them time and ultimately help in completing their projects on schedule, but the challenging part is figuring out how to actually increase your efficiency.

With 5 Fundamentals for Efficient Project Communications, we'll show you how to cut down on delays and maximize your efficiency by discussing the five necessary components for your project communication solution. These five fundamentals will allow your organization to save up to 30% in both time and costs during your construction administration process.

Fundamental 1: Collaboration

In a traditional construction administration process, individual teams operate in their own silo of contractual responsibility by focusing on just those items in which they are responsible for. This silo structure can often prevent teams from looking at the overall goal of meeting the owner's expectations.

On a typical project, each team will have their own set of tools used to perform their required project tasks. During design and construction information needs to be exchanged and this is usually done via email, FTP sites, fax or a shipping courier.

Owner Team

Design Team   Construction Team
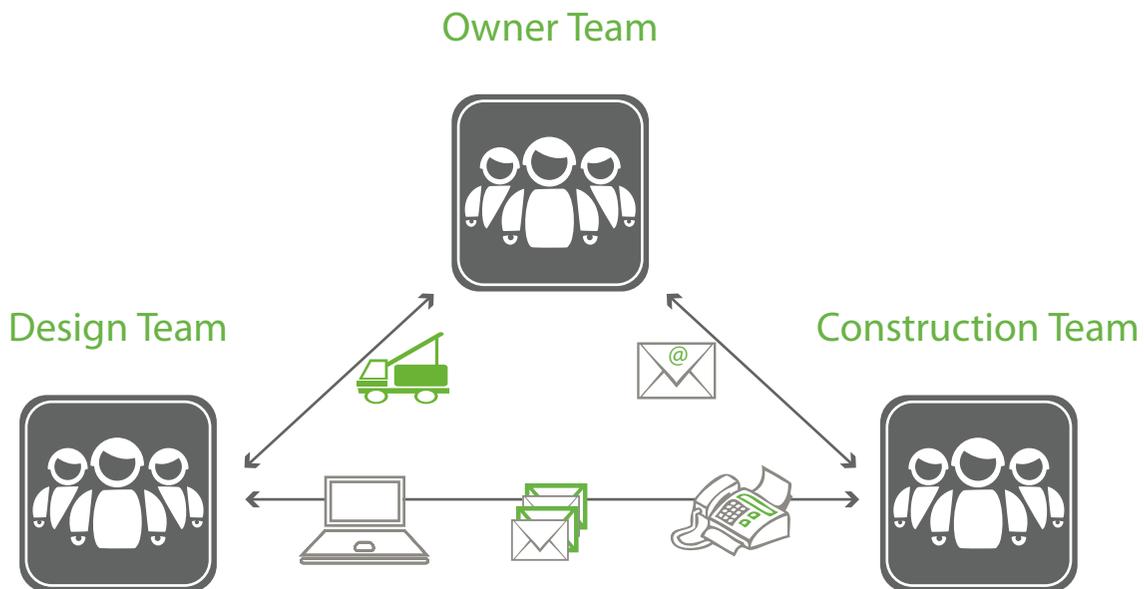
And while the information is successfully transferred to another party through these methods, several drawbacks can occur:

- *Fragmented communications.* There is no clear way to see what other communication and information exchange has occurred between team members.

- *Lack of accurate information tracking.* Multiple teams and team members may be keeping their own logs of construction documentation and thus own versions.

Fundamental 1: Collaboration

- *Limited access to information.* Team members only have access to the information that's available via their inbox, internal servers, FTP login, or papers on their desk.

- *Teams isolated in silos.* Depending on your project delivery method, many teams only focus on what their contract responsibilities include, with little thought or effort given to team wide communication.

- *Extensive administration.* Passing information back and forth for manual edit and review by multiple parties can increase opportunities for errors that could lead to significant project roadblocks and delays.

- *Potential impact on environment.* Printing and shipping paper or upgrading hardware and software can negatively impact the environment by contributing to cutting down trees, waste sent to landfills and CO_2 emissions.

All these drawbacks are the result of not having one uniform, collaborative method of sharing information across the team. For your project communications to be truly collaborative, you need a SaaS (Software-as-a-Service) technology. A SaaS solution is a cloud based software that grants access to all team members and stores all the data for a project in one centralized location that's accessed from anywhere and is not maintained on any one organization's server. A cloud-based system can be used anywhere you have Internet access. Learn more about SaaS technology here.

The Saas Way

Owner Team

Design Team   Construction Team

The Old Way

Owner Team

Design Team   Construction Team

Fundamental 1: Collaboration

When using a SaaS solution that fosters collaboration you can expect to experience fewer delays, lower costs and reduced impact on the environment.

An effective collaboration tool creates a seamless project team that can shift focus from just individual responsibilities to the mutual responsibility of meeting the building owner's expectations.

Collaboration Case Study: Hy-Vee Inc.

√ Multiple Projects throughout Midwest   √ Combined value of over $100 Million

"One thing project communication software has done for us, the owners, is it gives a little bit of **peace of mind** in terms of when we issue additional information. We know that it's out there and it's **not on somebody's desk waiting to be distributed**."
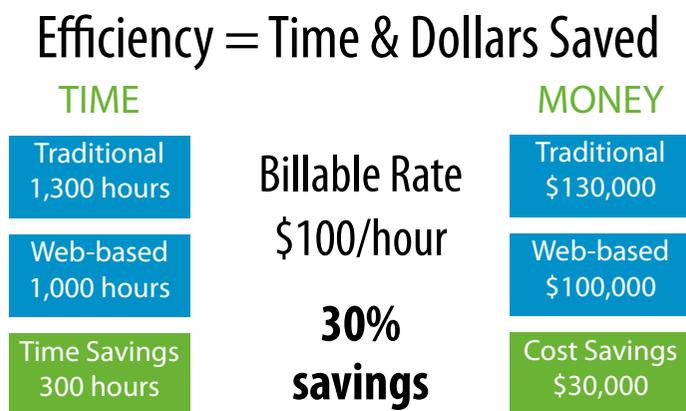
- Dan Willrich, Hy-Vee, Inc

Fundamental 2: Automation

The construction administration process can be tedious and time consuming as you work to process submittals and other construction communications. However, hours are eliminated when document review processes happen in an online environment. A project communication solution that automates tedious, manual processes can actually create significant time and cost savings.

Automation Case Study: $5 Million Project

An architectural firm estimated that they spent approximately 1,300 hours on construction administration, which was billed out at $100 per hour when using traditional project communication practices. When utilizing, Submittal Exchange, a cloud-based project communication solution, this firm saved 300 hours on the construction administration which reduced billed expenses to the owner by $30,000.

Efficiency = Time & Dollars Saved

TIME		MONEY
Traditional 1,300 hours	Billable Rate $100/hour	Traditional $130,000
Web-based 1,000 hours		Web-based $100,000
Time Savings 300 hours	**30% savings**	Cost Savings $30,000

An automated workflow provided in your project communication solution can drastically reduce the time spent during the construction administration process by automatically logging when documents are uploaded and reviewed, including allowing project teams to mark up documents right within the system.

Not only will automation keep your project team on schedule, but automation will save your organization time and money, supporting business and revenue growth.

For more information on project savings, visit our Project Savings Calculator.

Fundamental 3: Accountability

It can be very easy to lose track of construction documents, including who they currently reside with and when were they last reviewed, when there is not a uniformed system for submittals and other construction documents to move from project team to project team.

Often times a project team will try to keep track of documents by creating another internal document, such as an itemized spreadsheet. But maintaining and updating a spreadsheet can:

- *Require additional tracking.* Expect to spend time logging when documents were received or sent, keeping track of ball in court information and tracking version histories.

- *Require additional meetings.* Expect to be involved in scheduling, traveling, and attending meetings to verify information in construction documents.

- *Require additional administrative resources.* Expect to spend time (yours or a team member's) on the administrative tasks associated with tracking and meetings.

A project communications solution with accountability functions will eliminate the administrative hours spent by your organization on tracking by automatically doing it for you, including:

- Automatic logs of when documents are uploaded and reviewed
- Automatic email notifications sent to team members
- Real-time updates of ball in court information
- Up-to-date version histories for each document

A solution that tracks everything is critical to keeping the submittal process moving in a timely manner. Transparency and accountability allow all team members to know the status of their project at a moment's notices – eliminating unnecessary disputes and delays.

Fundamental 4: Reporting Capable

Quality control is very important during construction, as it's the only way to assure that your project is being built according to its specifications. One of the most efficient ways to monitor quality control and progress is to make sure your project communication solution has a robust reporting tool.

Robust Reporting = Improved Quality Control

Look for a reporting tool that is intuitive and easy to use and allows you to build custom reports based on your organization's needs. Not only should you have the capability to build custom reports but you should be able to save them, so they can be generated by just a click of your mouse. Additionally these reports need to be exportable and printable so they can easily be shared with anyone who needs to review them.

Reporting capabilities within a project communication solution will allow your organization to compile detailed reports on the status of the project to ensure that all construction administration is being handled in a timely and accurate manner, enabling your projects to stay on schedule.

Fundamental 5: Automatic Archive

Construction projects produce mass amounts of documentation that must be archived correctly to be accessed at a later date if needed.

If this process is done via hard copy it can be extremely time consuming and expensive, for example:

50,000 documents
EQUALS
100,000 pages
EQUALS
20 cases

Storage Costs
Est. $2,000/year
Est. $10,000 in 5 years
Est. $20,000 in 10 years
Est. $30,000 in 15 years

In addition to the expenses related to archiving paper documents, this method of archival can be very inefficient. When you need to seek out a specific document, it can take a long time to find an archived paper copy. You have to account for the time it takes to get to your storage location, the time it takes to search through boxes of papers, and the risk that documents may not even be there.

Creating an efficient archival process also involves more than storing documents in a digital format. Digital storage is simply just storing documents electronically rather than in paper format. An efficient solution to archive will:

- Consolidate project documentation that's located in a centralized cloud based solution
- Increase efficiency in project communications by allowing all parties immediate access to critical documents
- Establish a good audit trail through electronic archival that is organized and easily searched
- Help prove or disprove liability and damages if a dispute arises

An electronic, automatic archival of a construction project will provide a cost effective method for storing construction documents as well as providing an efficient and easily accessible method of locating documents in the future.

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Summary

Increasing efficiency during the construction communication process will require a shift in the mind set of project team members from focusing only on individual team responsibilities into a collaborative approach where every team shares a mutual responsibility to meet the owner's goals.

This collaborative approach can be maximized when organizations opt for a solution that includes these five fundamentals for efficient project communication:

1. Collaboration – including a centralized database of construction documentation that can be accessed by all team members from any location.

2. Automation – directing workflow by allowing for electronic upload and review and automatic email notifications.

3. Accountability – tracking everything from ball-in-court information to who has viewed and downloaded documents.

4. Reporting Capable – allowing team members to run detailed reports on the status of a project and easily share reports with others.

5. Automatic Archival – creating an electronic, organized audit trail of all construction project documentation.

Combined these five fundamentals will allow your organization to maximize time, efficiency and profitability.

5 Fundamentals for Efficient Project Communication

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