

If your stakeholder team is 10 or more people, the likelihood of the project failing to meet its objectives increases

Small organisations tend to get things done with little fuss. They can move swiftly and keep teams up to date more easily.



As organisations get a little larger, teams tend to coalesce around the concept of “projects” whereby small teams can organise themselves around simple actions and outcomes.

As organisations get larger still, the projects get bigger, and more complex, and this is when things tend to go wrong. Projects finish late and go over budget, deadlines are missed and projects often fail to meet their original objectives. Why is this?

At a fundamental level, it all comes down to communication – or the lack of it. Simple projects are done by small teams, very often collocated in the same office. When they need to communicate they do so verbally and face-to-face. The communication is understood and the understanding is confirmed.

However, as projects get bigger, the teams get larger and before long it becomes very easy for plans to be miss-read, emails to

be misinterpreted and the perspective on the objectives to be different between individuals on the project team, and associated stakeholders. To an extent, this has been exacerbated in the post-COVID world by the transitioning to virtual (and semi-virtual) working practices. (For more on delivering risky projects in a post-covid world, click here: <https://www.de-risk.com/delivering-risky-projects-in-a-post-covid-world/>)

Lack of communication can spread beyond programme objectives, goals and direction, into situation specific misunderstandings, which, when not communicated, introduce risk into the business. For example, if a production line breaks down, after a component which has been showing signs of fatigue for many months finally fails, the effect could be days, weeks or even months of no output while it is fixed. If the people who know the line was under stress had communicated this, there might have been preventative maintenance to protect the programme. Or, the effect on a

company which has invested heavily in a new product that will provide added functionality to an important client, only to find the client has changed their strategy but the account manager has not communicated this. These sorts of issues which could have been solved with communication and sharing are often at the heart of challenges that derail programmes. We could even go as far as to say that all risks (apart from 'acts of god') could be prevented by improved communication!

So, what should be communicated? In a world of information overload, there is fine balance between giving too much information so that it is ignored and too little so that risks slip through the cracks.



The way to reach 'just right' is to organise our communication by the key assumptions being made

By assumptions, we mean the key things that need to happen in order for the venture to be successful. Some of these assumptions will be "safe" and close to being facts. But some will have significant uncertainty, and these are the ones that need to be captured, communicated, and managed by the stakeholder community.

With this mind, the following steps can help the project meets its objectives:

1. Identify and extract the key assumptions outlined in the project plan.
2. Develop a framework to test these assumptions with stakeholders; identify the mismatches to test the reality of meeting the plan
3. Extract the risky assumptions and develop specific action / mitigation plans for them

As a rule of thumb, as soon as your stakeholder base gets above approximately 10 people, the scope assumptions to be misunderstood grows exponentially and a formal method of capturing, communicating and managing will be required. De-RISK's proven SDA methodology is a framework used to identify the key assumptions and open up dialogue to stress-test plans. In many cases our SDA methodology has shown misunderstandings in planning and extracted risky assumptions that have been overlooked, putting plans at risk.

Read [here](#) how a major and complex nuclear power station integration programme with many interdependencies and fractured projects was at risk of failing until De-RISK SDA brought the programme back on track.