



Project Communication and Management in Water Infrastructure Projects

Session 2 - Navigating Project Communications for Young Professionals

Andreas Olshausen, PE

Mitchell Boyd, PE

Generational Communication – Methods

Older Generations

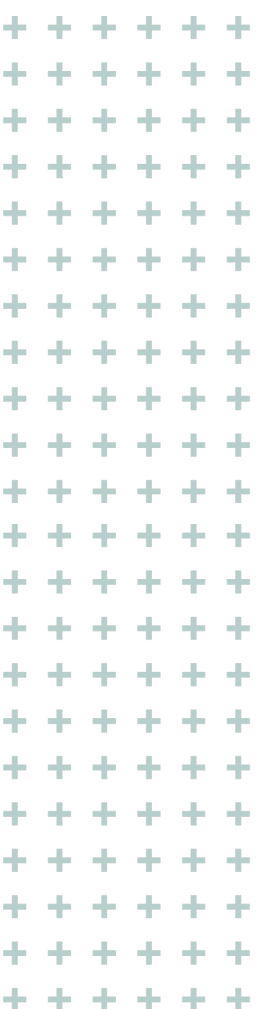
Typical kids' social gathering:



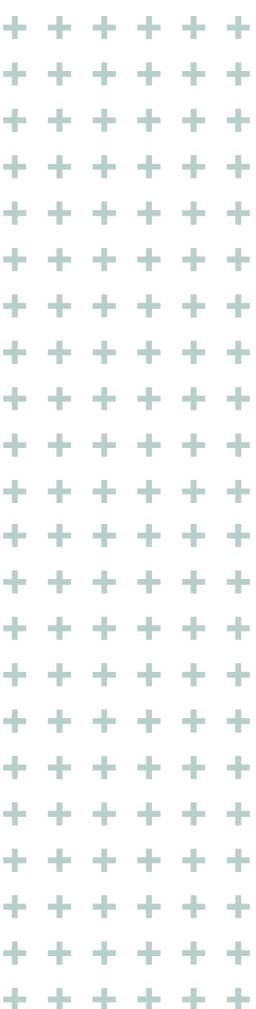
Forms of communication these generations were introduced to early in their career:



Younger Generations



Goals

- 
- 1) Understand and better manage generational differences in project communications
 - 2) Understand and overcome the challenges associated with communicating with your colleagues (internal)
 - 3) Become more confident and capable at effectively communicating with clients, peers, and personnel at public agencies (external)
 - 4) Learn to better manage your time through effective communication





Section One

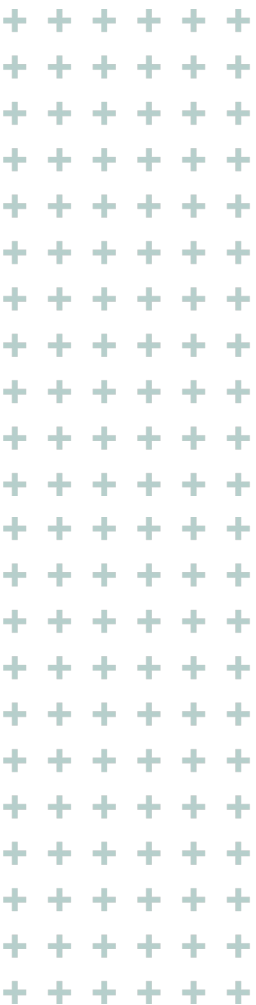
Generational Differences that Impact Communication



Engineering Generational Breakdown - 2020

ASCE		2020 Workforce Demographic Age		
Age Groups	CE Workforce		ENGINEERING Workforce	
	2016 (425,000)	2020 (475,000)	2016 (3,106,000)	2020 (3,305,000)
20 – 24	7%	7.8%	6.4%	6.3%
25 – 34	27.7%	28.2%	24.3%	26.3%
35 – 44	17.7%	23%	21.5%	21.7%
45 – 54	24%	15.7%	24%	20%
55 – 64	15.5%	19%	18%	20%
65+	7.5%	6%	5%	5%

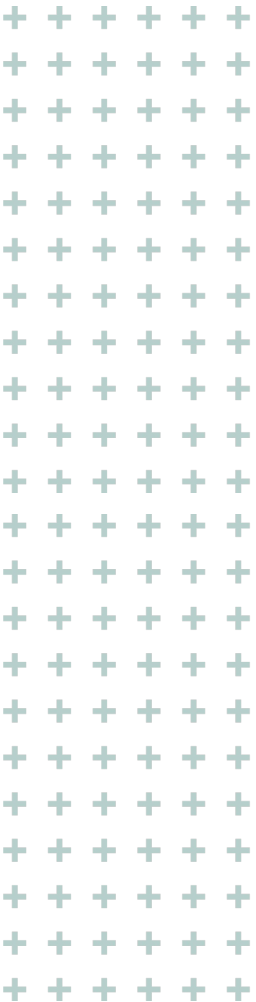
Source: [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#)



Generational Snapshot

	“Older Generations”		“Younger Generations”	
	Baby Boomers	Gen X	Millennials	Gen Z
Years	1946 - 1964	1965 - 1980	1981 - 1996	1997 - 2012
Grew up with:	Post WW2 cultural shifts, rapid advances in transportation, space race	Strong sense of independence, introduction of the internet in the workplace	Integration of the internet into daily life	Ubiquity of the cell phone, still emerging in the workforce
Common communication preferences	Face-to-face interactions, phone calls	Balance of traditional methods and digital tools for efficiency	Digital communication, video chats, occasional in-person interactions	
Strongest values for communication	Formality, traditionalism, clarity, predictability		Accountability, acknowledgement	Speed, convenience, directness

Disclaimer: generalizations included

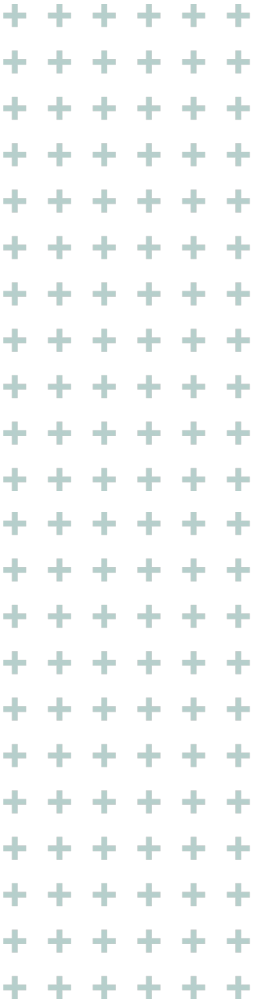


Overcoming Generational Differences

If we are generationally diverse and our communication methods are different, what can we do to overcome it?

Establish the project's vision by defining:

- Clear and direct overall goals
- Roles, purpose, and responsibilities
- Methods of project completion
- Methods of communication (format, technology, etc)





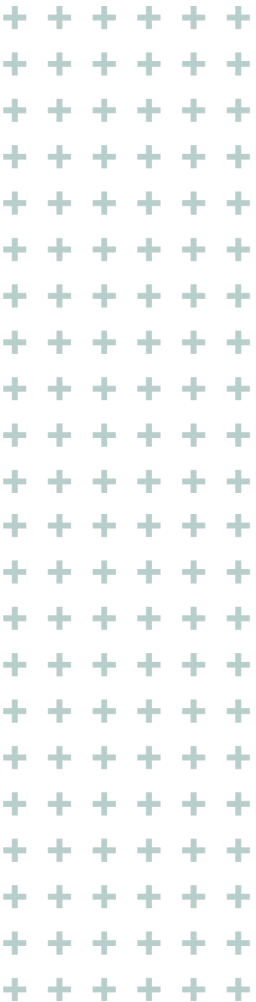
Section Two

Managing Internal Project Communication



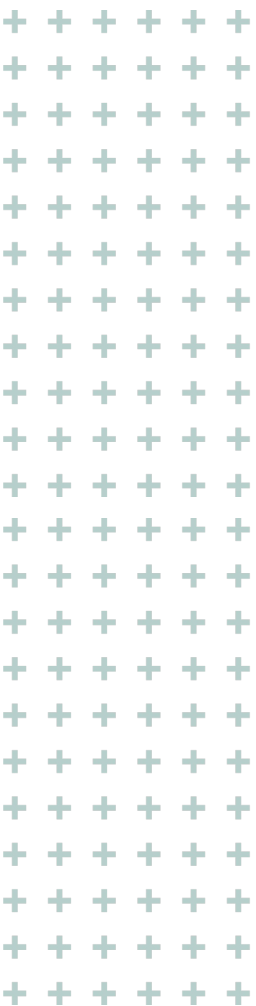
Building Mutual Understanding

- Set project expectations early: goals, timelines, response time, meeting format, communications channels, etc...
- Practice active listening – “Listening: The Forgotten Skill”
 - Provides mutual validation
- Encourage cross-generational learning (e.g., Gen Z on tech, senior staff on institutional knowledge)
- Take time to get to know each other
 - Share hobbies, mutual interests, work-based commonalities
- Best practice: Set expectations early and blend formats—formal touchpoints and informal channels
 - For example, use instant chat for communications but set regular in-person meetings to review hard copies



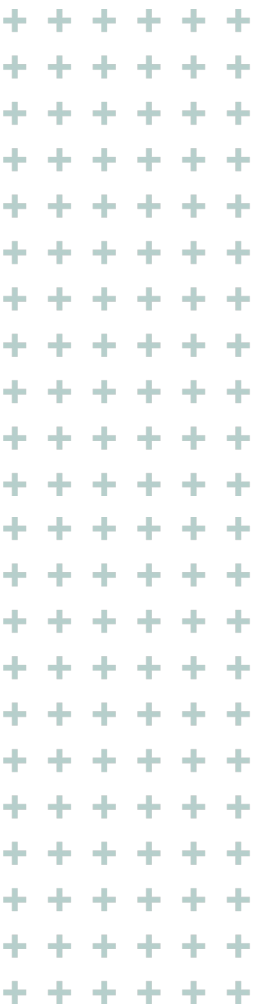
Strategies for Internal Project Management and Communications

Goal	Strategy
Communicate Proactively and Format It Appropriately	Define formatting expectations and frequency of interactions early
Be Solution-Oriented, Not Defensive	Adjust your tone, but never the intent of your message
Respect Others' Time and Communication Preference	Show respect by being open to learning new methods and show that you value their time (i.e. conversations in the hallway, open door policy)
Own Your Work—Show Accountability	Deliver consistently and report progress in a way that matches their leadership style



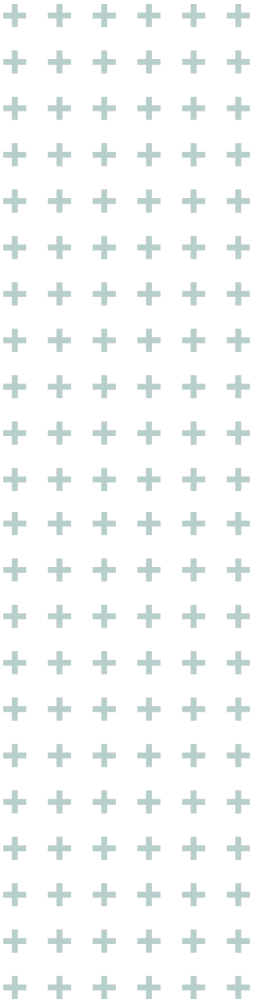
Risks Associated with Miscommunication

- Tone can be interpreted differently (e.g. “OK” vs. “K”) and can come across as disrespectful
- Misalignment in urgency and response expectations resulting in missed deadlines or lost projects
- Budget shortcomings
- Staff feeling undervalued or unappreciated



Conflict Management Across Generations

- Focus on clarity and tone
- Teach feedback methods that work for both groups
- Use collaborative tools (shared docs and communication tools) as a neutral space to promote input and align perspectives
- Recognize that some personalities clash
 - Coordinate with a supervisor of both parties
 - Adjust workflow
 - Separate what is said versus who is saying





Section Three

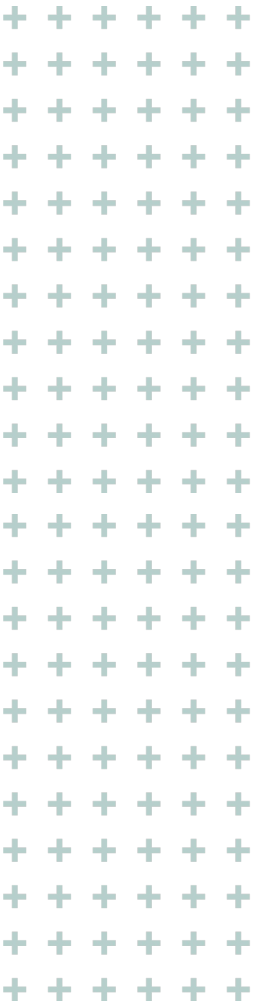
Managing External Communications with Clients and other Firms or Public Agencies



Understanding the External Audience

- Match your tone and method of communication to theirs
- Senior staff at agencies may want formality and phone calls
- Younger clients may prefer video recaps, Teams, or summaries via text
- Things to remember when meeting with external organizations:

Older Generations	Younger Generations
Bring your staff to meetings with others outside your organization	Understand your audience's concerns and motivations
Allow your staff opportunities to contribute to the conversation or lead sections	Avoid defensiveness in all situations and don't get personal, especially in reviews and negotiations
Remember to share with your staff that "secret, client-specific knowledge" that only you know	Listen to and follow your Manager's insights and client-specific knowledge

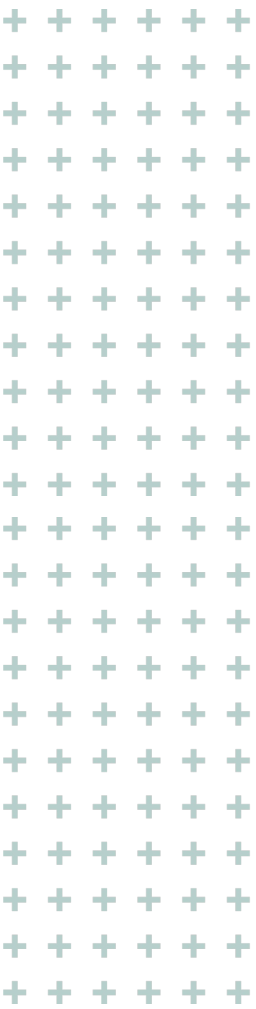


Managing Client Expectations

Action	Older Generations	Younger Generations
1. Set clear scope early and realistically—tailor the delivery to the recipient(s) with correct framing	Prefer formal proposals and signed agreements	Expect visual aids and plain language, preference a collaborative approach
2. Document everything—format with intent and adjust for level of comfort	May need help navigating digital platforms, preference for hard copies and PDFs	Expect modern visuals, interactive content, shared drives, and mobile-friendly tools
3. Invite feedback early—respect their communication norms	May hesitate to give direct critique unless asked	Want collaborative check-ins
4. Stay calm under pressure	Trust calm authority	Look for empathy and teamwork under stress

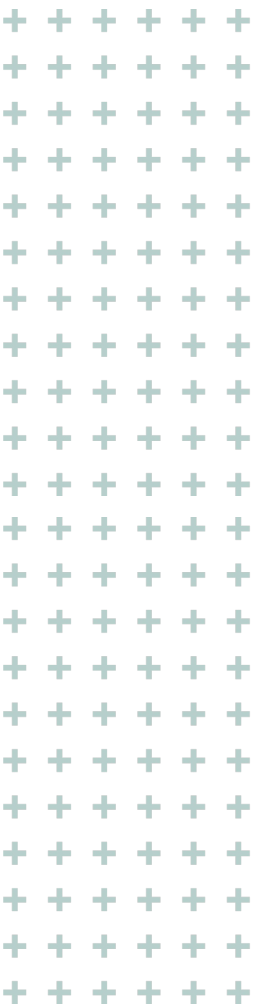
Important Notes:

- Correspondence with public agencies is technically legal record. NEVER convey significant project info by text message.
- Be Proactive: As a consultant, over 80% of project correspondence should be initiated by you, not the client



Building Trust with Clients and Customers

- Consistency and responsiveness matter to all. PACE's suggested response times:
 - Internal: 2 hours
 - External: within 24 hours
- Know your audience—adjust your tone if needed, not the intent of your message
- Ask about presentation preferences, be prepared to deliver detailed reports/memos or dashboards and collaborative platforms
- Avoid defensiveness, put yourself in their shoes





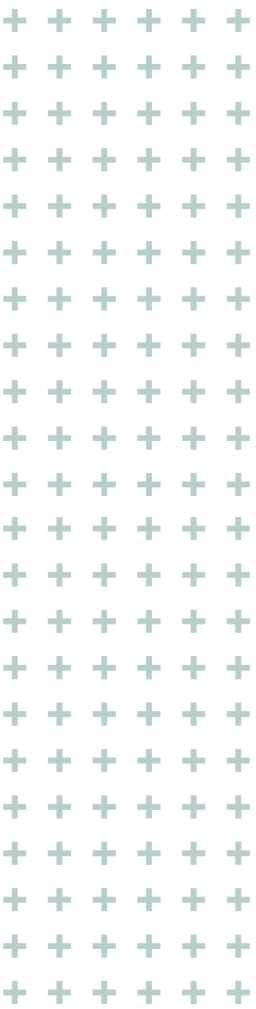
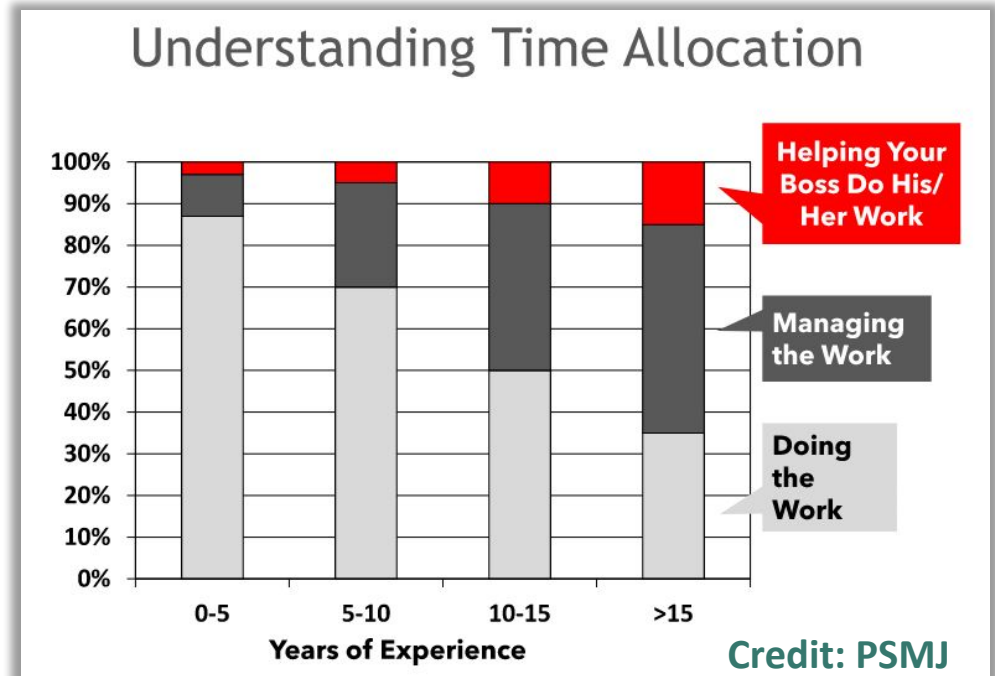
Section Four

Tools, Takeaways, and Managing Your Time through Effective Communication



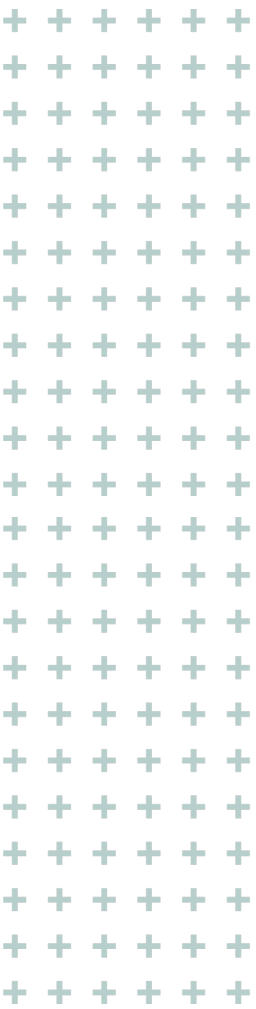
Managing Your Time Through Effective Communication

- Develop confidence delegating work to others:
 - Maintain a good rapport with your production staff
 - Remember that you're all on the same team
 - Don't let things get personal
- Be realistic about how much time project communication/coordination takes



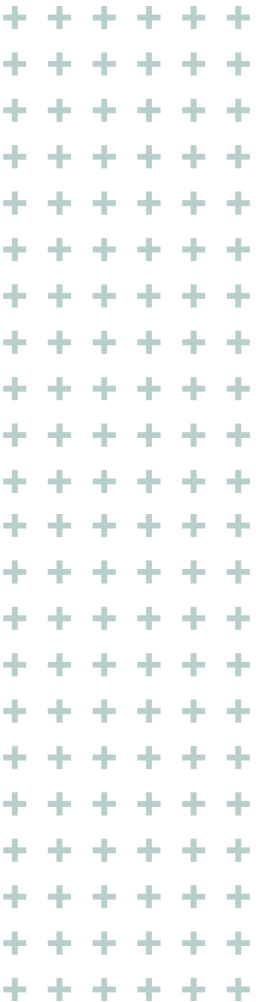
Practical Tools for Cross-Gen Communication

- Create a communications guideline to refer to during projects until you get more familiar with people's preferences (e.g. learn when and to whom to send an email vs. direct message or simply calling them).
- Integrate a new agreed upon tool/platform for communication (Teams, etc)



Communication Takeaways

- Older generations:
 - Embrace tech tools
 - Ask for feedback from younger staff
- Younger generations:
 - Pause before communicating
 - Consider tone and context
 - Don't sacrifice clarity for efficiency
- **Everyone:**
 - Avoid assumptions—ask, listen, clarify from the beginning
 - Embrace generational differences
 - Encourage one another
 - We're all human and need some grace





Thank you for attending!

Questions?

