

Project Manager to Project Sponsor Communication and the Withholding of Information



David Perkins, PMP



Withholding Information on Projects

Is silence really “golden” within the context of projects?

What are some *consequences* of withheld information on projects?

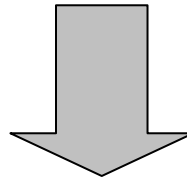
Consequences of Withheld Information on Projects

Not meeting schedule and cost objectives

Handling changes

Minimizing design deficiencies

Reduced quality



Increase chance for project failure



Consequences of Withheld Information on Projects

The VitaSmarts and The Concours Group's (2005) study of 1,000 executives and project management professionals involving 2,200 projects across 40 companies revealed that withheld information on projects resulted in:

86% of the projects missing their deadlines,

78% finishing over budget, and

74% not achieving the desired quality.

Partial List of Research Streams Related to Information Withholding

Upward communication distortion

Communication apprehension

Communication accommodation

Speaking up

Spiral of silence

Issue selling

Individual silence

Organizational silence

Critical upward feedback



Reasons for Withholding Information



Employee Security

Supervisor power

Employee Mobility Aspirations

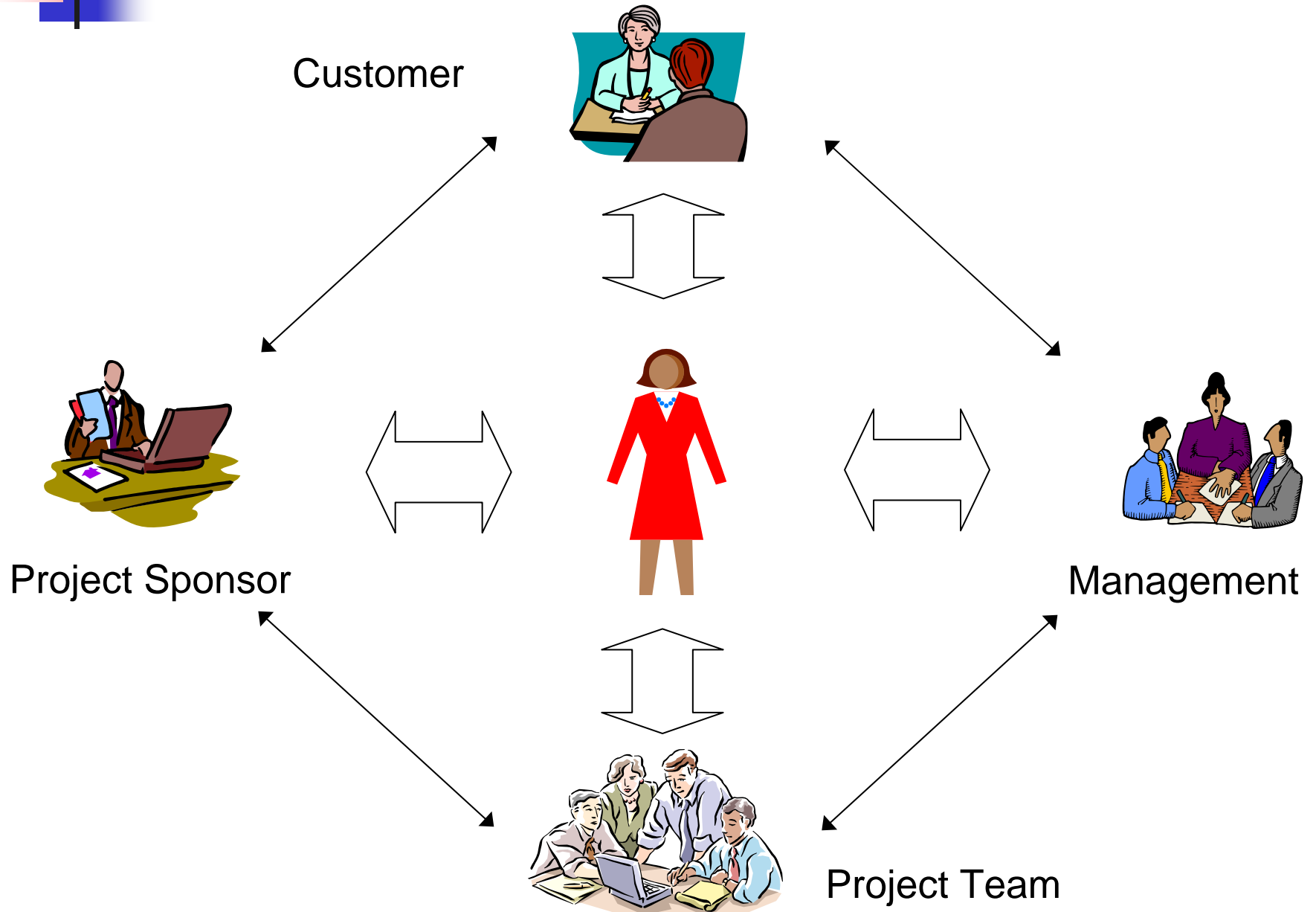
Supervisor approachability

Employee Job satisfaction

Perceived supervisory influence
in the organization

Employee performance

Project Stakeholders



Partial List of Research Streams Related to Project Team Communication

Technological complexity

Virtual project teams

Communication models

Communication patterns

Communication competencies

Innovation processes

Communication process maturity

Group longevity

Knowledge management

Knowledge sharing

Matrix organizational structures

Project abandonment

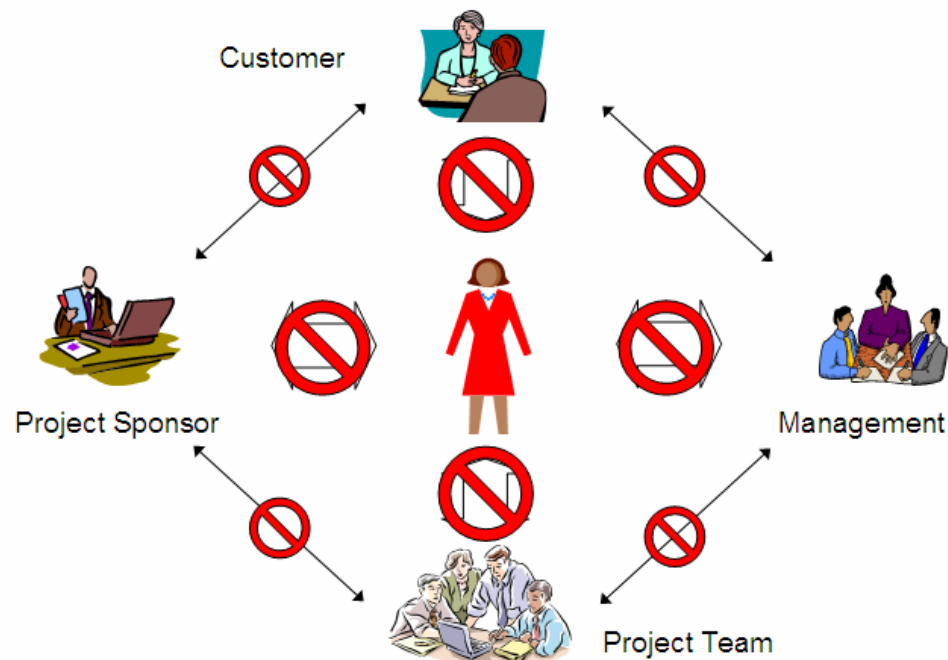
Project performance



Information Withholding on Projects is Prevalent

The VitaSmarts and The Concours Group's (2005) study of 1,000 executives and project management professionals involving 2,200 projects across 40 companies revealed that:

55% of survey participants withhold problem information on their projects



A Case in Point: The Navy A-12 Program

As a case in point, the withholding of project information has been well-documented on the ill-fated Navy A-12 Avenger Fighter Aircraft Program (Beach, 1990).

When top Navy and Pentagon officials belatedly learned that the A-12 Program was in trouble, “they downplayed it and ignored the implications” (Magnuson and Kramer, 1991, p. 46).

In fact, the U.S. Congress was assured that the program was on track in terms of schedule and cost.

Yet in less than a year after the congressional briefing, the A-12 Avenger Program was cancelled by the Department of Defense based in part on a \$2.7 billion cost over-run and an 18-month schedule delay (Magnuson and Kramer, 1991).



Another Case in Point: The CONFIRM Project

A late 1980s system designed to be a comprehensive travel industry reservation program that integrated airline, rental car, and hotel information (Oz, 1994).

Considered a well-known industry project example related to information withholding.

The project's original budget was estimated to be \$55.7 million. The project was cancelled 3.5 years late with expenditures of \$125 million (Oz, 1994).



The Role of the Project Sponsor



- Provides strategic project direction
- Interfaces with senior management
- Helps to secure resources
- May interface with high-level customers
- Lends political support
- Acts as a mentor
- Acts as a motivator

- "Project Director"
- "Program Manager"
- "Product Manager"
- "Project Executive"
- "Project Champion"
- "Project Owner"

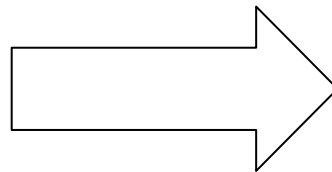
Project Manager to Project Sponsor Communication

Can occur at fixed intervals: e.g., daily, weekly, bi-monthly, monthly...

Can occur at variable intervals: e.g., at milestones, project phase exits, crisis situations, etc...

Type of information: project status, achievements, actions, risks, projections

Methods: Some examples: personal project reviews, project analysis, written status reports, and verbal updates (Turner and Müller, 2004)

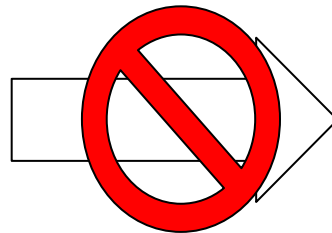


Project Manager Information Withholding from Project Sponsor

The principal-agency relationship, especially as related to the adverse selection problem and the moral hazard problem.

“Shoot the messenger” syndrome

Reluctance to communicate unfavorable project information



What can be done to limit and/or prevent this behavior?



Thank you for your time!

Questions/comments can be sent to me at
david.perkins@cox.net