Communicating for Effect

There is absolutely no point in communicating with someone if you do not want an effect!

The effect you are seeking can vary dramatically; you may want the person to do something, stop doing something, feel happier or more supportive or even feel worried or concerned. The starting point in any effective communication is developing a clear picture of what it is you want the communication to achieve.

A significant proportion of formal project communications are simply intended to keep people informed and supportive[1]. Achieving this effect is helped if the reports, newsletters, and other project communications are elegant, stylish and easy to read. A well-presented report generates positive emotional reactions in its readers, particularly if it includes a few appropriate charts and graphs. The feeling generated by the report is that its creators are 'in control'. Conversely a scruffy report suggests lack of control or lack of concern for the reader[2].

The rest of your communications are likely to be focused on persuading the receiver to change their behaviours; start something, do things differently, quicker, slower better or even stop! The communication medium can be anything from a casual conversation through to a formal contract notice. However, regardless of the medium, if the communication is to be effective in achieving the desired change, several key elements need to be incorporated.

- The most important element is an unambiguous statement of precisely what it is you want the receiver to do or change. This information needs to be SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time Framed.

- The second element is to demonstrate the reason why this is important to you. Telling your life partner to lose weight is unlikely to get a positive response; suggesting they lose a couple of kilos in the next month because you are concerned about changes in their health is likely to get a more positive reaction.

- The last element is defining the benefit the receiver can expect if they cooperate with your request. Mutuality recognises you are far more likely to get what you want from a communication if the receiver can expect something of value as well: WIIFM – What's In It For Me trumps altruism 8 times out of 10!

Mutuality does not mean changing contract conditions or offering unethical inducements; rather it is a process of connecting your needs and requirements to an objective or benefit that is of value to the receiver. Within the team this may be directly aligned with motivational initiatives such as recognition, autonomy or advancement. When advising upwards to senior managers, linking the requested action to

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[1]   See more on **the three types of stakeholder communication**:
https://mosaicprojects.com.au/Mag_Articles/SA1020_Three_types_stakeholder_communication.pdf

[2]   See reporting is not communicating:
https://mosaicprojects.com.au/Mag_Articles/SA1005_Reporting-v-Communicating.pdf

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the expected project outcomes and organisational value may be a more appropriate way of motivating your manager to help you make them successful[3].

Communication for effect is a subtle art; you need clarity in your objectives from the communication, if you don't know what you want you are unlikely to get it! You also need to understand the receiver's value proposition, what's in it for them. Then you need to work out how to connect these two elements in a culturally sensitive way that is most likely to achieve the outcome you need.

If you think this is too hard, remember there is absolutely no point in communicating with someone if you don't want an effect.

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[3]   See more on *Communicating Upwards for Effect*:
https://mosaicprojects.com.au/Mag_Articles/G004_Communicating-Upwards-For-Effect.pdf

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