



Construction Industry Institute®

Compass:
An Assessment Tool for
Improving Project Team Communications

Construction Industry Institute

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Prepared by the
Construction Industry Institute
Project Team Communications Research Team

Updated by
Construction Industry Institute
Knowledge Management Committee

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Executive Summary

Previous research has established that effective communications are essential to the successful completion of engineer-procure-construct (EPC) projects. However, this finding would be of little benefit to the industry without a reasonable means of measurement. In 1996, Research Team (RT) 105, Project Team Communications Research Team, investigated ways of measuring the effectiveness of project communications and, on the basis of its findings, developed Implementation Resource 105-2, *Compass: Communications Project Assessment Tool*. The tool was designed to enable project managers to assess project team communications during the execution phases of an EPC project. The tool targets three project groups: project management, engineering, and construction. This research summary describes the development and capabilities of this tool and introduces the newly developed second version.

As part of its charter to manage the CII Body of Knowledge, the CII Knowledge Management Committee (KMC) reviewed and updated the original RT 105 publications in 2011. The KMC is now publishing this second version of the research summary, along with a revision of Implementation Resource 105-2 in the Microsoft Excel 2007 format. Version 2.0 of the Compass tool supports efficient data collection, analysis, and reporting of assessment results. The tool provides benchmarking results from 72 CII projects for comparison. It also permits more detailed analysis through the scoring of six critical categories of communication. These analyses help identify specific weaknesses in a project's communications and can be used in the development of improvement strategies. Communication scores can also be charted over multiple assessment periods, enabling trend analysis.

Introduction

Projects today are increasingly technically complex and schedule-driven. Their multi-disciplinary nature requires management and execution by highly skilled, task-organized project teams, with members drawn from both owner and contractor organizations. Throughout a project, relevant information must be identified and disseminated among team members. Thus, effective project team communications stand among the major challenges to a project's success.

While studies have highlighted the importance of effective communications for project success, little effort has been made to measure the effectiveness of communications. An important first step in improving project communications is the development of an assessment tool capable of providing essential diagnostic information. Such a tool must be simple to use and understand, impose a minimal administrative burden, and provide quantifiable summary results. The tool must also provide sufficient detail for the development of a communications improvement strategy. In addition, it must have the ability to make assessments over time, so that communications improvements can be monitored.

The primary objective of the CII Project Team Communications Research Team was to develop such a tool. Other objectives included the following:

- Identify relevant communications and success variables.
- Evaluate the relationship between communications effectiveness and project success.
- Develop a numerical communications effectiveness score that can be calculated for any project during the execution phases of the project.

- Identify specific areas requiring communications improvement and provide insight for corrective measures.
- Establish a baseline methodology and database for follow-up monitoring and assessment.

This is the second version of Research Summary 105-1, *Compass: An Assessment Tool for Improving Project Team Communications*. The first version, released in 1996, summarizes the research team's efforts at developing the Communications Project Assessment Tool (Compass). In 2011, the CII Knowledge Management Committee (KMC) reviewed the original documents as part of its charter to manage the CII Body of Knowledge. The KMC subsequently reformatted the original tool from an older Visual Basic program into the Excel workbook format. The new version of the software tool includes an updated version of the user's guide.