

The case for engineering crystal clear communication

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Anyone who has ever worked with an engineer knows their brilliance in design does not always translate into brilliance with words.

I recall my early encounters with engineers as a post-graduate student at the University of Queensland. I was fascinated by their ability to make sense out of the seemingly impossible through. The contrast in our 'lens' on the world – communication verses engineering - could not have been greater. Where I saw words and pictures, they saw numbers and boxes.

Yet never has there been a better and more timely reminder of the widespread ramifications and business implications of poor communication than the Queensland Flood's Commission of Inquiry and the stream of dam engineers admitting to their challenges.

One of the dam engineers openly confessed to his capability gap – 'It's 6 o'clock in the morning. I've been on for 12 hours. I'm an engineer. My English is crap.'

He is not alone. The days of calling in the comms people to 'tart things up' after the engineers have done their bit are over. Increasingly, engineers are expected to possess excellent communication skills as part of their professional toolkit.

At PRISM we believe that these critical skills can be taught and increasingly we are coaching and training senior engineers and project managers to act as the voice or face of their projects and company in the community.

Those engineers who truly 'get it' can make an enormous difference to the overall success of any project.

In his *Career Guide Book for Engineers* (2010), John Hoschette contends that the most common and noteworthy root cause for engineers being unsuccessful is inept or poor communication skills. 'Engineers get paid to solve complex problems using communication skills to bring together the resources, people and technical knowledge necessary for success.'

The poor communication skills of the Wivenhoe dam engineers may well prove to be the tipping point that triggers a multi-million dollar professional negligence claim by those people whose properties and homes were irreparably damaged by the January 2011 floods. It will be a sobering case study in the business case for crystal clear communication.



Services

- > Training and coaching
- > Strategy design and implementation

Useful links

- > Engineers may also be interested in reading [The Career Guide Book for Engineers](#) by John A. Hoschette, Wiley, 2010.
- > Blogger and former Microsoft executive Philip Su Rings In offers some particularly [helpful tips for introverted engineers](#)