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Member Communication Experience

Field-to-Office Communication

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Good communication between the field and office is essential to keeping a project on time and on budget. Keep everyone abreast of what each operation or department is doing, and whether any issues or miscommunication have arisen to avoid delays or errors that can cost thousands of dollars or more in construction rework, eating up your bottom-line profits.

A few ways that technology built for heavy construction can help improve field-to-office communications are:

TIME MANAGEMENT – Track employees' time individually with the ability to log lunches, breaks, and capture signatures.

EQUIPMENT INSPECTIONS – Perform quick inspections on mobile devices to make it a consistent part of your field team's process.

COST CODE WORK – Employees note what they worked on and cost code their work so foremen aren't guessing at the end of the day or week.

DOCUMENTATION – Quickly capture daily information from easy-to-answer questions.

SAFETY OBSERVATIONS – Record unsafe conditions with photos, description, and severity to build a culture of safety awareness and get ahead of issues before they happen.

VIEWING EMPLOYEE HOURS – Give employees visibility into the hours they logged to compare them to what has been approved including pay classes and overtime.

GPS LOCATION – Stamp all clock in/out locations with longitude and latitude for accurate site reporting.

MAINTENANCE REQUESTS – Submit equipment issues to the shop for immediate review and action to avoid downtime.

CHANGES IN PROJECT PLANS – Use digital plan sheets so all stakeholders have the most up-to-date plans, know when change orders come in and understand what those changes are.

IMPROVING BIDS – Give estimators quick access to production

history so they can find the most relevant, achievable production for a specific job and justify their numbers. When foremen can review estimators' notes, they better understand what the estimator was expecting to happen.

Improving communications between the field and office reduces conflicts that can occur when a project plan has been revised and some people are working from outdated information. Technology in the hands of the right people can drive valuable change to your business. Often, the field is overlooked even though it is precisely the location where money is made or lost.

Here are several tips to improve communication between the field and office:

Remove paper: Every jobsite document—timecards, plans, forms, safety meetings, inspections and truck tickets—should be digital, and thus searchable, up-to-date, and available as critical decision-making information instantly. Reducing risk, lowering costs and saving time are all valuable results of eliminating paper on your jobsite, but the true strength of going paperless is the real-time insight into job costs and productivity. Removing paper reduces time spent entering and processing data, removes the risk of errors and can save more than $10,000 per year per foreman in admin time and costly mistakes. All job information can be made viewable and searchable when all paper forms are digitized. Managers and the field can actively view field data and collaborate with each other, and the field gets immediate feedback on how they're performing versus the estimate and plan.

Digitize plans: By digitizing plans, everyone in the office and field has access to changes, notes, quick calculations and shared communication. Software exists that will manage all project documents, including permits, takeoff packages, drawings and more, and foremen can do their redlines and communicate about needs and changes in the field. Use digital plans that can update in one click for everyone so there's no more rework due to someone working from an outdated version of the plan, and no time wasted driving new plans sheets to jobsites.

Manage safety issues: Foremen can use a complete construction safety system to ensure compliance. By automating your safety processes, you can perform safety meetings in the field using relevant toolbox talks, fill out and submit safety forms and record any incidents or near misses as they happen in the field to communicate with the safety manager on the spot. When every person on a jobsite has easy-to-use tools available in the palm of their hand to document safety observations, inspections, incidents or near misses, everyone can be accountable for the culture of safety in your company.

Document and communicate all phases of the project. If notes are documented in the estimating or pre-construction phases, then the estimators' notes can be automatically shared with foremen on their daily timecards. Supervisors can use the notes to understand how the estimator planned the work and can notify the project manager ahead of time if actual production won't match the estimate. You can also track critical information like crew hours, equipment usage, cost codes, photos and more. This information can be sent to the project manager for approval in a timely manner. When project managers have daily visibility into all of their jobsite costs, they can make smart decisions about how to adjust their project plans to stay profitable and efficient. It also makes it easy to spot and avoid mistakes that might have taken a week or longer to notice with traditional cost tracking methods, massively reducing the financial impact of those mistakes.

Better communication between the field and office breaks barriers by keeping everyone informed on what is happening at any given time. The office will be alerted to delays or material shortages or equipment issues, allowing managers to step up and preempt costly situations before they occur, turning the jobsite into a well-orchestrated machine.

About the Author

Tom Webb is VP of strategic initiatives & customer relations at HCSS, a leading provider of innovative software that helps heavy civil businesses streamline their operations. Since 1986, HCSS, an AGC of America Capstone Supporter, has been developing software to help construction companies streamline their operations. Today, the company is recognized as a pioneer and trusted leader in estimating, operations, and fleet software, serving thousands of construction companies across the nation.

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