PMI®—Agile Certified Practitioner (PMI-ACP)®

Agile Communication

Objectives

simpl**i**learn
*your pace, your place*

After completing this lesson, you will be able to:

- Define project communication

- Differentiate between various types of project communication

- Describe Agile tooling

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Every project manager quickly learns that the most valuable technique for project success is communication. However, there are many different types of communication and not all of them are as effective at communicating ideas. Agile emphasizes that the most effective communication occurs face-to-face.
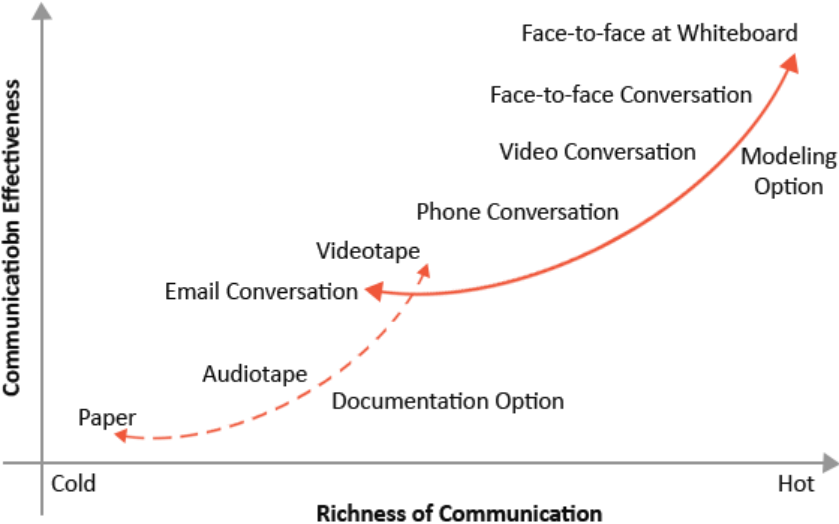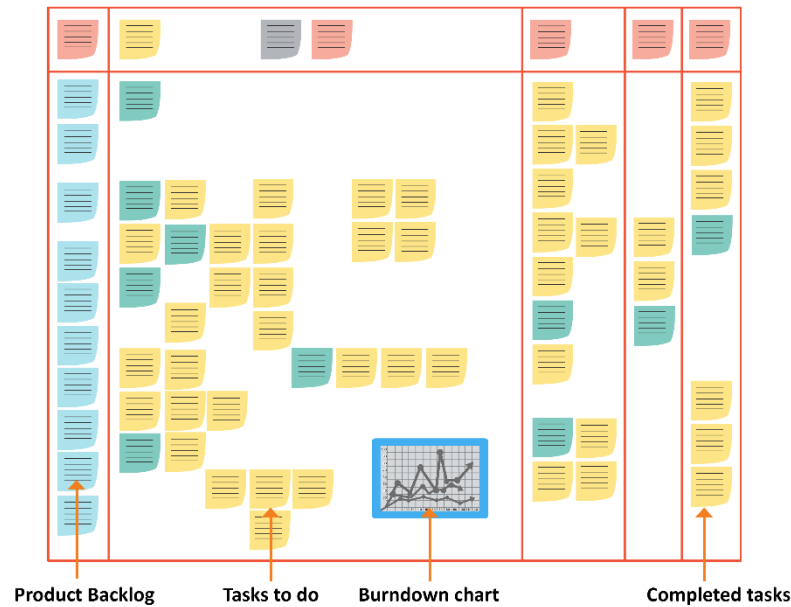
"An information radiator displays information in a place where passersby can see it. With information radiators, the passersby don't need to ask any question; the information simply hits them as they pass."—Alistair Cockburn

- This concept was invented by Alistair Cockburn.
- Information radiators enable team members to view the current state of the project and its progress.
- Most Agile teams implement it to some degree in their processes.
- Most popular information radiators are:
  - Task boards
  - Big visible charts (Includes burndown charts)
  - Continuous integration build health indicators (Including lava lamps and street lights)

Task Board

The image represents an example of task board which is used as information radiator during project implementation.

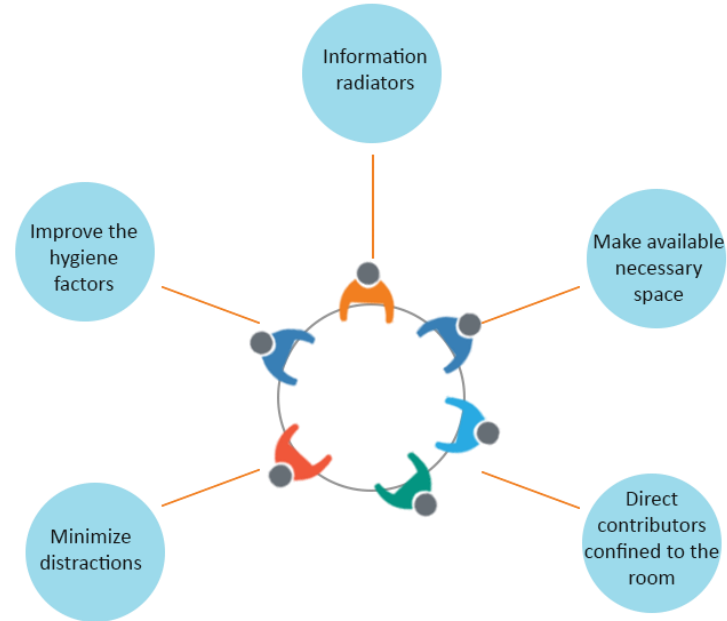**Product Backlog**   **Tasks to do**   **Burndown chart**   **Completed tasks**

These are a part of the information radiator family and are referenced as part of the Extreme Programming (XP).

- Intent for these is to provide information to the team and also non-team members, easily and without a lot of context
- These charts are casual, usually hand-drawn, big, and showcase important project information
- It's working when:
  - people stop and read the charts;
  - team members don't complain about updating them; and
  - they reflect the reality of the project.
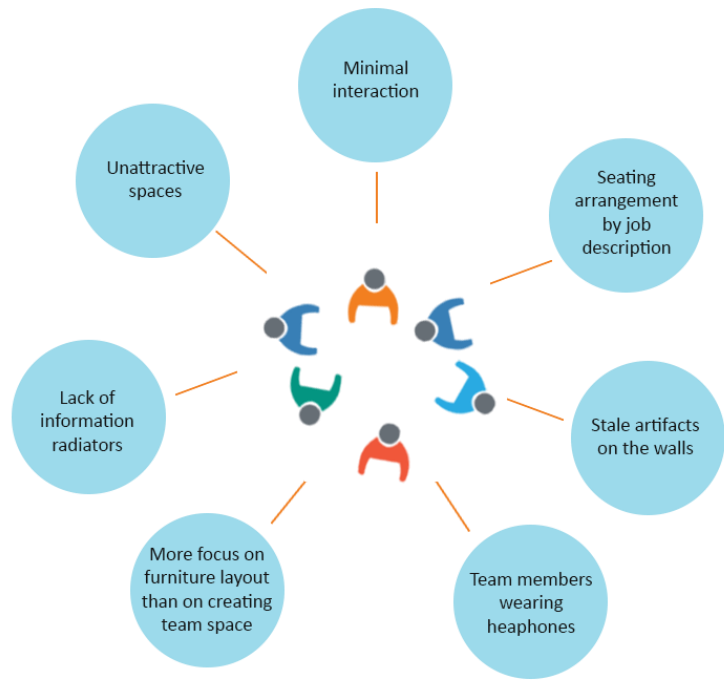
Effective information radiators should be:

- Simple: Brief and concise.

- Stark: Errors should not be masked, rather should be used to improve the work and performance.

- Current: Information displayed should be the latest.

- Transient: Once the problem has been rectified, it should be taken off from the chart.

- Influential: Empowers the team to take decisions.

- Highly visible: Easy to see and understand.

- Minimal in number: Not so many that they drown out other information.

Team space is sometimes referred to as a 'war room.' This involves getting the entire team together in one room and working on factors that foster communication as well as motivation leading to higher productivity.

Information radiators

Improve the hygiene factors

Make available necessary space

Minimize distractions

Direct contributors confined to the room

Signs of Bad Team Space

Bad team spaces can lead to chaotic and unproductive team output.

- Minimal interaction
- Seating arrangement by job description
- Stale artifacts on the walls
- Team members wearing heaphones
- More focus on furniture layout than on creating team space
- Lack of information radiators
- Unattractive spaces

Two types of teams can be identified.

Co-located Team

- Team members seated together in a room, creating a "war room"
- Issues resolved informally in a timely manner
- Incidental interaction leads to productivity
- Team decides which roles to adopt based on sprint goals
- Team leverage tactile, low cost solutions

Distributed Team

- Teams distributed geographically, either locally or globally
- Formal logging of knowledge
- Structured use of processes
- Explicit role definition via tasks
- Exploiting technology for collaboration

Osmotic communication occurs when information is overheard in the background of the team room and some of it is absorbed via osmosis.

Co-located Team

- Team members to be seated in a war room so as to overhear useful information
- Caves and Commons pattern: 'Caves': for phone calls, short meetings, or for team members to concentrate
- 'Commons': open, shared workspaces for the team where osmotic communication occurs

Distributed Team

- Use of live video conferencing
- Use of group chat Instant Messaging
- When sending mail, choose the recipient(s) and CC the rest of the team
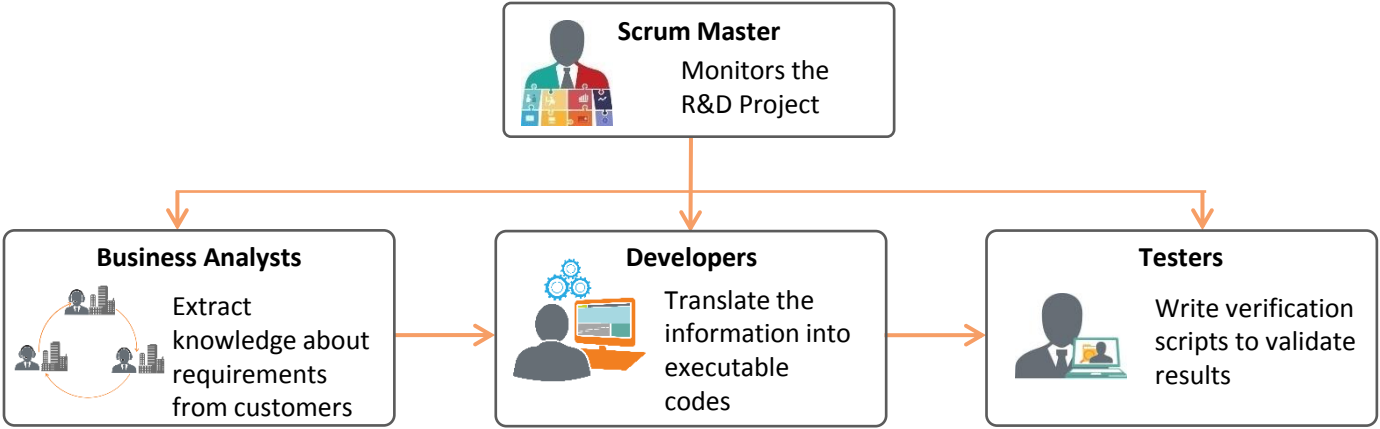- Forums or corporate information hubs

Daily stand-up meetings share progress on the sprint or iteration. Team members stand to keep the meeting focused and short. The stand-up is where each team member makes a commitment on what they will complete for the rest of the team to hear.

- Scrum specifies that the meetings should be timeboxed to 15 minutes.
- Only 'committed' team members are involved, with each participant answering 3 questions:
  - What did you do yesterday?
  - What will you do today?
  - What's in your way?

Multiple Open source tools are available are:

- Agile specific project management tools (e.g. xplanner)

- Continuous integration build tools (e.g. cruise control)

- Automated testing tools (e.g. Junit, Fitnesse)

- Agile software configuration management tools (e.g. subversion)

Communication Gap—Example

Natasha Lisovskii, the Scrum Master at Nutri Worldwide was monitoring an R&D project of developing a new Customer Relationship Management software package. Despite following Agile methodology, the project was behind schedule. The graphic below shows how the team members were working in silos and communicating through e-mails and physical documents.

Scrum Master
Monitors the R&D Project

Business Analysts
Extract knowledge about requirements from customers

Developers
Translate the information into executable codes

Testers
Write verification scripts to validate results

List the changes that the Agile coach should implement to reduce the communication gap within the team.

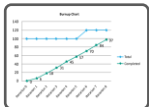Listed are some of the recommended changes to help the team overcome the issues faced:

Ensure daily stand up meetings are conducted.

Use minimal documentation and increase face to face communication.

Use Kanban/Task board to track the progress of the user stories.

Use Burnup and Burndown charts to show the progress of the sprint and release.

Introduce video and audio conferencing facilities.

Real Life Example

Tony Orlando, the Executive Vice President of Sales and Marketing at Fairfax was asked about the primary reason behind project failures. The reason cited was the contradictory goals of different stakeholders working on the same project. The graphic below showcases the challenge faced.

Lack of communication between different stakeholders

Developer

Wants to write good and clean codes

Marketing, Sales, and Finance Personnel

Want the product to succeed

Customer

Demands a good user experience

Tony cited that the failure of new initiatives was due to disconnect between business units (marketing, sales, and finance) and IT goals. It was out of these seemingly contradictory goals that the Agile development framework was born, and its principles are very important in business today. In Agile, the focus shifts from the project to the product. The graphic below shows the communication channels and iterations required for the success of the organization.

Collaboration and communication between different stakeholders

Developer   **Marketing, Sales, and Finance Personnel**   **Customer**

Quiz

QUIZ 1

Which of the following is not a sign of bad Agile team spaces?

a. Ugly spaces

b. Appropriate information radiators in the workspace

c. Minimal interaction

d. Stale artifacts

QUIZ 1

Which of the following is not a sign of bad Agile team spaces?

a. Ugly spaces

b. Appropriate information radiators in the workspace

c. Minimal interaction

d. Stale artifacts

Answer: b.

Explanation: Appropriate information radiators is a sign of ideal Agile team spaces. All the other options listed are signs of bad agile team spaces.

QUIZ 2

Which of the following is most true about the daily stand-up meeting?

a. The team gets together to discuss the status

b. It is a meeting to discuss the problems only

c. They are not status sessions for the project manager

d. It is a two minute stand-up meeting for the management team

QUIZ 2

Which of the following is most true about the daily stand-up meeting?

a. The team gets together to discuss the status

b. It is a meeting to discuss the problems only

c. They are not status sessions for the project manager

d. It is a two minute stand-up meeting for the management team

Answer: c.

Explanation: Daily stand-up meetings are not status sessions for the project manager; rather they are team member commitments in front of the team.

QUIZ 3	Which of the following is the most effective communication under the modeling options?

a.   Voice communication

b.   Video communication

c.   Face-to-face communication

d.   Email

QUIZ 3	Which of the following is the most effective communication under the modeling options?

a.   Voice communication

b.   Video communication

c.   Face-to-face communication

d.   Email

Answer: c.

Explanation: Face-to-face communication is the best form of communication under the modeling options.

| QUIZ 4 | Which of the following is not a characteristic of an ideal information radiator? |

a. Simple

b. Current

c. Influential

d. Permanent

| QUIZ 4 | Which of the following is not a characteristic of an ideal information radiator? |

a. Simple

b. Current

c. Influential

d. Permanent

Answer: d.

Explanation: Information radiators should be transient. Problems or errors, once rectified should be removed so as to show progress in the project.

QUIZ
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Can osmotic communication occur with a distributed team?

a. Yes, if they use IM, have a live video feed, and email cc lists

b. Yes, all communication is osmotic

c. No, osmotic communication can only occur in person

d. No, distributed teams can not truly apply agile techniques

QUIZ 5

Can osmotic communication occur with a distributed team?

a. Yes, if they use IM, have a live video feed, and email cc lists

b. Yes, all communication is osmotic

c. No, osmotic communication can only occur in person

d. No, distributed teams can not truly apply agile techniques

Answer: a.

Explanation: Although osmotic communications are best applied in team room settings, a virtual experience can be achieved using tooling like IM, live video feeds, email, and other information sharing techniques.

QUIZ 6

Which of the following is not a reflection of a co-located team?

a. Issues resolved informally, in a timely manner

b. Incidental interaction leads to productivity

c. Formal logging of knowledge

d. Team leverage tactile, low cost solutions like whiteboards, post-its, and index cards

QUIZ 6	Which of the following is not a reflection of a co-located team?

a.   Issues resolved informally, in a timely manner

b.   Incidental interaction leads to productivity

c.   Formal logging of knowledge

d.   Team leverage tactile, low cost solutions like whiteboards, post-its, and index cards

Answer: c.

Explanation: Distributed teams rely more on formal logging of knowledge, co-located team can rely more on informal information sharing and osmotic communication.

QUIZ 7

What are the caves and commons?

a. A shared workspace for the team and a closed door room for private conversations

b. A design pattern found in many web based architectures

c. Caves are senior team members while the commons are for average team members

d. The sprint backlog is referred to as the caves while the product backlog is the commons

QUIZ 8

Which of the following is not part of the daily stand-up set of questions?

a. What did you do yesterday?

b. What will you do tomorrow?

c. What is the your current velocity?

d. What's in your way?

QUIZ 8

Which of the following is not part of the daily stand-up set of questions?

a.   What did you do yesterday?

b.   What will you do tomorrow?

c.   What is the your current velocity?

d.   What's in your way?

Answer: c.

Explanation: Velocity is a metric that is determined at the completion of a sprint or iteration. It is not part of the daily stand-up.

Summary

Here is a quick recap of what was covered in this lesson:

- The most valuable technique for project success is Communication.

- In documentation and modelling communication methods, more the human interaction, more enriched and effective the communication.

- An information radiator displays information in a place where passersby can see it and there are three broad types.

- There are differences in co-located and distributed teams as well as tools and techniques that work well with both of them.

- Osmotic communication occurs when information is overheard in the background of the team room and some of it is absorbed via osmosis.

THANK YOU