



Session 9

Project Communications Management

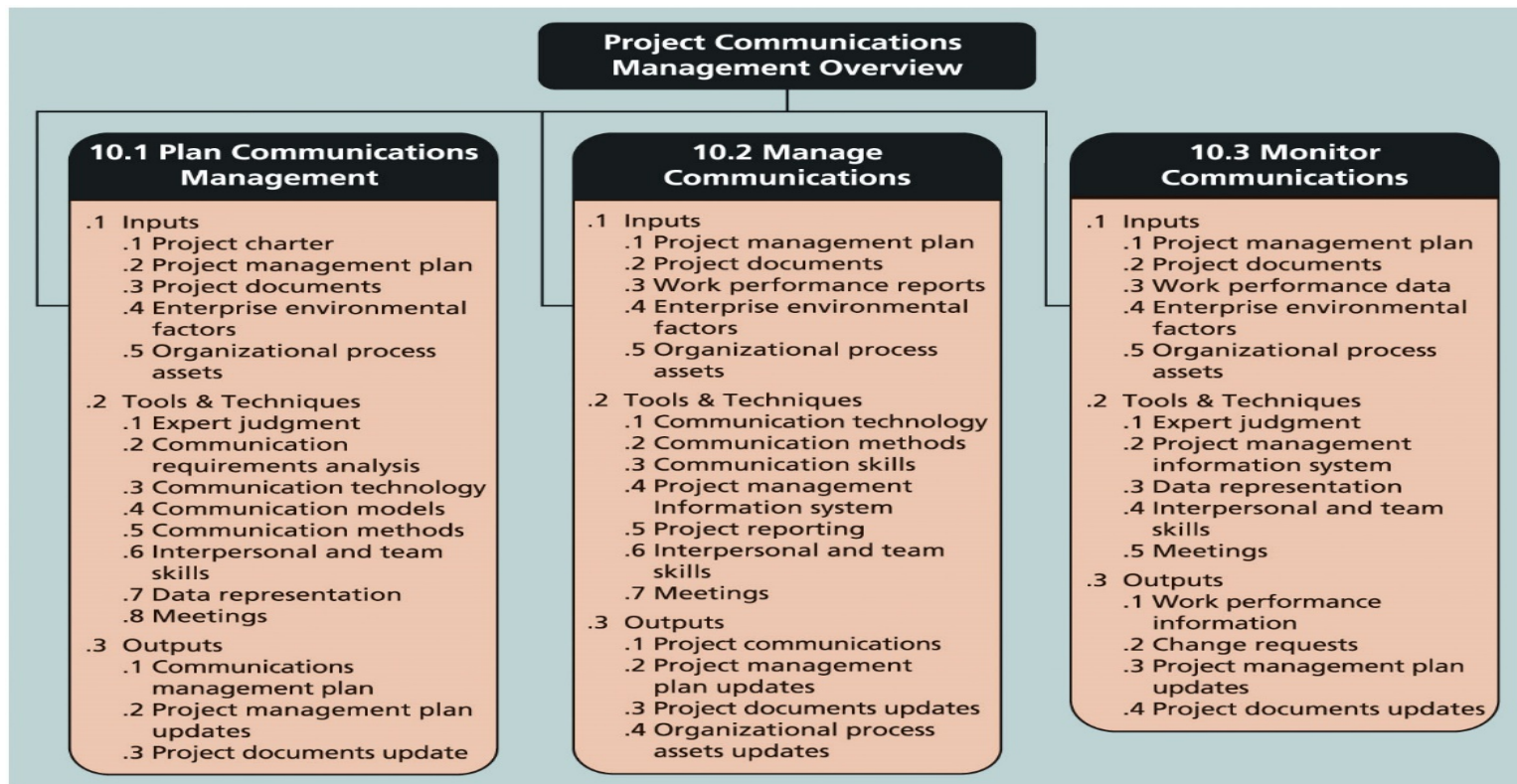
Learning Objectives

- Discuss the role of soft skills in IT project management, and highlight the importance of good communications as one means of achieving project success
- Review key concepts related to communications
- Explain the elements of planning project communications and how to create a communications management plan
- Describe how to manage communications, including communication technologies, media, and performance reporting
- Discuss methods for controlling communications to ensure that information needs are met throughout the life of the project
- List various methods for improving project communications, such as running effective meetings, using various technologies effectively, and using templates
- Discuss considerations for agile/adaptive environments

The Importance of Project Communications Management

- Greatest threat to many projects is a failure to communicate
 - You cannot totally separate technical skills and soft skills when working on IT projects
 - For projects to succeed, every project team member needs both types of skills
- Main processes in project communications management
 - Planning communications management
 - Managing communications
 - Monitoring communications

The Importance of Project Communications Management



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FIGURE 10-1 Project communications management overview

Keys to Good Communications

- Project managers say they spend as much as 90 percent of their time communicating
 - Several important concepts can help
 - *Focus on group and individual communication needs*
 - *Use formal and informal methods for communicating*
 - *Distribute important information in an effective and timely manner*
 - *Set the stage for communicating bad news*
 - *Determine the number of communication channels*

Focusing on Group and Individual Communication Needs

- People are not interchangeable parts
 - As illustrated in Brooks' book *The Mythical Man-Month*, you cannot assume that a task originally scheduled to take two months of one person's time can be done in one month by two people
- Every person is unique, so you cannot simply generalize based on a personality profile or other traits
 - Seek first to understand, as author Stephen Covey suggests in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*
 - Put yourself in someone else's shoes before you can truly communicate

What Went Wrong?

- Amusing examples of miscommunications are common, especially when they involve the use of new technologies
 - Example: right click (on the computer mouse) versus writing the word click

Formal and Informal Methods for Communicating

- Many people prefer informal communications
 - Several colleagues and managers want to know the people working on their projects and develop a trusting relationship with them
 - Oral communication also helps build stronger relationships among project personnel and project stakeholders
 - Effective creation and distribution of information depends on project managers and project team members having good communication skills

Distributing Information in an Effective and Timely Manner

- Important considerations
 - Include detailed technical information that affects critical performance features of products or services
 - Document any changes in technical specifications that might affect product performance
 - Report bad news
 - Have short, frequent meetings

Setting the Stage for Communicating Bad News

- It is important to put information in context, especially if it's bad news
 - If there is a problem, know how it will affect the whole project and the organization
 - Recommend steps to take to mitigate a problem
- Project managers should know how a major problem might affect the bottom line of the organization
 - Use leadership skills to handle the challenge

Determining the Number of Communications Channels

- As the number of people involved increases, the complexity of communications increases
 - More communications channels or pathways through which people can communicate
 - Number of communications channels = $n(n-1)/2$
(where n is the number of people involved)

Determining the Number of Communications Channels

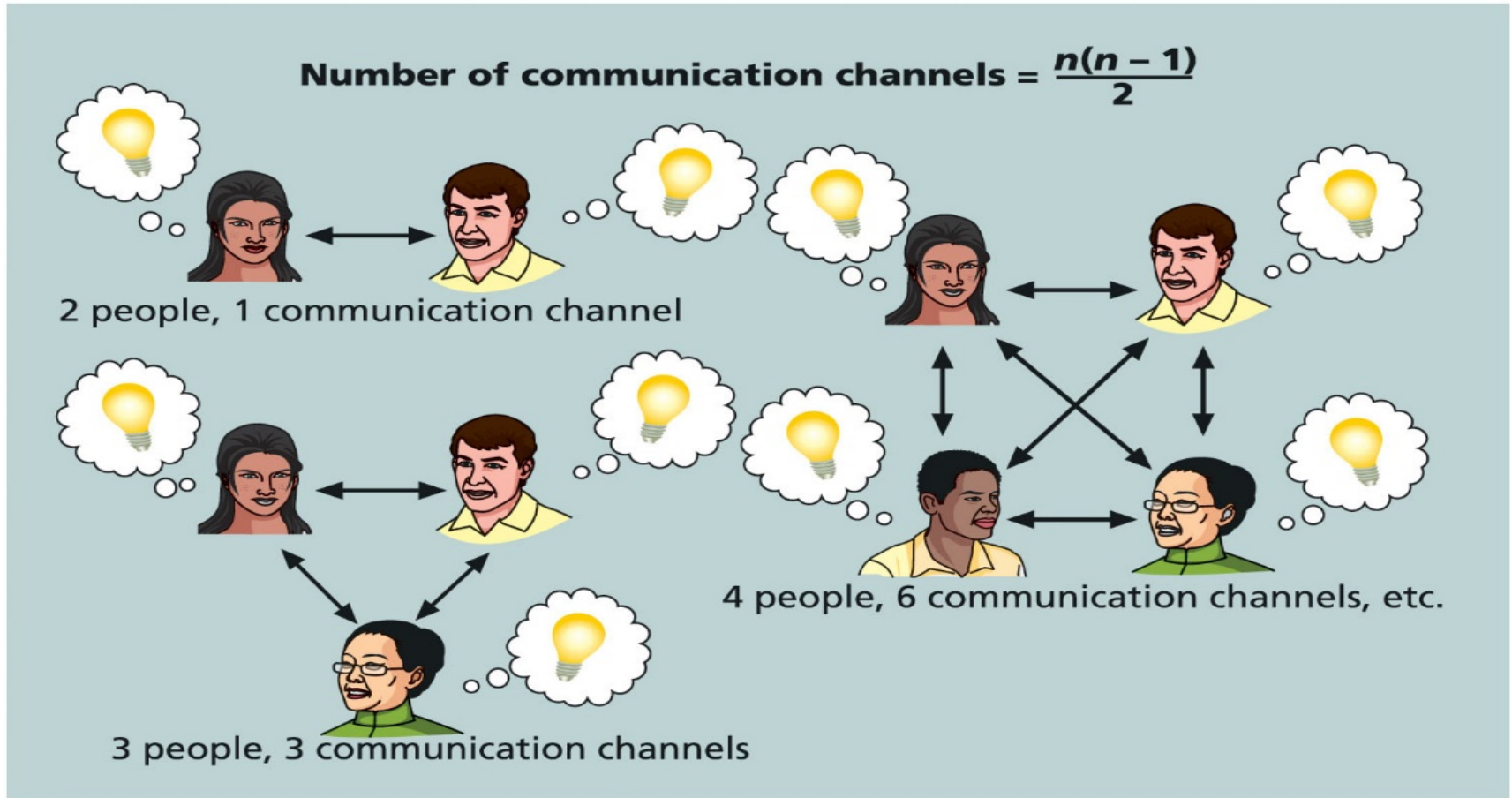


FIGURE 10-2 The impact of the number of people on communication channels

Planning Communications Management

- Every project should include some type of communications management plan
 - Guides project communications
 - Varies with the needs of the project, but some type of written plan should always be prepared
 - For small projects, the communications management plan can be part of the team contract
 - For large projects, it should be a separate document

Planning Communications Management

- Communications management plan contents
 - *Stakeholder communications requirements*
 - *Information to be communicated, including format, content, and level of detail*
 - *Who will receive the information and who will produce it*
 - *Suggested methods or technologies for conveying the information*
 - *Frequency of communication*
 - *Escalation procedures for resolving issues*
 - *Revision procedures for updating the communications management plan*
 - *A glossary of common terminology*

Planning Communications Management

Sample stakeholder communications analysis

| Stakeholders | Document Name | Document Format | Contact Person | Due |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|
| Customer management | Monthly status report | Hard copy and meeting | Tina Erndt, Tom Silva | First of month |
| Customer business staff | Monthly status report | Hard copy | Julie Grant, Sergey Cristobal | First of month |
| Customer technical staff | Monthly status report | E-mail | Li Chau, Nancy Michaels | First of month |
| Internal management | Monthly status report | Hard copy and meeting | Bob Thomson | First of month |
| Internal business and technical staff | Monthly status report | Intranet | Angie Liu | First of month |
| Training subcontractor | Training plan | Hard copy | Jonathan Kraus | November 1 |
| Software subcontractor | Software implementation plan | E-mail | Najwa Gates | June 1 |

Comments: Put the titles and dates of documents in e-mail headings and have recipients acknowledge receipt.

Managing Communications

- Managing communications is a large part of a project manager's job
 - Getting project information to the right people at the right time and in a useful format is just as important as developing the information in the first place
- Important considerations
 - *Use of technology*
 - *Appropriate methods and media to use*
 - *Performance reporting*

Using Technology to Enhance Creation and Distribution

- Technology can facilitate the process of creating and distributing information, when used effectively
 - It is important to select the appropriate communication method and media

Global Issues

- Natural disasters often disrupt communications around the world
 - Japan's communications infrastructure damage after a 9.0 magnitude earthquake in March 2011 was unprecedented
 - During the April 2015 earthquake in Nepal, people turned to older technology like ham radios to communicate
 - Danish researchers are working on a new device called Reachi to aid communications during natural disasters

Selecting the Appropriate Communication Methods and Media

- Classifications for communication methods
 - ***Interactive communication:*** two or more people interact to exchange information via meetings, phone calls, or video conferencing
 - Most effective way to ensure common understanding
 - ***Push communication:*** information is sent or pushed to recipients without their request via reports, e-mails, faxes, voice mails, and other means
 - Ensures that the information is distributed, but does not ensure that it was received or understood
 - ***Pull communication:*** information is sent to recipients at their request via websites, bulletin boards, e-learning, knowledge repositories like blogs, and other means

What Went Wrong?

- Collaboration is a key driver of overall performance of companies around the world
 - Of all the collaboration technologies that were studied, three were more commonly present in high-performing companies than in low-performing ones: Web conferencing, audio conferencing, and meeting-scheduler technologies
- Study showed there are regional differences in how people in various countries prefer to communicate with one another
 - Follow-up study showed that the highest returns were in the areas of sales performance and innovations and new product development

Reporting Performance

- Performance reporting keeps stakeholders informed about how resources are being used to achieve project objectives
 - *Progress reports* describe what the project team has accomplished during a certain period of time
 - *Status reports* describe where the project stands at a specific point in time
 - *Forecasts* predict future project status and progress based on past information and trends

Monitoring Communications

- Main goal of monitoring communications is to ensure the optimal flow of information throughout the entire project life cycle
 - *The project manager and project team should use expert judgment, project management information systems, data representation, interpersonal and team skills, and meetings to assess how well communications are working*
 - If problems exist, the project manager and team need to take action, which often requires changes to the earlier processes of planning and managing project communications
 - *It is often beneficial to have a facilitator from outside the project team assess how well communications are working*

Suggestions for Improving Project Communications

- Good communication is vital to the management and success of IT projects
 - *Develop better communication skills*
 - *Run effective meetings*
 - *Use e-mail and other technologies effectively*
 - *Employ templates for project communications*

Developing Better Communication Skills

- Most companies spend a lot of money on technical training for employees, even when employees might benefit more from communications training
 - *Individual employees are more likely to enroll voluntarily in classes to learn the latest technology than in classes that develop soft skills*
 - *As organizations become more global, they realize they must invest in ways to improve communication with people from different countries and cultures*
 - *It takes leadership to improve communication*

Media Snapshot

- 93 percent of recruiters check out social media profiles of prospective hires
 - 2014 article in *Money* magazine provides a list of “10 Social Media Blunders That Cost Millennial a Job or Worse”
 - Posting something embarrassing on the corporate Twitter feed
 - Sexual oversharing
 - Revealing company secrets
 - Blowing your own cover
 - Talking smack about a job before you’ve even accepted it
 - Making fun of clients or donors
 - Making fun of your boss/team
 - Posting while you’re supposed to be working
 - Complaining about your job
 - Drinking in a photo—even if you’re over 21

Running Effective Meetings

- Guidelines to help improve time spent at meetings
 - *Determine if a meeting can be avoided*
 - *Define the purpose and intended outcome of the meeting*
 - *Determine who should attend the meeting*
 - *Provide an agenda to participants before the meeting*
 - *Prepare handouts and visual aids, and make logistical arrangements ahead of time*
 - *Run the meeting professionally*
 - *Set the ground rules for the meeting*
 - *Build relationships*

Using E-Mail, Instant Messaging, Texting, Kanban Boards, and Collaborative Tools Effectively

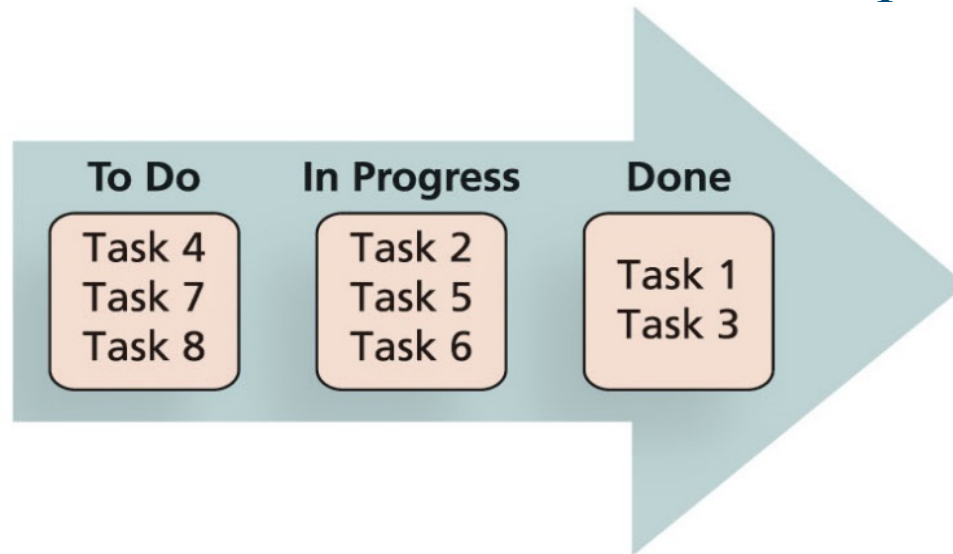
- Guidelines to use e-mail as a more effective communication tool
 - *Be sure to send information to the right people*
 - *Use meaningful subject lines and limit the content of emails to one main subject*
 - *Be as clear and concise as possible*
 - *Reread your e-mail before you send it*
 - *Limit the number and size of e-mail attachments*
 - *Delete e-mail that you do not need to save or that does not require a response*
 - *Make sure the virus protection software is up to date*
 - *Respond to e-mail quickly*
 - *If you need to keep e-mail, file each message appropriately*

Using E-Mail, Instant Messaging, Texting, Kanban Boards, and Collaborative Tools Effectively

- Guidelines to help use other communication tools more effectively
 - *Make sure that your team is using a good tool*
 - *Be sure to authorize the right people to share your collaborative documents*
 - *Make sure that the right person can authorize changes to shared documents and that you back up files*
 - *Develop a logical structure for organizing and filing shared documents*

Best Practice

- One of the main features of kanban is visualizing workflow, which is often done by using kanban boards
 - People using kanban boards can tailor the concepts to meet



Source: Kathy Schwalbe, *An Introduction to Project Management*, Fifth Edition (2015)

FIGURE 10-3 Sample kanban board

Using Templates for Project Communications

- Many people are afraid to ask for help
 - *Providing examples and templates for project communications saves time and money*
 - *Finding, developing, and sharing relevant templates and sample documents are important tasks for many project managers*
- The project manager and project team members should prepare a lessons-learned report
 - Reflective statement that documents important information they have learned from working on the project
- Project teams can use one of the many software products available to assist in project communications through the Web
 - Vary considerably in price and functionality

Using Templates for Project Communications

Project X Description

Objective: Describe the objective of the project in one or two sentences. Focus on the business benefits of doing the project.

Scope: Briefly describe the scope of the project. What business functions are involved, and what are the main products the project will produce?

Assumptions: Summarize the most critical assumptions for the project.

Cost: Provide the total estimated cost of the project. If desired, list the total cost each year.

Schedule: Provide summary information from the project's Gantt chart, as shown. Focus on summary tasks and milestones.

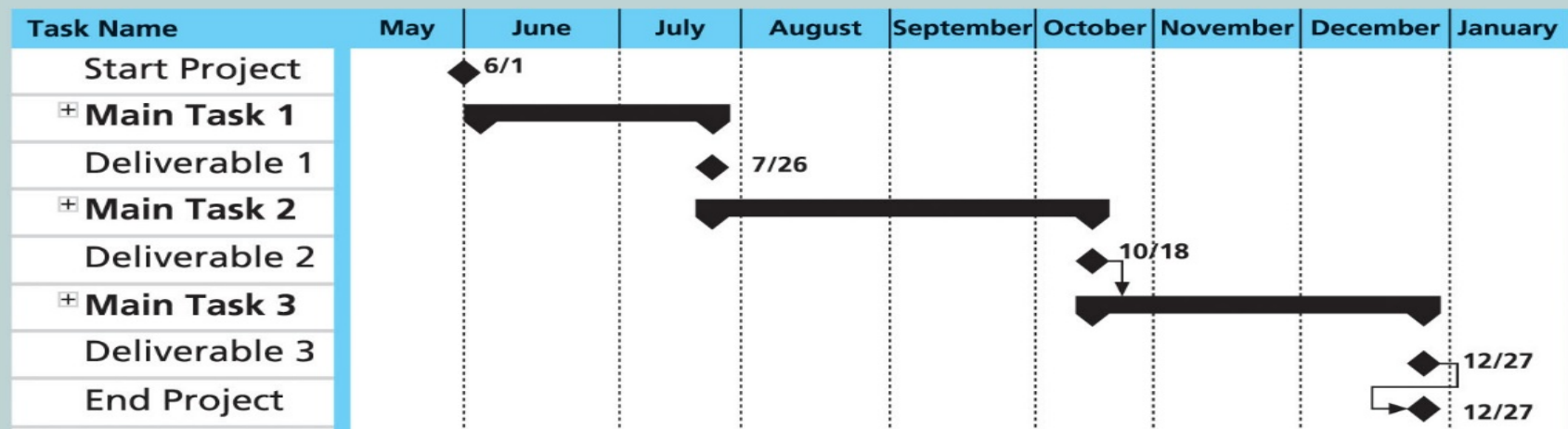


FIGURE 10-4 Sample template for a project description

Using Templates for Project Communications



“It’s in Basecamp.”

Instead of stuff scattered all over the place — strewn across separate products, lost in inboxes, or scrawled on stickies or notepads — Basecamp brings everything your company’s working on under one roof. Organized, centralized, and clear so everyone knows where everything is, what to do, and where things stand.

Source: Basecamp

FIGURE 10-5 Basecamp core tools

Using Templates for Project Communications



Source: Atlassian

FIGURE 10-6 Jira agile reporting

Using Software to Assist in Project Communications

- Many organizations are discovering how valuable project management software can be in communicating project information across the organization
 - *Project management software can provide different views of information to help meet various communication needs*
 - *Often, one of the biggest communication problems on projects is providing the most recent project plans, Gantt charts, specifications, meeting information, and change requests to stakeholders in a timely fashion*
 - *Most project management software allows users to insert hyperlinks to other project-related files*

Using Software to Assist in Project Communications

- Many project management software products also provide tools to enhance communications
 - Portfolio management
 - Resource management
 - Project collaboration
- Even with all of the technology available, many organizations have problems communicating on global projects
 - Issues with timing, audio, and video
 - Differences in culture and language

Considerations For Agile/Adaptive Environments

- Communications should be up to date, easily available, and reviewed regularly with stakeholders
 - *Many projects involve people who do not work in close proximity to each other- Virtual Teams*
 - Effectively planning for good project communications and using appropriate technology become even more important in these situations

Considerations For Agile/Adaptive Environments

- Communication is among the more important factors for success in project management
 - *Technology can aid in the communications process and be the easiest aspect of the process to address, it is not the most important*
 - *Improving an organization's ability to communicate is vital; often requires a cultural change in an organization that takes a lot of time, hard work, and patience*

Chapter Summary

- Failure to communicate is often the greatest threat to the success of any project, especially IT projects
 - Communication is the oil that keeps a project running smoothly
 - Project communications management involves planning communications management, managing communications, and controlling communications
- Project managers can spend as much as 90 percent of their time on communicating
 - There are several keys to good communications
- A communications management plan of some type should be created for all projects to help ensure good communications
 - Contents will vary based on the needs of the project

Chapter Summary

- Managing communication includes creating and distributing project information
 - Various methods for distributing project information include formal, informal, written, and verbal
- To improve project communications, project managers and their teams must develop their communication skills
 - Suggestions for improving project communications include learning how to run more effective meetings, how to use e-mail, instant messaging, texting, kanban boards, and collaborative software more effectively, and how to use templates for project communications
- New hardware and software continue to become available to help improve communications.