Chapter 4
Planning for Communications

Objectives of this Chapter:

- ✓ **Understanding the demand of communications**
- ✓ **Building an effective communication management plan**
- ✓ **Determining which stakeholders need communication**
- ✓ **Defining the communications modality**

The Importance of Communicating Effectively

In software project management you must be able to communicate with the project team about many important things, including:

➢ **Changes in the technology**

➢ **Nuances of the software being created**

➢ **Demands being made by the customer**

• You and the project team must have a clear understanding about what the project is creating, the demands of the project stakeholders, and your expectations about the project deliverables.

• If a communication breakdown occurs, it'll compound issues, and no one, especially you, will be happy.

Ensuring accurate communication

➢ 1. **Document your conversations in e-mails, memos, or meeting minutes.**

➢ 2. **Sign where the line is dotted.**

Here are some typical things you and the project sponsor or project customer both need to sign:

• **Scope statement**

• **Scope changes**

• **Budget**

• **Schedule**

 3. **Document scope, time, or cost compromises**

 4. **Take minutes**

 5. **Set an agenda**

How not to communicate

You can't deny that poor communication includes poor writing. Here's what you can do:

❖ Take time to proofread and edit your e-mails before sending them out to the world.

❖ If you're not much of a writer, try to keep your missives short and simple.

❖ Only send e-mail when you absolutely have to or if no other form of communication will work.

❖ Never put into an e-mail what you wouldn't say to someone's face. Performance evaluations — even compliments — should always be communicated verbally.

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Care and Feeding of Nerds

Here's what you need to realize when it comes to programmers:

✓ They are smart people

✓ They are creative

✓ They can understand intangible things.

✓ They often communicate in absolutes

✓ They are proud of their work.

✓ They're often in demand

Facing the risks of communication meltdowns

The risk of a communication breakdown is that problems that could have been easily solved haunt your project.

Here are some risks of miscommunication, in order of severity, along with possible solutions:

- **Problem: Wasted time**
- **Problem: Wasted money**
- **Problem: Frustration**
- **Problem: Lack of confidence**

Managing communications across the enterprise

Here's what you can do to avoid the problems we've dealt with:

• Educate end users about the changing software and take steps to ensure that they understand what's coming to them

• Maintain proper communication levels

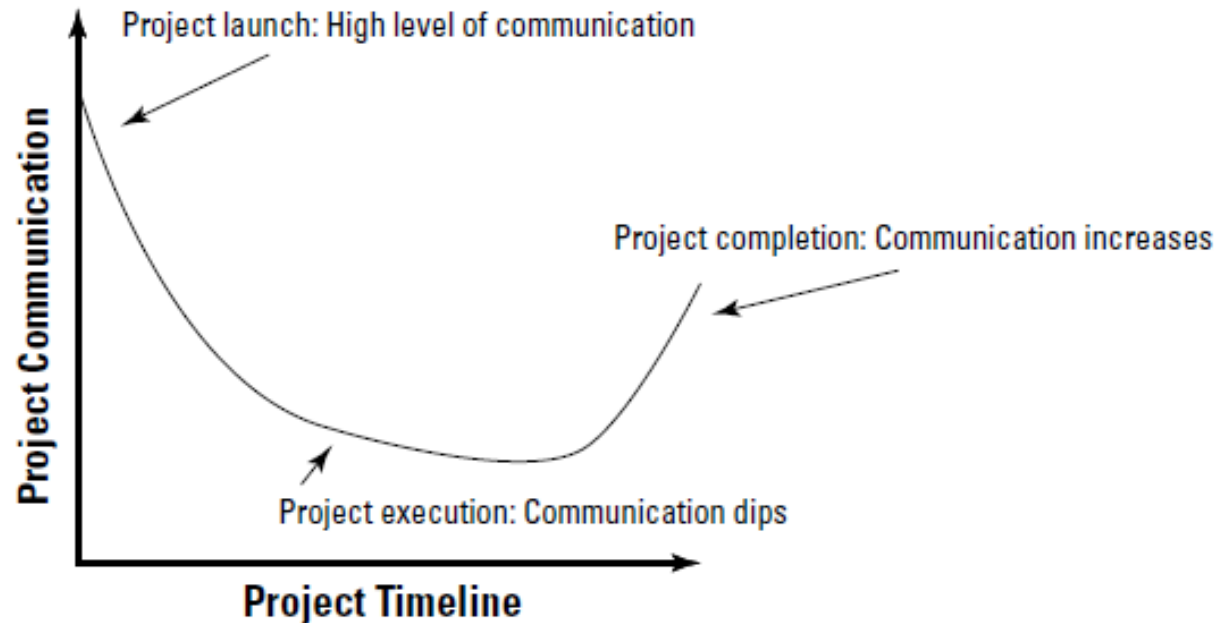# Fig 1: Communications typically dip during the project execution Processes
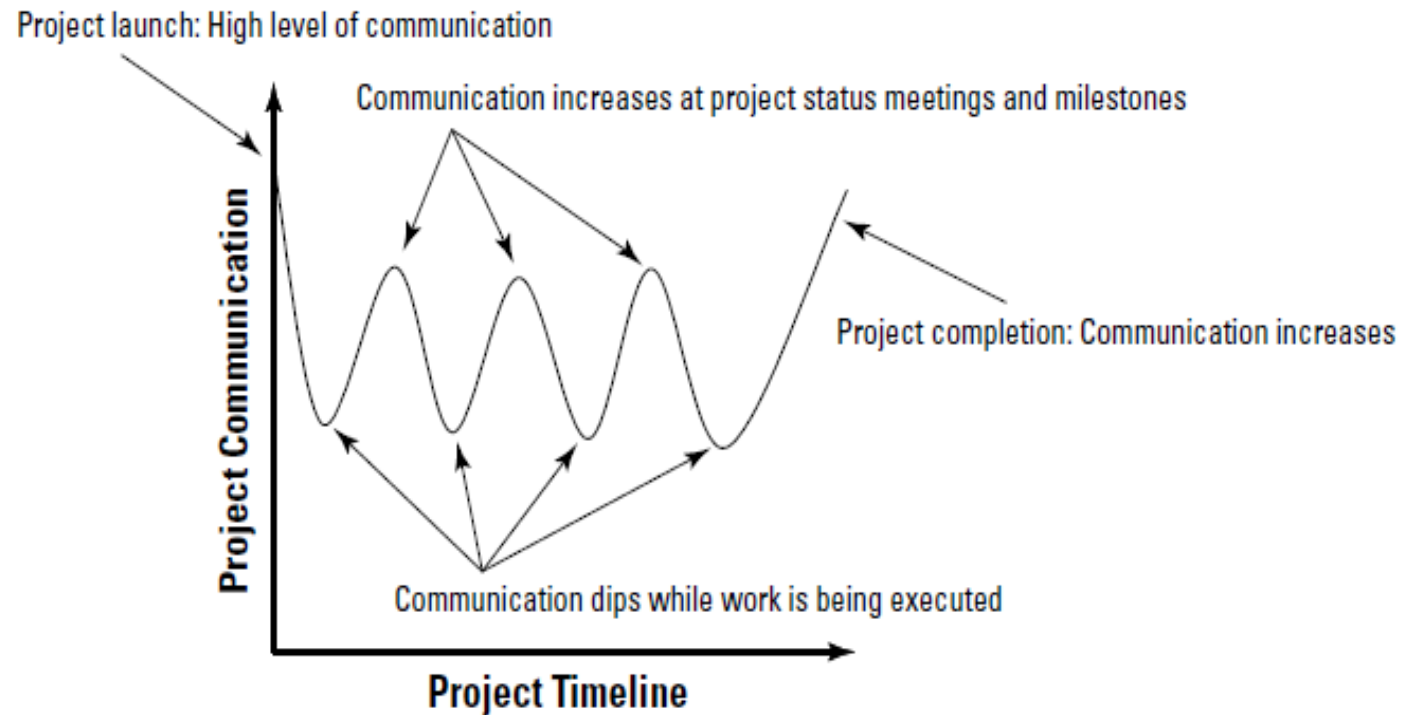
Fig 2: Communications should reflect the project progressions

Project launch: High level of communication

Communication increases at project status meetings and milestones

Project Communication

Project completion: Communication increases

Communication dips while work is being executed

Project Timeline

Calculating the Communication Channels

Here's what you can do to avoid the problems we've dealt with:

• Present a professional image of the organization

• Enable photographers to search for filters for their cameras

• Enable customers to place and pay for orders

• Enable customers to upload digital images and to test the effects of the various filters your client sells

• Enable photographers to create a free photo album displaying their work

• Offer a database of sample photographs for customers to search and explore based on different conditions such as lighting, subject, and camera type

• Provide an ongoing series of articles about photography, which users can search by topic

• Keep a database of users for repeat business

Knowing the six things every communication plan needs

Here are six demands that your communication management plan makes:

➢Communication explanation

➢Purpose

➢Frequency

➢Modality

➢Duration

➢Responsibility

Defining Who Needs What Information

Every organization is broken down into three distinct layers, as Figure 4-4 demonstrates.

Each layer has its own project objectives with various communication needs:

- **Executive: Executives set the vision for the organization.**

- **Functional management: Managers determine the functions, tactics,** and strategies for the entities within the organization.

- **Operations: The workers perform activities to support the endeavors of** the organization, satisfying the tactics set up by functional management, and supporting the vision of the organization, set up by the executives.

Defining Who Needs What Information

- Steering Committee Meetings
- Project Presentations
- Project Summary Reports

- Project Status Meetings
- Written Status Reports
- E-mail Updates
- Newsletters

- Project Status Meetings
- Informal Meetings
- Written Status Reports
- Issues Database
- E-mail Updates
- Newsletters

Executive — — — — — — — — Vision

Functional Management — — — — — — Tactics

Operations — — Day-to-Day
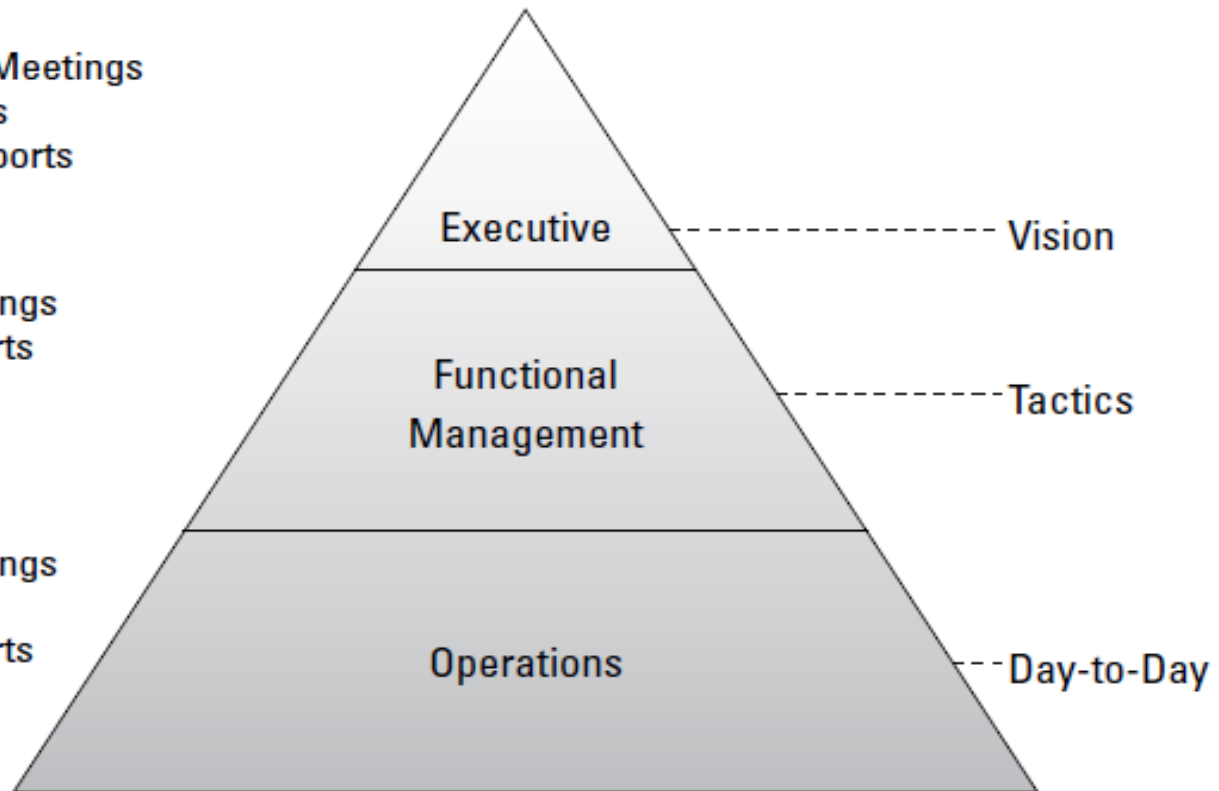
What executives want to hear

Here are some general guidelines for talking with executives:

❖ Keep it simple and quick.

❖ Follow your plan

❖ Be direct

❖ Set up project summary reports as needed

What functional managers need to hear

Basically, managers want to know how your project affects them.

Managers often have their employees on your project team. They want to know:

✓ When you'll need their resources to work on your project
✓ How their resources will contribute to your project
✓ How their employees are performing on the project
✓ Whether your project is performing to expectations

What your project team needs to hear

Here's what programmers must hear from you:

➢What activities are pending

➢What activities are lagging

➢What risks are looming

➢What issues are being resolved

➢Recognition

What you need to hear

➢ **Progress**

➢ **Issues**

➢ **Risks**

Some project team members may feel as if they're letting you down if they tell you about pending or new risks they've identified.

Encourage them to share discovered risks so you and the team can deal with them.

✓ **Change orders**

✓ **Change orders**

Defining When Communication Is Needed

Creating a communication schedule

You will also want to schedule a few other odds and ends in your calendar:

1. Team member performance reviews

2. Milestone reports

3. Meetings: Because so much of project management centers on communication, you must schedule lots of meetings:

A.   Planning sessions

B.   Risk management meetings

C.   Procurement management meetings

4. Cash flow forecasting

Hosting team and stakeholder meetings

Meeting agendas should include the following:

•Purpose of the meeting

• Scheduled start and finish time, as well as the location of the meeting

• Participants of the meeting

• Items to be discussed in the meeting

• Review of action items

Hosting a key stakeholder meeting

Stakeholder meetings usually come in one of five of the following flavors:

❑Stakeholder analysis meetings

❑Scope management meetings

❑Training sessions

❑Status reporting

❑Scope verification meetings

Defining Communication Modalities

- *Modality is just a fancy way of clarifying the form communication takes.*
- *Some* communication should be paper-based, while other communication should be electronic.
- On other occasions, a formal, face-to-face presentation is the necessary modality.

1. Modalities for formal communication

A. Presentations

B. Reports

C. Conference/phone calls

D. E-mail

2. Modalities for informal communication

A. E-mail

B. Ad-hoc meetings

C. Instant messaging and text messaging

D. Coffee talk

THANKS