

College of Management Project Communications

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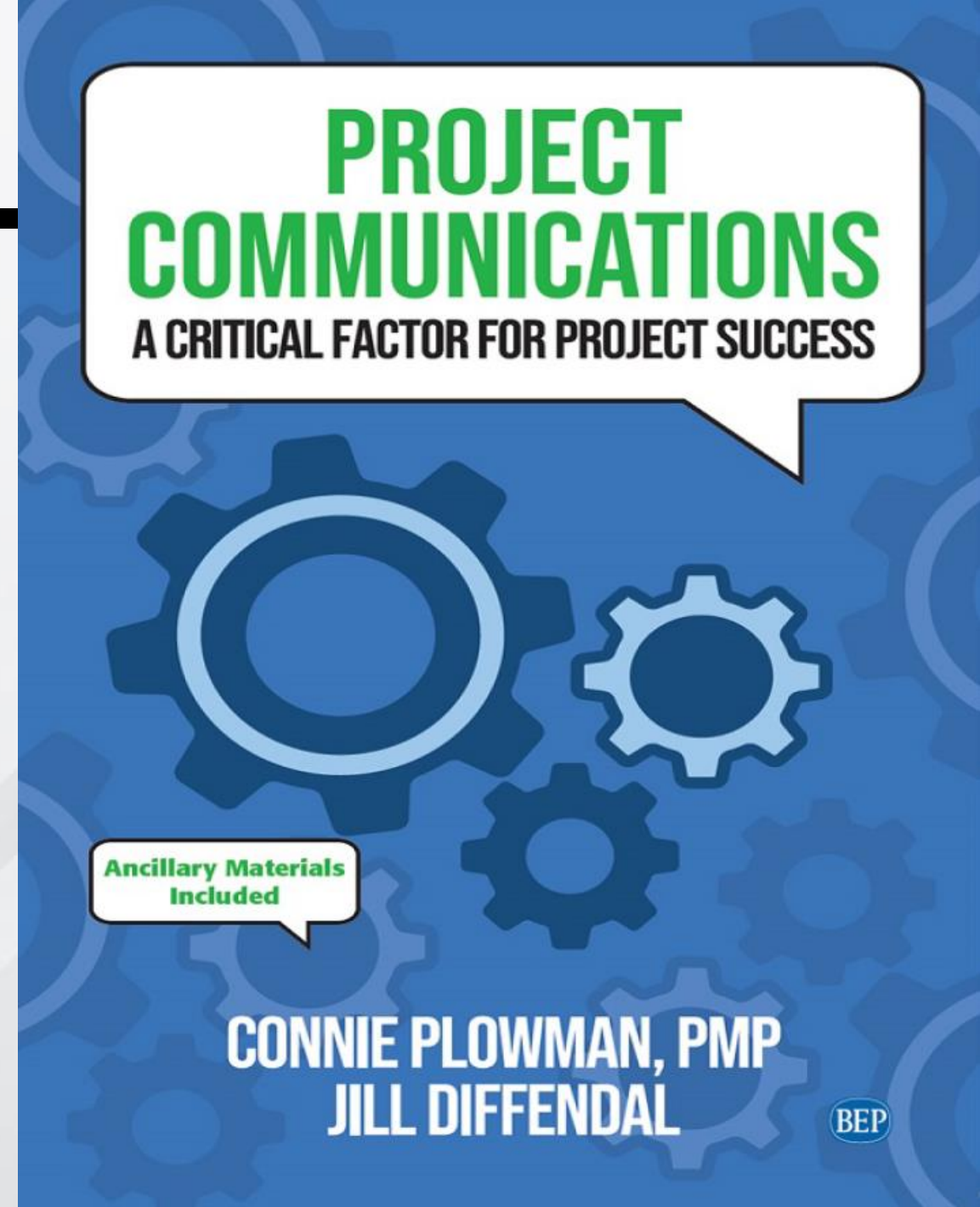
PMG 112

Lecture 02



Reference Book:

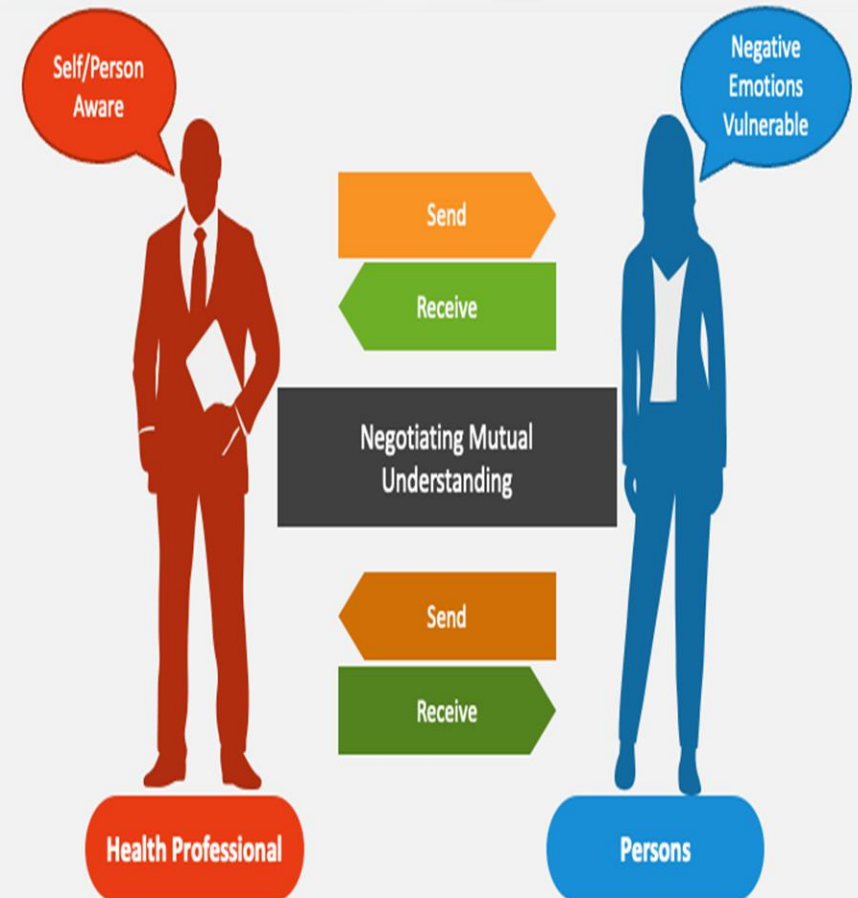
- **Ch1:** Introduction.
- **Ch2:** Exploring Communication Theories.
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Chapter 2: Exploring Communication Theories

The purpose of this chapter is to help you:

- Understand why people communicate by looking at two different communication theories that focus on communication as a way people handle uncertainty.
- Evaluate the impact of the quality as well as the quantity of communication in a project.
- See the connection between effective communication and stakeholder trust.



Exploring Communication Theories

Communication and Uncertainty



Most project managers and team members will already be familiar with the term uncertainty; typically, however, it is associated with risk management.

Exploring Communication Theories

Uncertainty, Risks and Communication

- **Risks** are uncertain events or conditions that can affect projects positively or negatively. The process of risk management is oriented toward identifying and managing these uncertainties so that they do not interfere with the accomplishment of project objectives.
- In the field of communication, however, **uncertainty** is a cognitive and emotional state that motivates people's actions (or inactions) and behaviors.



Exploring Communication Theories

Uncertainty, Risks and Communication

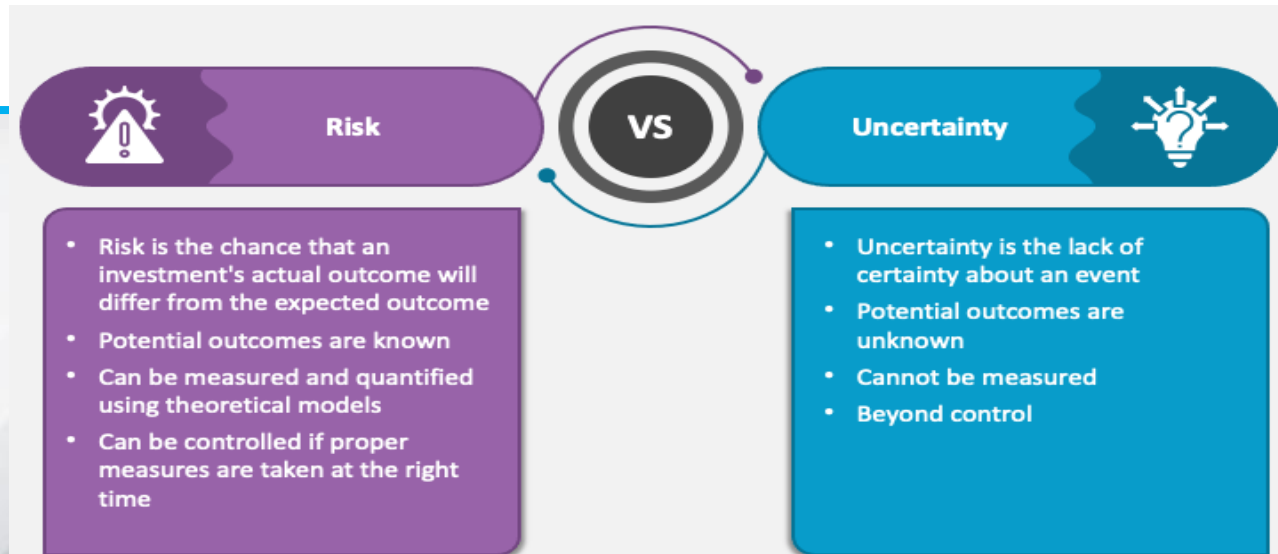
- In both the communication world and the project world, **uncertainty** is about not knowing what will happen.
- In a project, **uncertainty** affects the project itself—it could positively or negatively impact processes or outcomes of the project. Project uncertainty is evaluated by how far the project could deviate from the plan.



Exploring Communication Theories

Uncertainty, Risks and Communication

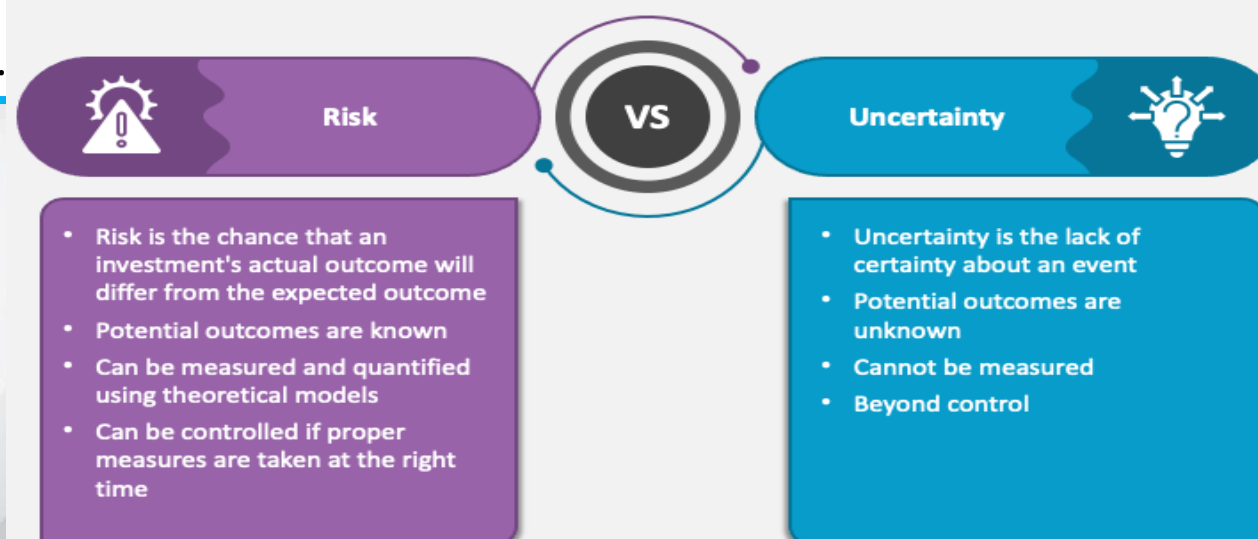
- It is addressed or managed by considering the likelihood and potential impact of the uncertain condition, and by planning for different strategies and alternatives should the uncertain condition occur.
- When it comes to communication theory, **uncertainty** affects the person rather than the project. An individual evaluates uncertainty based on the perception of how it will affect him or her.



Exploring Communication Theories

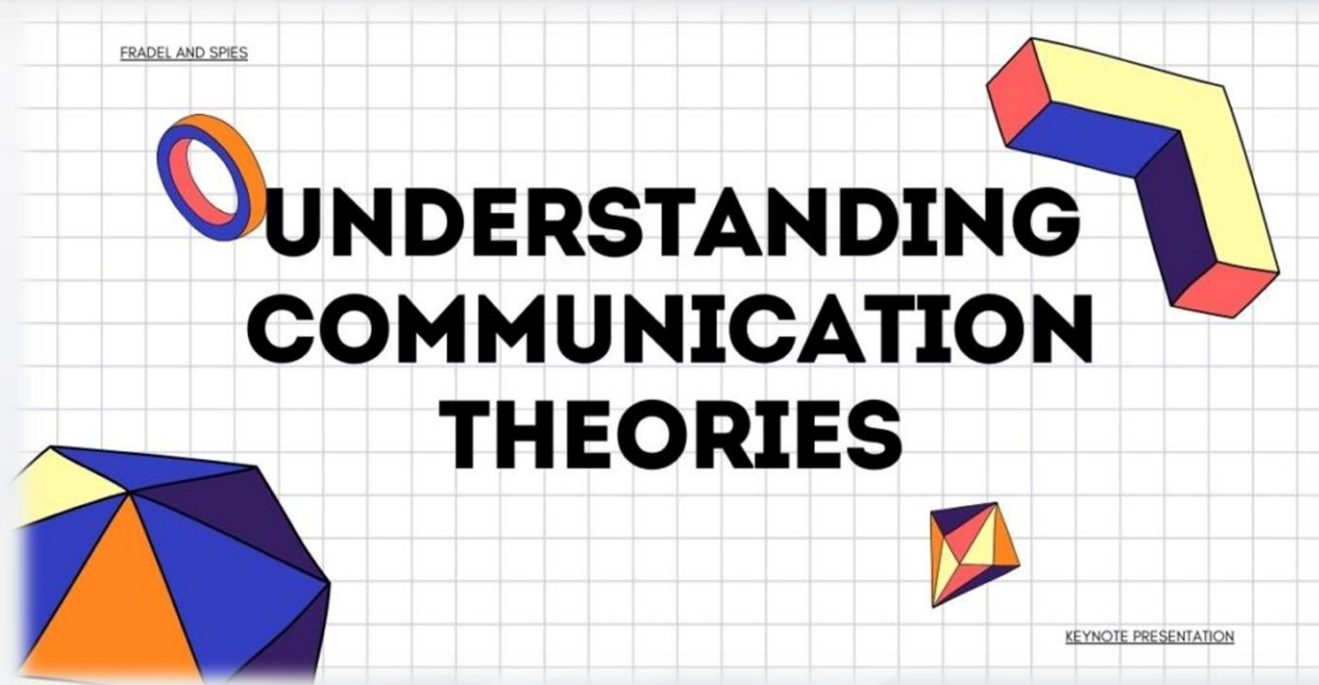
Uncertainty, Risks and Communication

- Just as project teams use **risk** management techniques to address the uncertainties in a project, individuals use communication to address the uncertainties in their lives.
- The project team attempts to address many of the uncertainties about the project (for example, estimating cost, schedule, scope, and regulatory or environmental impacts) through project planning and risk identification activities.



Exploring Communication Theories

Communication theories

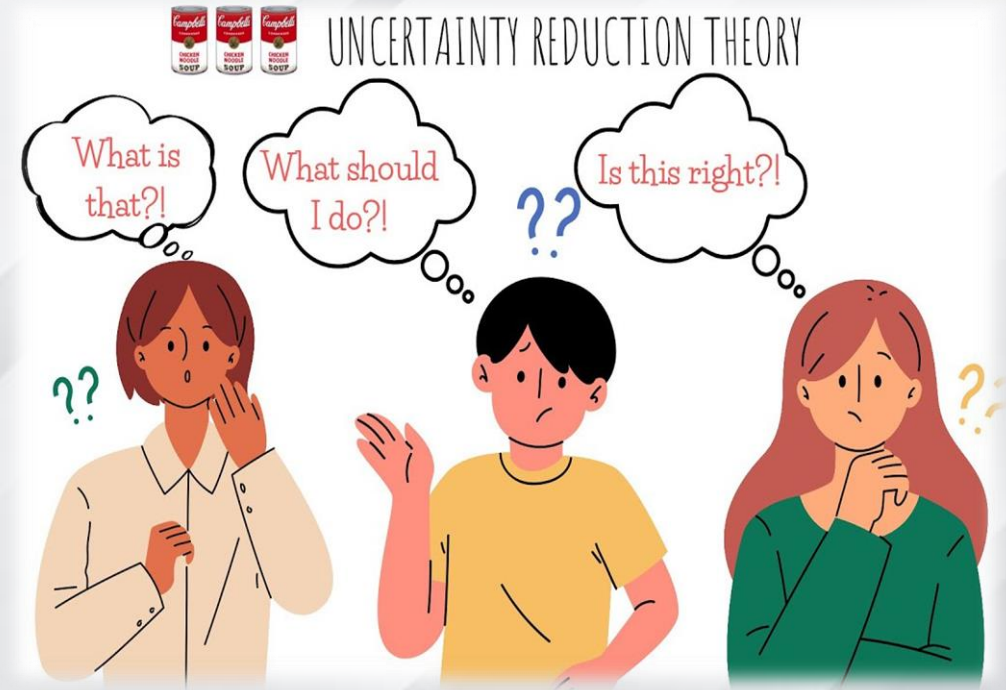


Two communication theories that specifically focus on uncertainty, and how people use communication to manage it: uncertainty reduction theory and uncertainty management theory.

Exploring Communication Theories

1. Uncertainty Reduction Theory

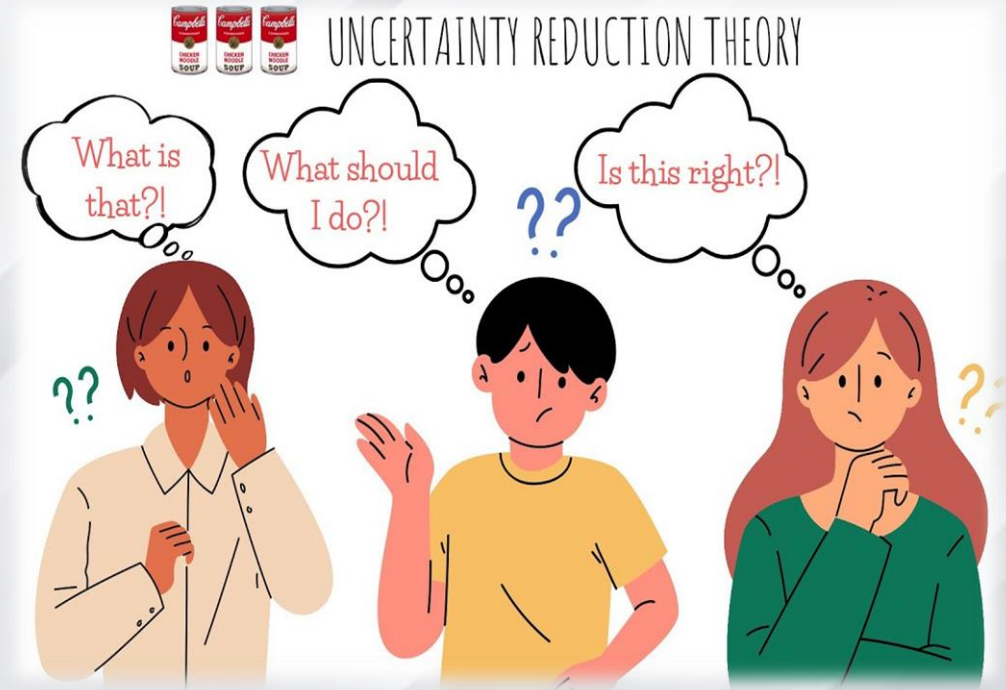
- **Uncertainty Reduction Theory** the older and more well-known of the two theories we will review, defines uncertainty as “having a number of possible alternative predictions or explanations.
- This theory presumes that people always try to reduce or make sense of uncertainty from a cognitive, information-based perspective.
- Information acquisition, including communication, is the primary means by which people deal with uncertainty.



Exploring Communication Theories

1. Uncertainty Reduction Theory

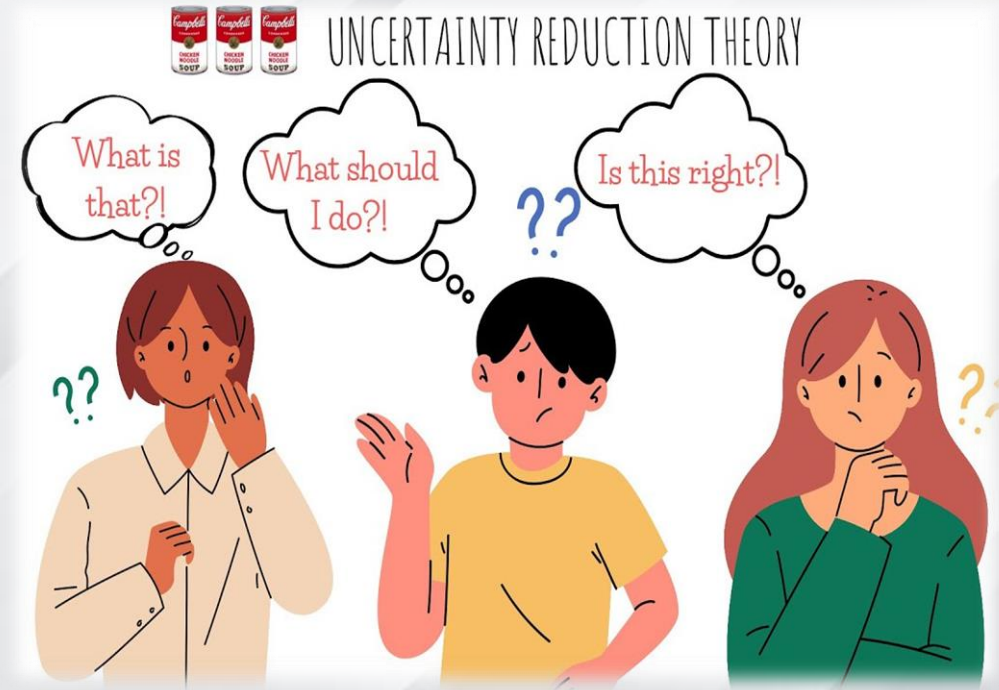
- Two of the main principles of URT can help us understand how uncertainty motivates people to communicate in the context of a project.
- The first of these principle states that, “Efforts to reduce uncertainty are linked to the likelihood of future interactions and reward potential of the other person.
- The second principle of URT we will review here explains that people reduce uncertainty through knowledge acquisition.



Exploring Communication Theories

1. Uncertainty Reduction Theory

- **Three main strategies people use to do this:**
- **Passive:** Observing other people without actually interacting with them.
- **Active:** Using indirect methods to collect information about the other person (e.g., conducting an internet search, or asking others about them).
- **Interactive:** Seeking information through direct contact with the person (a face-to-face conversation, phone call, e-mail, etc.).



Exploring Communication Theories

2. Uncertainty Management Theory

- **Uncertainty Management Theory** was developed a few decades later. It builds on the work of URT but broadens the impact of uncertainty beyond the cognitive realm to the emotional realm.
- This addition of the emotional aspect helps explain why, in practice, people do not always attempt to reduce uncertainty.



Exploring Communication Theories

2. Uncertainty Management Theory

- **UMT** states that “uncertainty exists when details of situations are ambiguous, complex, unpredictable, or probabilistic; when information is unavailable or inconsistent; and when people feel insecure in their own state of knowledge or the state of knowledge in general.



Exploring Communication Theories

2. Uncertainty Management Theory

- **UMT** proposes that people react to uncertainty based on how they evaluate the relevance of the uncertainty to their lives, and how they react emotionally to the uncertainty, i.e., do they view it as a threat or as an opportunity?.
- In a project, a stakeholder's appraisal of and emotional reaction to uncertainty can help explain the communication actions they take (or do not take):



Exploring Communication Theories

Comparison of uncertainty reduction and uncertainty management theories

Theory	Uncertainty reduction theory	Uncertainty management theory
Definition of uncertainty	Uncertainty is a cognitive state based on an individual's knowledge, and is separate from emotion.	Uncertainty is both a cognitive (knowledge-based) and emotional state.
Evaluation of uncertainty	Uncertainty is always bad.	Uncertainty could be good or bad.
Behaviors that result from uncertainty	People will communicate in order to reduce uncertainty.	People may or may not communicate to reduce uncertainty based on how they evaluate the probability, impact, and emotional reaction to the uncertainty.

Exploring Communication Theories

Communication theories

- The person subjectively experiences an emotional reaction to the uncertainty that is either positive, negative, or neutral. This is the primary way that UMT differs from URT.
- **A person reacts positively** if the uncertainty could be beneficial, or if they tend toward optimism.
- **A person reacts negatively** if they perceive danger, and may even panic if the reaction is extreme.
- **Neutral reactions**, generally, occur if the person sees the uncertainty as irrelevant or inconsequential.

Exploring Communication Theories

Uncertainty and Effective Communication



As a project manager, how do you tackle these stakeholder uncertainties that can impact your project? Through communication! Specifically, by communicating enough (quantity) and by communicating well (quality).

Exploring Communication Theories

Quantity of Communication

- People can't act on, or react to, information they do not have. If information is a primary way to reduce or manage uncertainty, lack of communication limits stakeholders' ability to make sense of the situation and make decisions about how to think, feel, and act.
- **Quantity of information doesn't necessarily mean sending more e-mails** –most workers already feel like their inboxes are flooded. But you do need to ensure information is available to people when and how they need it.

Exploring Communication Theories

Quantity of Communication

Quality over Quantity



Exploring Communication Theories

Quantity of Communication

- Another aspect to consider is that communication is not all verbal; in fact, much of it is not. A significant amount of meaning is communicated through physical cues (facial expressions and body language) and voice (tone, inflection, and other vocal cues outside of the words themselves).
- This means that communications you are delivering through methods that use only text or voice will have reduced effectiveness.

Exploring Communication Theories

Quantity of Communication

- Virtual teams especially can be impacted by this. When there is limited face-to-face interaction, even via methods such as video calls, teams can struggle to develop an effective approach to working together because the opportunities to reduce uncertainty are decreased.
- If the vast majority of the team's interactions are, in fact, virtual, the team will need to work harder to compensate for the lack of nonverbal communication.

Exploring Communication Theories

Quantity of Communication



Exploring Communication Theories

Quality of Communication

- High-quality communication gets your message across clearly and effectively.
- Quality communication requires that the person sending the message must make sure that the message he or she wants to send is accurately received.
- **One way** to do this is to be clear and specific about what you are communicating. If you need a task completed by 3 p.m. tomorrow, don't just say "tomorrow afternoon."

Exploring Communication Theories

Quality of Communication

When communicating an assignment or request, provide as much **SMART** information as you can.



Exploring Communication Theories

Quality of Communication

- When communicating an assignment or request, provide as much **SMART** information as you can.
- **Specific:** What is the scope of what needs to be done? Make sure the assignment is clearly defined.
- **Measurable:** How will you determine completion/success? State any metrics or parameters for measuring and tracking progress.

Exploring Communication Theories

Quality of Communication

- When communicating an assignment or request, provide as much **SMART** information as you can.
- **Attainable**: Is what you are asking attainable in the parameters given? Ask for feedback on this from the team member(s) involved.
- **Relevant**: Have you tied the task to the overall project goals? Ensure team members involved understand why this task is important.
- **Time-bound**: What is the deadline for this task? Be as precise as you can.

Exploring Communication Theories

Quality of Communication

- **Another way** to communicate clearly is to limit your use of vocabulary that is not universally understood, a.k.a. jargon.
- **A third way** to ensure quality of communication is to seek feedback from the receiver to verify that they understood what you intended to communicate.

You can consider feedback a means of quality assurance in your communications.

Exploring Communication Theories

Reducing Uncertainty Builds Trust



Uncertainty is closely tied to trust.

Exploring Communication Theories

Reducing Uncertainty Builds Trust

When you think about whether you trust someone, what factors do you consider?

- Most people count honesty (presenting information accurately and truthfully) and reliability (doing what you say you will do) as major factors in trusting others. Both factors speak to the level of uncertainty you have about the other person's words and resultant behaviors.



Exploring Communication Theories

Reducing Uncertainty Builds Trust

- In a team environment like a project, trust is critical to success. Trust results in high-functioning teams that exhibit dedication to successful project outcomes and are often willing to take personal risks to advance common goals.
- It also results in stakeholders that develop and maintain support for the project and the project team.



Exploring Communication Theories

Reducing Uncertainty Builds Trust

- **On the other hand**, there are consequences when a team lacks trust.
- It's not just about reduced performance; it is a cycle that feeds itself. Just as good communication cultivates trust, lack of trust can lead to poor communication.
- **In lack of trust**, members may delay communication, or reduce quality of communication by giving insufficient knowledge and misinforming.



Exploring Communication Theories

Reducing Uncertainty Builds Trust

- Stakeholders who do not trust the project team can withhold support and even delay or derail the project entirely.
- Trust is “the most essential ingredient in effective communication. It’s the foundational principle that holds all relationships.



Exploring Communication Theories

Reducing Uncertainty Builds Trust

How might trust impact team performance?

WHEN WE TRUST



We expect others to
behave positively
towards us...



So, we may tolerate
more vulnerability &
uncertainty...



...and tend to work better
with others and stay
focused on team goals.

Exploring Communication Theories

Reducing Uncertainty Builds Trust

How might trust impact team performance?

WHEN WE DON'T TRUST



We might be more suspicious of how others may act towards us...



We can become defensive, trying to reduce our vulnerability...



We may lose sight of team goals and focus on personal interests.

Exploring Communication Theories

Trust in project teams

- Trust, at a project team level, involves communication, commitment, collaboration and competence – in other words, social interactions.
1. **Communication** with one another: should be consistent and meaningful so as to avoid miscommunication
 2. **Commitment** to a team: helps teammates meet goals and able to rely on one another.



Exploring Communication Theories

Trust in project teams

- Trust, at a project team level, involves communication, commitment, collaboration and competence – in other words, social interactions.
- 3. Collaboration:** allows sharing of ideas and building stronger bonds through working with each other
- 4. Competence:** in fulfilling roles and responsibilities, and completing assigned tasks



Exploring Communication Theories

Lecture Summary

- **Project communication** starts by building on a solid foundation—an understanding through communication theory of why people communicate, and what happens when they communicate ineffectively.
- **Two communication theories** that apply well to project communications are URT and UMT. These theories view uncertainty as a primary motivation to communicate (or not to communicate). People use communication as a tool to gain information that will reduce their uncertainty.

Exploring Communication Theories

Lecture Summary

- Understanding uncertainty as a motivator can help project managers and stakeholders appreciate the value of communication as a means to manage uncertainty, and therefore manage the project.
- **Two ways to manage uncertainty** are to ensure sufficient quantity and high quality of communications. These strategies for good communication can help build trust among project team members and outside stakeholders, which is a key factor in project success.



Thank You