

College of Management

Project Communications

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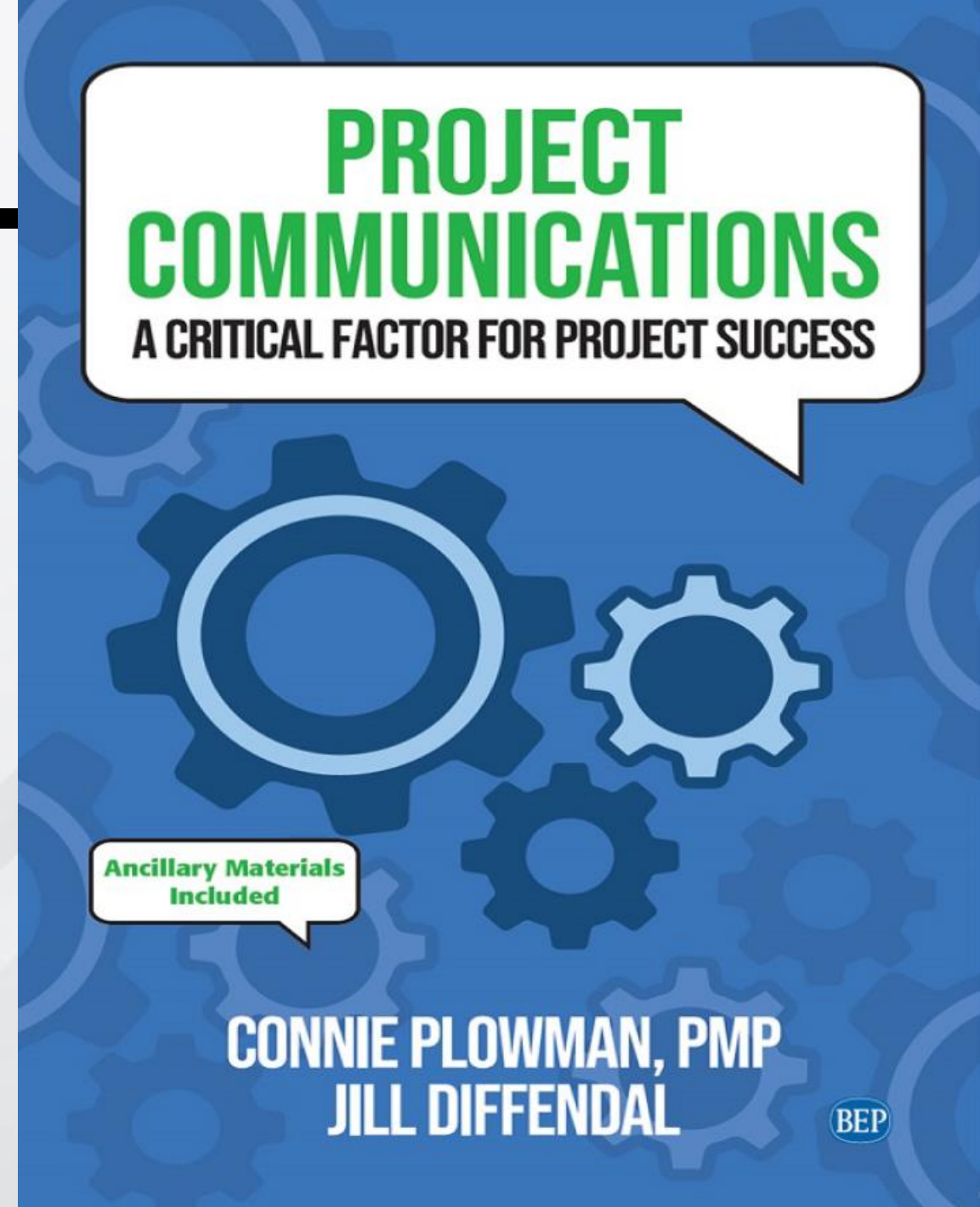
PMG 112

Lecture 07



Reference Book:

- **Ch1:** Introduction.
- **Ch2:** Exploring Communication Theories.
- **Ch3:** Knowing Your Audience.
- **Ch4:** Starting with the Basics.
- **Ch5:** Planning Project Communications.
- **Ch6:** Managing and Monitoring Project Communications.
- **Ch7:** Using Project Communication Tools.
- **Ch8:** Communicating Change.
- **Ch9:** Managing Conflict through Communication.
- **Ch10:** Closing.



Chapter 7: Using Project Communication Tools

The purpose of this chapter is to help you:

- Consider what goes into choosing the right communication tools for your project
- Examine the purpose and benefits of different project communication tools
- Understand the importance of being knowledgeable about whatever communication tools you use for your project.



Using Project Communication Tools

Project Management



Communication Tools

The more elaborate our means of communication, the less we communicate.

—Joseph Priestley, 18th-century theologian, philosopher, chemist, grammarian, teacher

Using Project Communication Tools

Choosing the Right Communication Tool

- Our emphasis in this section is on the process and importance of choosing the right tool, rather than focusing on specific, brand-name products or services.
- The concept starts with **WHY**, then looks at **HOW**, and then answers **WHAT**.
- Sinek describes the approach to organizational success, but we can use the same approach when selecting project communication tools



Managing and Monitoring Project Communications

Choosing the Right Communication Tool

Approaches for selecting project communication tools:

1. **WHY**—the reason or purpose. Why are we addressing this communication problem? Why is this an issue? Why is this important?
2. **HOW**—differentiating factors. How do the different features, capabilities, or uses address our project communication needs? How will this tool solve a need or enhance our project communication abilities?
3. **WHAT**—the product or mechanism. What project communication tool is the best solution? What result or change in our project communications do we expect to see?

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Choosing the Right Communication Tool

1. The Why

- Usually, we start with the tool (**the what**) and even look at the features (**the how**), before we address the need (**the why**).
- Suppose we get a new communications tool. We start using it. We then discover it does not meet our communication needs.
- **This creates even greater communication problems on the project:**
 - More misunderstandings,
 - More frustration,
 - More waste of time and resources, and
 - More uncertainty

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Choosing the Right Communication Tool

1. The Why

- How can we avoid this? By starting with the why!
 - Why are we addressing this communication need?
 - Why is this an issue?
 - Why is this important to the project, team, and stakeholders?
- Focus first on the why—the reason or the purpose.
- Once these questions are answered, the next steps of **how** and **what** will logically follow

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Choosing the Right Communication Tool

2. The How

- Next, establish a list of criteria based on your project needs, organization, team, budget, and other influencing factors.
- Researchers recommend focusing “on the criteria that matter” when selecting the right product or tool. These criteria are the how—**how the tool can accomplish the why**.
- Harrin provides a sample criteria list (as shown in Exhibit). This is an excellent place to begin. Take a look at the list and modify it to build your own set of selection criteria.

Using Project Communication Tools

Sample criteria to consider when selecting a project tool⁵

- Task management: How is managing tasks handled? Is it a simple tool or do we need complex features?
- Tracking: How does the tool track time, tasks, budgets, resources, and progress?
- Visibility: How are dashboards and project reports shown?
- Accessibility: How is the online access?

Using Project Communication Tools

- Mobility: How does a mobile app help our project team manage their work?
- Features: How are collaboration features handled, like discussions or online chats?
- Security: How is security addressed so that we know our data is safe?
- Integration: How easy is it to integrate with our current environment including compatibility with other products we use?
- Usability: How is the usability? Is it simple to use so that the team can start using it immediately?
- Cost: How does it fit within our budget?

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Choosing the Right Communication Tool

2. The How

- Why is this important? A criteria list provides you with a focused roadmap for your selection process so that you don't get off track with criteria that do not matter.
- In evaluating tools, you also need to consider how the communication takes place—is it **synchronous** (meaning real-time or contemporaneous) or **asynchronous** (not interactive or not at the same time)? A combination of both synchronous and asynchronous communication tools is required for all types of project teams and stakeholders.
- Next exhibit provides examples and considerations for both types.

Using Project Communication Tools

Table 7.1 Synchronous and asynchronous communications⁶

Type	Example	Note
Synchronous communication	Project team members or stakeholders are engaged in the dialogue together (either electronic or verbal). Examples include online chat sessions or face-to-face conversations.	Participants are in the same place at the same time (i.e. face-to-face) or different place at the same time (i.e. online chat or teleconference). There is two-way communication with an immediate response.

Using Project Communication Tools

Type	Example	Note
Asynchronous communication	Project team members or stakeholders are <i>not</i> engaged in a dialogue. Examples include sending an e-mail, distributing an internal memo, or posting information on the project website.	Participants are communicating at different times. (Note that this does not mean different time zones!) They may be in the same place, but not talking with each other. Or they may be in different places (remote locations). This is one-way communication waiting (hopefully) for a response or acknowledgement, or making others aware that the information is now available.

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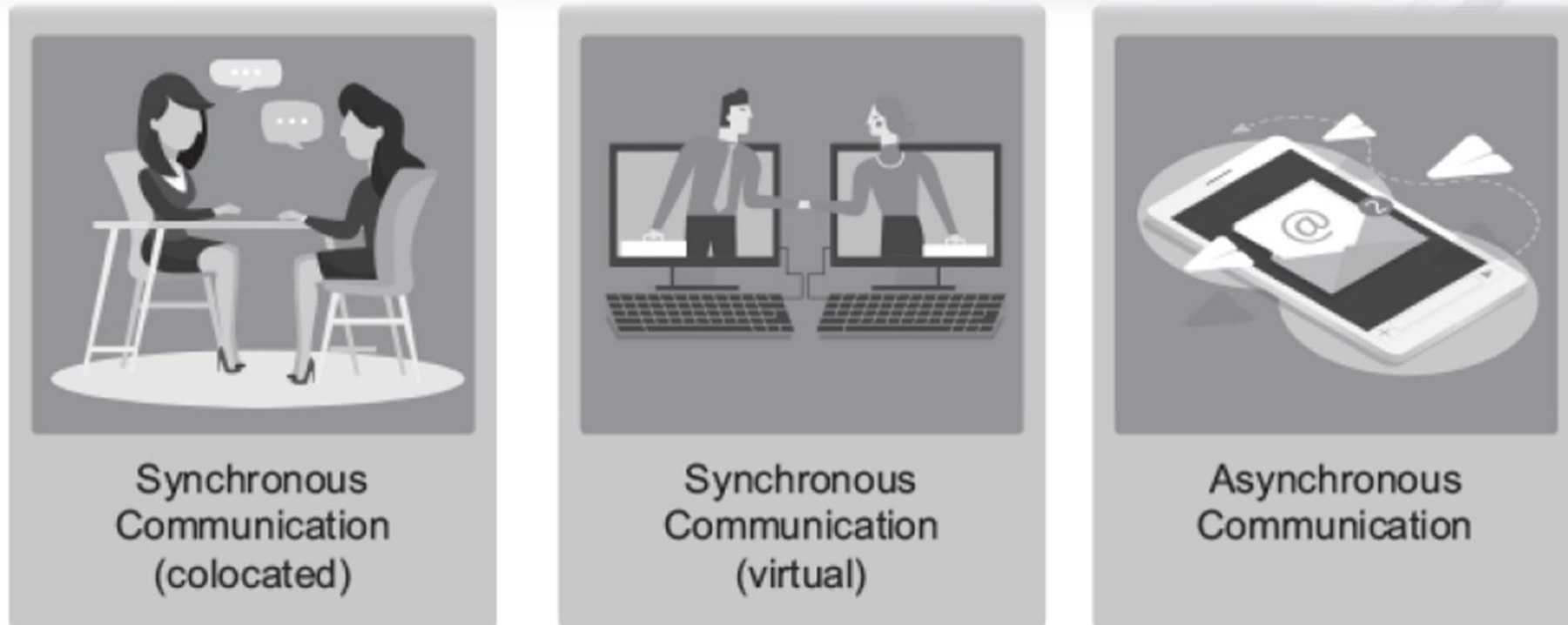


Figure 7.2 Depiction of synchronous and asynchronous communications

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Choosing the Right Communication Tool

2. The How

- Once you have established your criteria list and have considered the need for synchronous and asynchronous communications, the next step is to prioritize the criteria in order of importance.
- **Categorize the features into three groups:**
 - **Group 1:** Criteria you must have.
 - **Group 2:** Criteria you would like to have.
 - **Group 3:** Criteria you don't need.

Using Project Communication Tools

Table 7.2 Template for tool selection criteria and priority

Criteria	Must have	Would like to have	Do not need
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			

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Choosing the Right Communication Tool

2. The How

- **Why categories of criteria are important?**
- Putting together a criteria list and establishing priorities before looking at the actual communication tools—regardless of the type of tool—will help you throughout the selection process and increase the probability of choosing and **using the most effective tools that fit your project needs.**

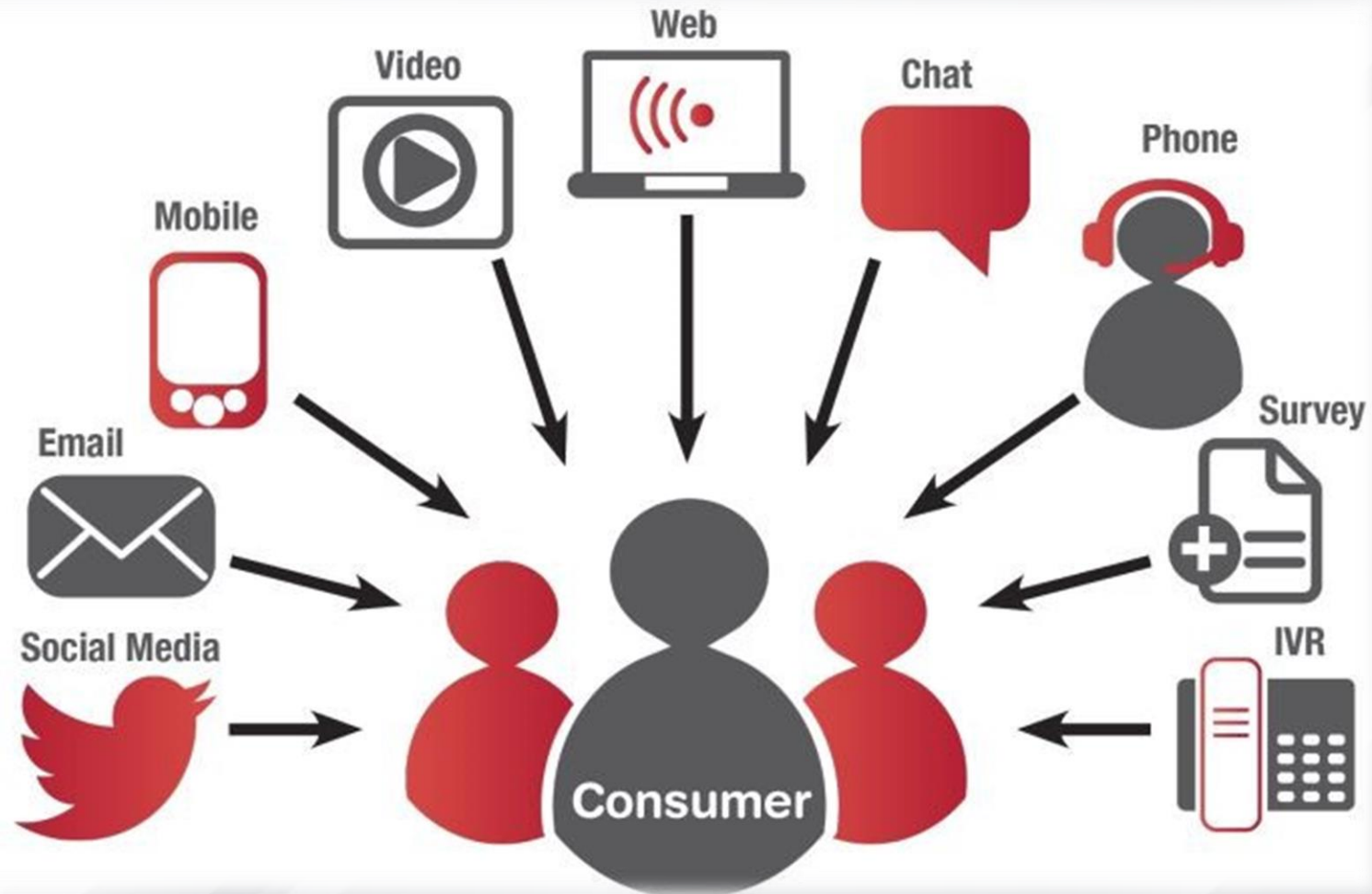
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Choosing the Right Communication Tool

3. The WHAT

- Now that we have looked at the why and the how, it is time to look at the what—the actual project communication tools that you might consider.
- The goal here is to find and **select tools that can accomplish the why while meeting all of the criteria you have established in the how.**
- The next section provides an overview of several types of project communication tools for consideration.

Communication Tools for Projects



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Communication Tools for Projects

- In managing projects and working with project teams and stakeholders, you should be using a collection of project communication tools.
- Each tool in your collection has its own purpose and benefits. When it comes to project communications, there is no “one size fits all”
- To get started, we will look at five general categories of project communication tools

Table 7.3 Categories of project communication tools

1	2	3	4	5
Technology	Project documents	Presentations and templates	Meetings	Talents and strengths

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1. Technology

- Choosing the most effective technology must be done carefully. This is not a simple process. It is “influenced by the organization’s budget, nature of the team task, and members’ access to various technologies.”
- There is **urgency**. There is **confidentiality**. There is **availability** and **compatibility**. There is **knowledge** and **ability**. The process is not easy.

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1. Technology

Collaboration Software

- collaboration software is “many different kinds of apps and services that handle everything from video conference calls to letting two people type on a document at the same time.
- When a team needs to collaborate, use collaboration software tools that allow for interactive discussions (such as online chat rooms or instant messaging) or the ability to jointly work on the same document.
- It will increase productivity with people working together, talking, and communicating (synchronous).

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1. Technology

Collaboration Software

- When information needs to be shared, collaboration websites provide a resource for storing, communicating, and sharing project information (asynchronous).
- The benefit is that the project team and authorized stakeholders can use the website—at their convenience—to access the most current information on the project.
- In addition, collaboration tools today are very robust and can be especially useful for teams who are not collocated.
- They also cut down significantly on e-mail clutter.

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1. Technology

Video Conferencing

- The value of using a video conferencing tool as a communication method is that you can see everyone. Consider it another form of face-to-face meeting. You benefit from verbal communication, as well as seeing the nonverbal communication of gestures, body language, reactions, or level of participation.
- Furthermore, you can share a screen to show participants documents, presentations, videos, and other information which can facilitate even greater understanding and collaboration

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1. Technology

Video Conferencing

- The chat feature within many video conferencing tools provides an added mechanism for asking questions, getting clarification, and engaging online with other participants.
- The downside of video conferencing is that not everyone has the required bandwidth, or some may have difficulty accessing it or may not know how to use it effectively.



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1. Technology

Teleconferencing

- Conducting a phone meeting, or teleconference, among people who are not collocated is another communication tool.
- The benefit is that it is easier to schedule as it involves less complicated technology than a video conference call.
- Many teleconferencing and video conferencing tools also allow the meeting to be recorded so that absent team members can listen to it at a later time.

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1. Technology

Teleconferencing

- Teleconferencing requires an excellent facilitator to manage the conversation so that participants are not talking all at the same time and the conversation (and agenda topics) keeps moving forward.
- A downside of these tools is that you can only hear the participants; you cannot see them



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1. Technology

E-mail

- While e-mail is part of our daily routine, it is considered one-way communication (asynchronous). You send a message. Then you wait. And wait. And wait until you get a response, if any.
- E-mail should be used for documenting conversations, not conducting conversations. The benefit of email is that it provides you with project documentation. The downside of email is urgency (others may not respond as quickly as you need) and understanding (the tone of your written message may be different from the tone of how your message is read).

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1. Technology

E-mail

- In working on projects, look for tools that enable a two-way dialogue, not one-way.
- Remember: Just because you hit the “send” button on an e-mail does not mean that you have actually communicated



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1. Technology

Social Media

- Using social media tools to communicate in a project is becoming more prevalent. Social media provides an avenue for sharing project information with stakeholders in a public, low-cost, and easily accessible way.
- This can be beneficial in large projects that affect members of the broader external community as a means to provide them with current information about the project status and how it affects them as it progresses.

Managing and Monitoring Project Communications

1. Technology

Social Media

- It also provides stakeholders with a means of providing feedback and can be measured
- through engagement metrics available on many social platforms.
- However, social media is not the right tool for every project and every stakeholder group.

Carefully consider the why, how, and what of using social media as a tool, and ensure it satisfies your tool selection criteria before moving forward.



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2. Project Documents

Project Reports

- The report is simply for documentation purposes. Just because we wrote it, it doesn't mean that people read it! If you know there is information in the report that certain stakeholders need to know, communicate it separately. At a minimum, when you send the report, add an introductory note that uses bullet points to highlight specific aspects of the report you want to ensure they see. **The benefit** of project reports is that critical project information has been documented. **The challenge**: making sure that project reports, decision logs, issue logs, and other reports have a purpose and are being used

Managing and Monitoring Project Communications

2. Project Documents

Project Schedule

- The project schedule is highly detailed and communicates the tasks, milestones, planned and actual start/end dates, durations, dependencies, resources, and other detailed information. It brings the pieces (information) from other sections of the project plan into one place—the schedule.
- To improve your project communications, consider printing the project schedule as a large wall chart, or post it on a virtual team wall. As you start doing the work on the project, mark your project schedule in different colors.

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2. Project Documents

Project Schedule

- When a task is late, communicate this by highlighting the task in a bright color with a large arrow or circle.
- When a task is completed early, communicate this by highlighting the task on the schedule in a different bright color and adding an icon (star, exclamation point, etc.).
- The benefit of having a marked-up project schedule that is visible to everyone is communicating progress, problems, and commitment.

Project Title

Project Schedule

Start Week **Jan 5, 2014**

Week	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Notes
Starting	Jan 5	Jan 12	Jan 19	Jan 26	Feb 2	Feb 9	Feb 16	Feb 23	Mar 2	Mar 9	Mar 16	Mar 23	Mar 30	Apr 6	Apr 13	Apr 20	Apr 27	May 4	May 11	May 18	
Phase One	Quality Assurance Plan																				
		Project Plan																			
			Plan Review																		
Phase Two				Draft Requirements																	
				Capacity Planning																	
					Project Test Plan																
					Acceptance Test Plan																
							Final Requirements Specifications														
Phase Three							Phase Review and Approval														
							Milestone: additional funds	Draft Design Specifications													
								Configuration Management Plan													
								Architecture Design Plan													
								Define Interface Requirements													
								Shared Component Design													
								Integration Test Plan													
								Define Project Guidelines													
								Final Design Specifications													
								Phase Review and Approval													

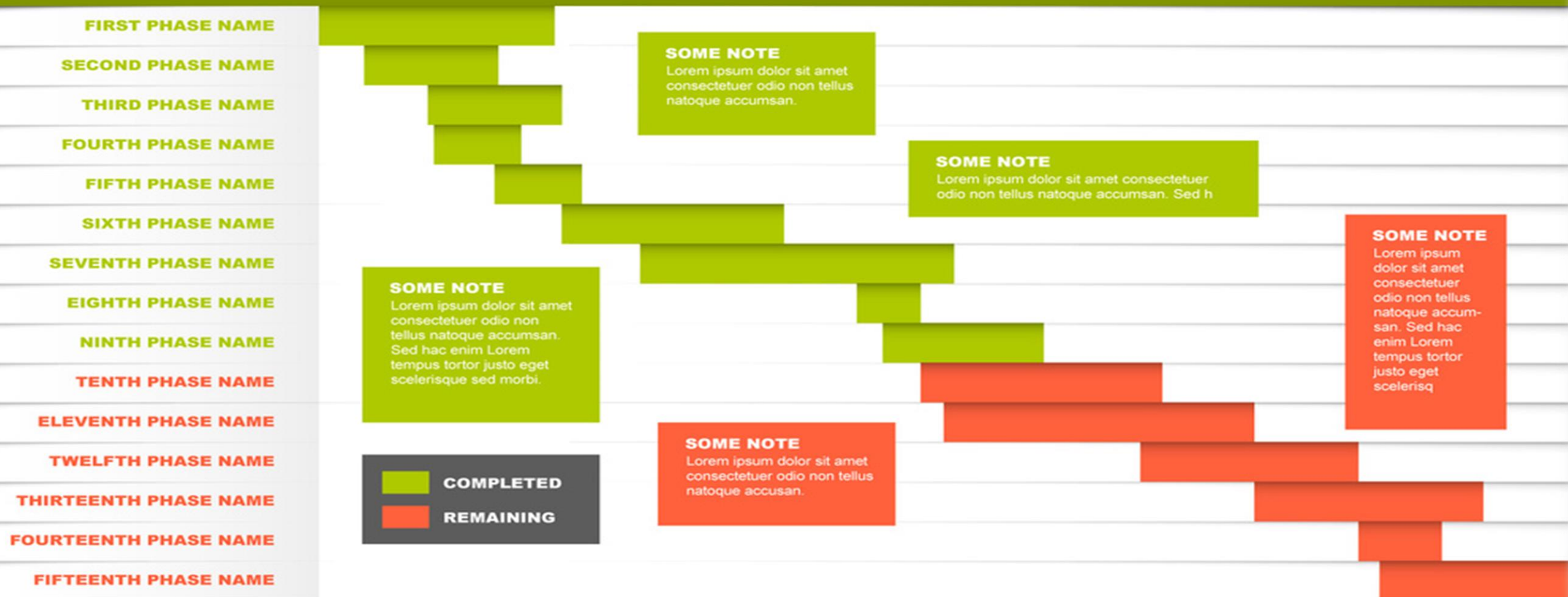
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2. Project Documents

Milestone Schedule

- By definition, a milestone schedule is “a type of schedule that presents milestones with
- planned dates. Notice the difference in the level of detail in the milestone schedule.
- The benefit of using a milestone schedule as a communication tool is that sometimes key stakeholders, project sponsors, or management may only want a high-level view (or summary) of the status of key milestones, or points in time. Consider using a milestone schedule for communicating in these situations

PROJECT MILESTONE SCHEDULE



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2. Project Documents

Status Reports

- Status reports allow us to communicate project progress at regular intervals. Whether your document is called a status report, project update, or some other name, it is a vital communication tool. Without it, how would you know that progress is being made on the project?
- The frequency and formality of communicating project status will depend on your project. This should be documented in your team's operating principles.

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2. Project Documents

Status Reports

- Status reports do not need to be complicated. They should be easy to read and preferably a maximum of one page (depending on the size and complexity of the project). Using a template ensures that a constant format and consistent information is being communicated.
- Make sure that your stakeholders are receiving current information in the status reports and not getting status reports with outdated details.
- The timing of your status report distribution should be outlined in your project communications management plan. The benefit in consistently using status reports is that they help answer the question, “Where are we on the project?” for everyone involved.

Managing and Monitoring Project Communications

3. Presentations and Templates

Presentations

- Tools such as face-to-face presentations, interactive webinars, podcasts, or videos provide an excellent opportunity for communicating project information. This is a time to use your presentation skills and facilitation techniques when presenting key project information.
- Graphs, charts, photographs, and stories can create very powerful and impactful images.
- The benefit is that you can engage the audience (see Chapter 3) and reduce uncertainty (see Chapter 2) by directly addressing any project questions or concerns.

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3. Presentations and Templates

Templates

- There is a template or form for just about everything! Don't spend your time creating a form from a blank sheet of paper or screen.
- Find a template, modify it, then use the same template for similar interactions. The benefit in using a template is that it provides consistent messaging and branding to support your project communication.
- Spend your time on the communication content, and not on creating, designing, and redesigning a form.

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4. Meetings

Face-to-Face Meetings

- Invest the time and money to have at least one face-to-face meeting for a project team, especially at the beginning of the project.
- Face-to-face meetings are critical for all teams. Research shows that “when teams are unable to meet face-to-face—even once—they are less able to handle cultural differences and to understand and appreciate one another.”

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4. Meetings

Face-to-Face Meetings

- Don't underestimate the power and benefits of face-to-face meetings.
- They are crucial to project and team success!
- The downside of face-to-face meetings is the difficulty in getting everyone scheduled to attend at the same time, and the costs that may be associated with them.
- However, there are greater costs when face-to-face meetings are not held

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4. Meetings

Stand-Up Meetings

- Quick stand-up meetings are also an excellent communication tool, especially for agile project teams.
- Stand-up meetings are just that: participants stand. They do not sit down.
- The meeting is short and focused. In agile practice, stand-up meetings typically occur daily and last no longer than 15 minutes.
- In traditional or hybrid teams, these meetings may occur weekly and last longer.

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4. Meetings

Stand-Up Meetings

- Regardless of the duration, the benefit of stand-up meetings is that they are consistent, short, and focused.
- It is an opportunity to quickly identify problems, prioritize items, and provide support where needed.
- Make sure that you have established ground rules for your stand-up meetings

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4. Meetings

Meeting Outcomes

- When working with teams and conducting meetings, it is essential to communicate the meeting outcomes, goals, or intentions.
- Meeting outcomes should address the intended goal for the meeting and expectations of what will be accomplished by the end of the meeting.
- Include the meeting outcomes on the meeting agenda and distribute the agenda well in advance of the meeting time. The benefit of clearly stating meeting outcomes is that everyone knows that their time and input are valued and respected, and can come prepared for focused discussions.



Thank You