Software Project Management

Lesson 5 – Communication

Uwe Gühl
Winter 2015 / 2016
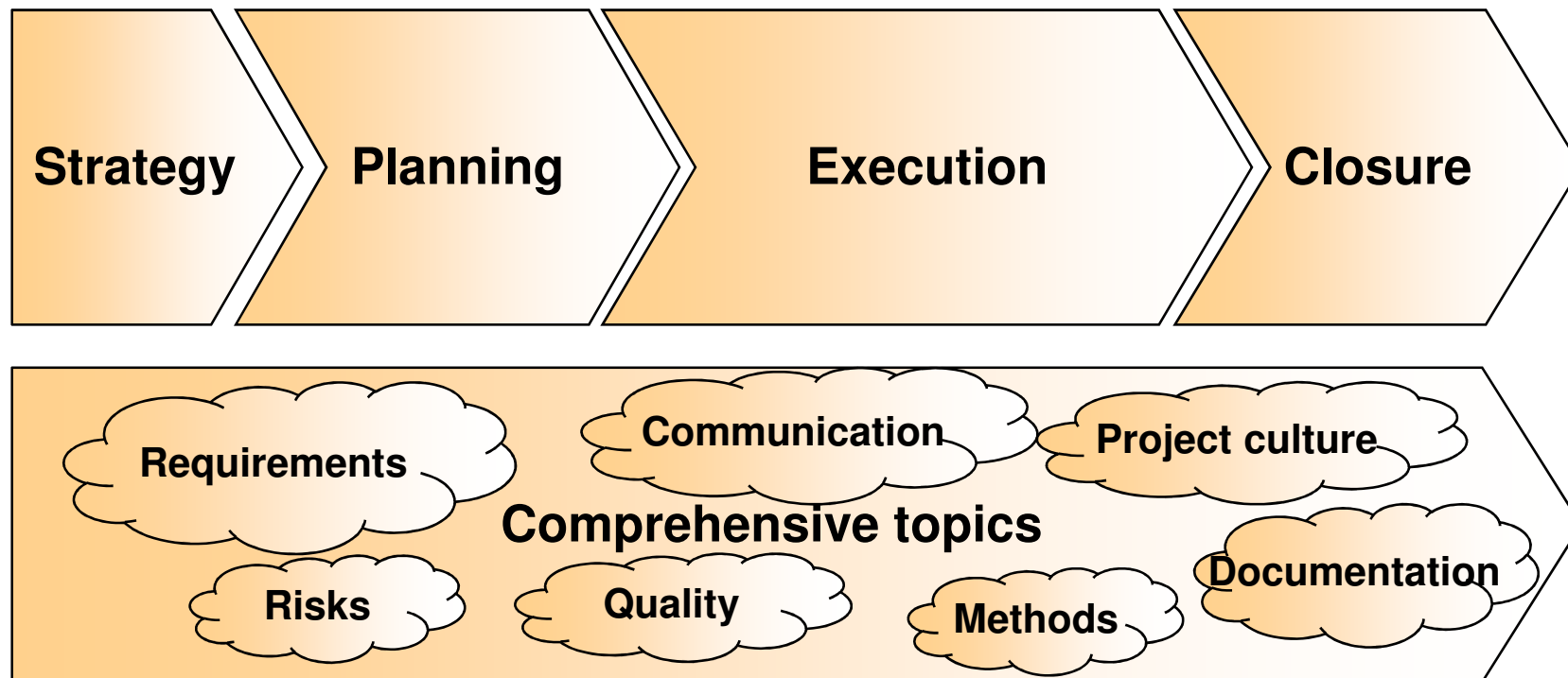
Contents

- Communication
  - Introduction
  - Definitions
  - Improving communication
  - Communication plan
  - Meetings
  - Task list
  - Documentation

Introduction

Strategy > Planning > Execution > Closure

Comprehensive topics

Requirements

Communication

Project culture

Risks

Quality

Methods

Documentation

Introduction

Strategy | Planning | Execution | Closure

Requirements

Communication

Project culture

Comprehensive topics

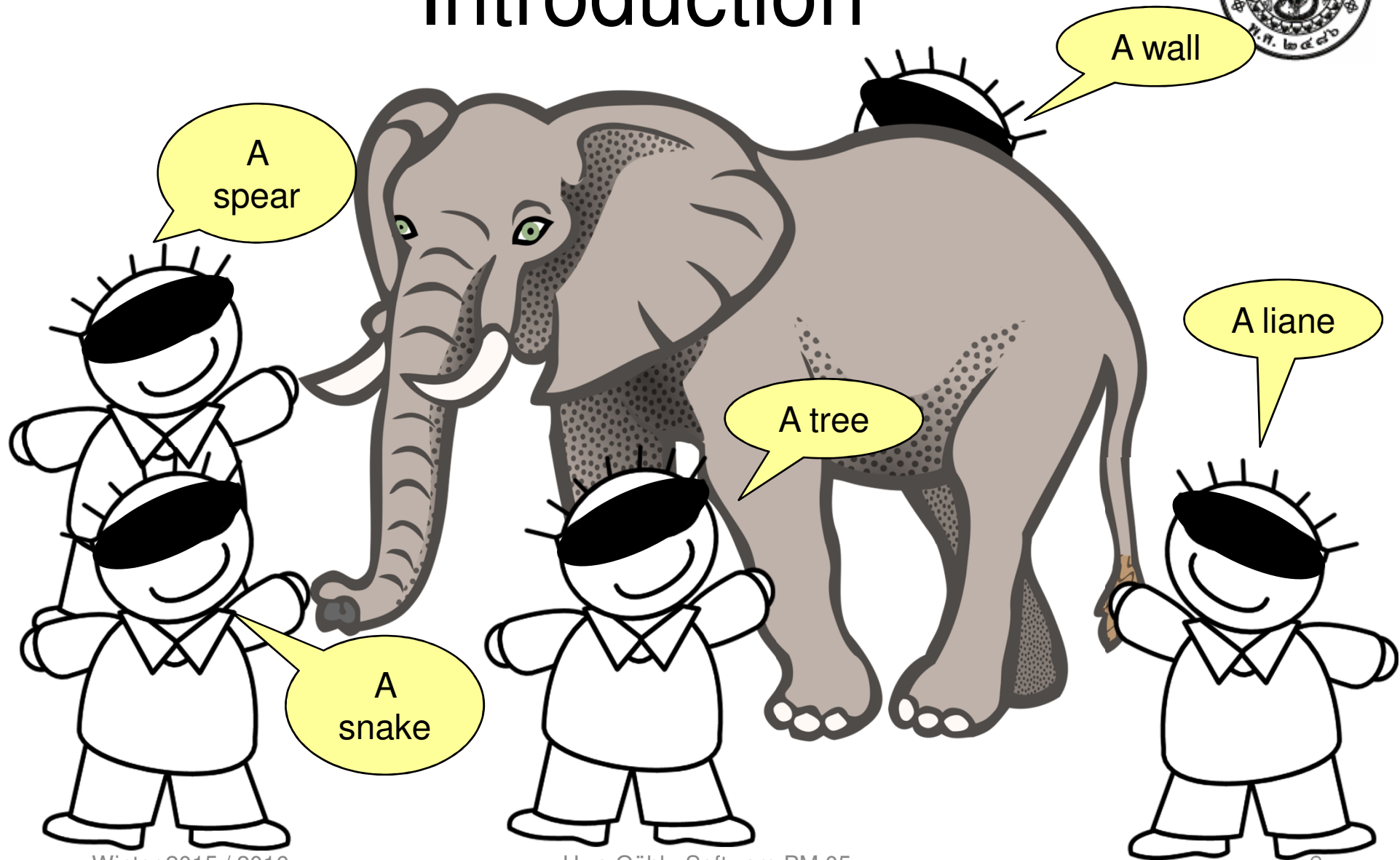Risks | Quality | Methods | Documentation

Introduction

- Communication is an important success factor
- Communication with (verbal) and without words (nonverbal) [MF67]
- Communication issues because of cultural differences are especially in international projects possible

Introduction

Introduction

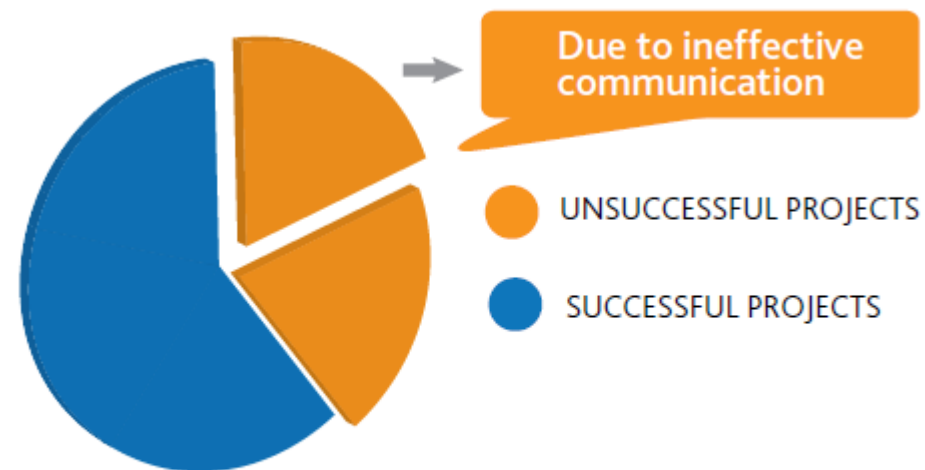- Communication is a (if not the) key to project success

Figure 4. One out of five projects is unsuccessful due to ineffective communications.

Source: [PMI13]

Introduction

- Tom DeMarco: "The business we're in is more sociological than technological, more dependent on workers' abilities to communicate with each other than their abilities to communicate with machines." [ML87]

Definitions

- Communication in a project is the exchange of information
  - within the project between the project members and
  - outside of the project to stakeholders
- A communication plan documents, how project information gets distributed.

Improving communication

Basic rules:

- Respect and acceptance
- Active listening
- Asking open questions
- Justified compliments
- Understanding the perspective of other people
- Talking clear, specific, goal-oriented
- Being a role model

Improving communication

Communication hierarchy:

- Best is face to face communication
  Not only words are important, but body language, facial expressions, gestures and voice as well [MF67]
  Go to the desk of the person, if something has to be discussed
- Second is communication by phone / chat – bidirectional information
- Third is communication by text only like email
  - Beware of email communication.
    It is very easy to misunderstand what is said, even if emoticons (smileys) are used.
  - Use email to confirm topics, to summarize results discussed, to send information to be shared like minutes

Improving communication

As a project manager:

- Support continuous communication with the team and in the team

- Be always addressable
  Be located right in the center of the team instead of being located outside

- Facilitate project members interchange
  Establish several opportunities like „sweeties corner" and coffee dispenser
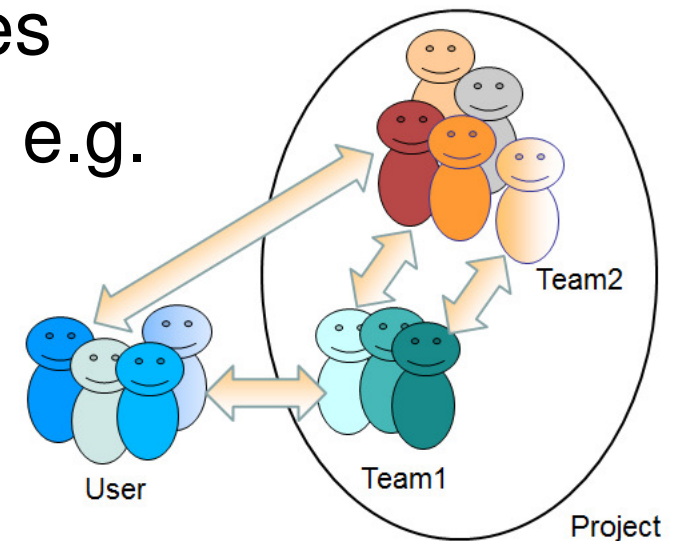
Improving communication

As a project manager:

- Create tandems of team members (e.g. concerning peer reviews), merge the tandems
- Prevent regional separation of the team
- Consider intercultural differences

Distribution of project information, e.g.

- Regular reporting
- Project newsletter

Improving communication

- Usage of a project glossary
  - Common description of important terms, everybody should have same understanding
  - Follow an iterative approach
  - There should be only one glossary
  - Easy accessible for everyone in the project
  - There should be one responsible
  - Good basis for people new in the project
  - Could help even years after the project ended
    → Maintenance

Communication plan

- Communication plan to plan and to tailor how to distribute information, e.g.
  - Principal / contracting body – Clearance
  - Project core team – Project meetings
  - Project team
  - Specialist meetings concerning special topics
  - Bidirectional communication between project manager and individual project team members
  - Stakeholders like sponsors – regular information
  - External (e.g. end user, marketing)

Communication plan

Example for a template

Kind of communication	Who	Purpose	Frequency
<Principal meetings>	*<Principal>*	*<Update, critical issues, approval requests>*	*<Biweekly, on request>*
<Project board meetings>	*<Project board>*	*<Status, approval requests>*	*<Every 2 months>*
<Project meetings>	*<Project members>*	*<Status, critical issues, risks>*	*<Weekly>*
<Core project meetings>	*<Core project members>*	*<Status, next steps, issues>*	*<Daily>*
<Status report>	*<Principal, project board, project members>*	*<General information>*	*<Monthly>*

Meetings

Meetings
- Try to install regular meetings in a project
- Follow a communication plan
- Proposal: Regular daily short meetings
  - Better often regular short meetings instead of seldom irregular long meetings
- Follow a simple approach in the meetings
  Every participant should be involved and report
  - What did I achieve?
  - Next steps
  - Current issues
- "Working meetings" to solve issues
- "Presentation meetings" to inform

Meetings

What is required for good meetings?

- A good organization

- An agenda posted in advance

- An agenda that plans fix timing

- Parties are in time and good prepared

- Minutes after the meeting with clear tasks and target dates
  → A meeting without minutes did not happen

Meetings

What is required for an execution of good meetings?

- In big meetings:
  - Minute taker
  - Moderator
- Following the agenda
  People should not wander from the subject
- Keeping time schedule
- Tasks identified during the meeting should be assigned only to participants

Meetings

What is required after a meeting? Minutes!

- "Keeper of minutes" should be determined in the beginning of the meeting
- Best practice
  - Taking minutes during the meeting, differentiation:
    - ➢ Information
    - ➢ Task: Who is doing what until when?
    - ➢ Decision: What has been decided?
  - Presentation and alignment of the minutes as last activity
- Important: Getting a common understanding of the results of a meeting
- Additional documents as attachment

Meetings

Example for a minutes template

Minutes

Project name	<Name of project>	Project No.	<Number of project>
Location	<Location of meeting>	Date	<dd.mm.yyyy>
Minute taker	<Name of minute taker>	Version	<n.m.p>
Topic	<Topic of meeting>		

Attendees	<Att1 Name, department, mail, phone>
	<Att2 Name, department, mail, phone>
	...
	<Attn Name, department, mail, phone>
Distribution list	<Dis1 Name, department, mail, phone>
	<Dis2 Name, department, mail, phone>
	...
	<Disn Name, department, mail, phone>

No.	(A)ction Item (D)ecision (I)nformation	Description	Responsible	Due date
<1>	<A>	<Description of action item>	<Name>	<dd.mm.yy>
<2>	<D>	<Decision taken concerning specific topic>	<Name>	<dd.mm.yy>

Task list

- Synonyms: Action item list, To-do list
- Use a task list to collect and trigger the action items to do
- Regularly check the status of the tasks, e.g. in project meetings or personal alignments

Task list

- Important attributes of a task
  - What is the task? Clear description, should be understood, when is it done?
  - Who is the requestor?
  - Who is responsible?
  - Until when should it be done?
  - What is the status?
    Open, in progress, cancelled, done
- If an action item is done, document the result

Task list

- Example

Task list for project								
Id	Task	Category	Priority	Responsible	Start date	Due date	Status	Comments
1	First lecture	SW PM	high	Uwe	15.01.16	**21.01.16**	done	2016-01-15 [Uwe] Preparation required
2	Second lecture	SW PM	low	Uwe	22.01.16	28.01.16	in progress	2016-01-22 [Uwe] Meeting planned to discuss proceeding
3	Third lecture	SW PM	medium	Uwe		04.02.16	open	

- Additional fields (not visible):

  – Requestor: Who asked for the task?

  – Along with: Who is going to support?

  – Result: If a task is done, what is the result? Where to find?

Task list
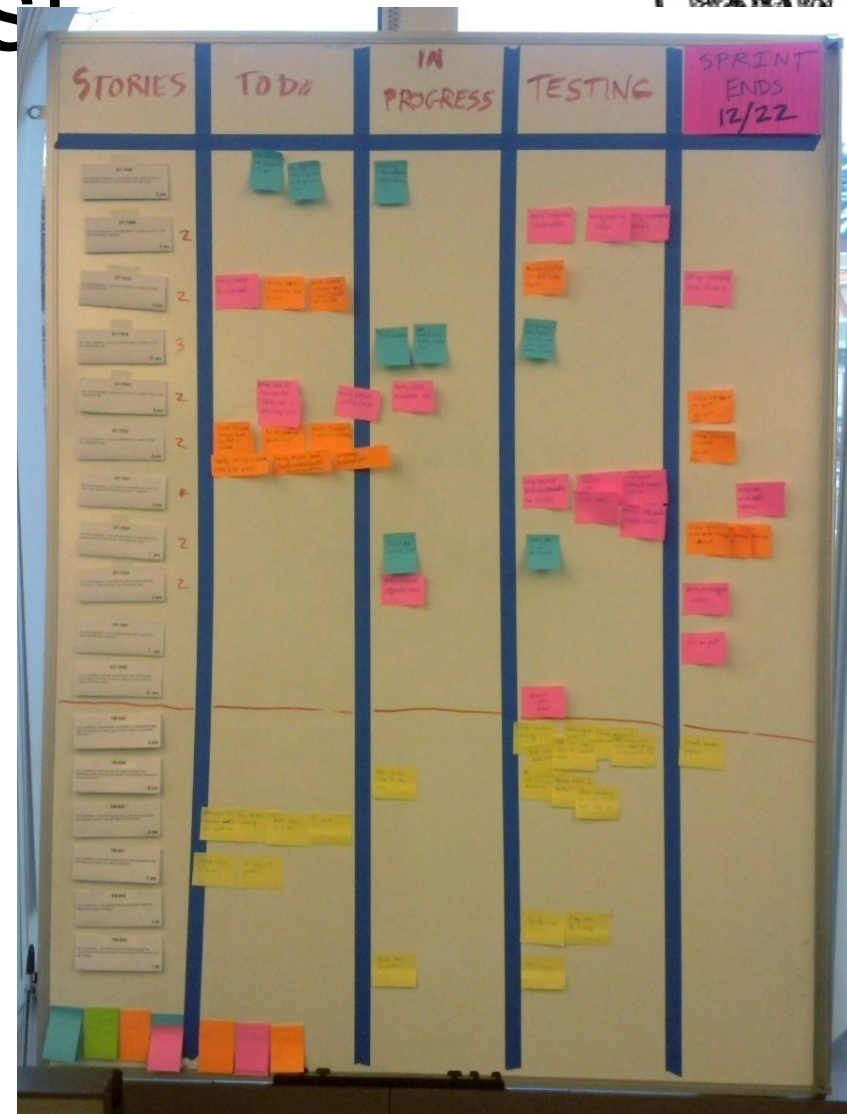
- Compare to a Scrum Task Board

Image source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/1b/Scrum_task_board.jpg

Documentation

- Use documentation as basis for communication
- Example
  - **Test plan** to communicate with principal / project team
  - **Test report** to communicate to all project stakeholders
- Try to understand: Who is the recipient of a document, who is interested?
  => People to contact concerning expectations and approval

Sources

- [AG16] Daud Alam, Uwe Gühl: Projektmanagement für die Praxis, Springer, 2016 (in German)
- [MF67] Mehrabian, Albert, Susan R Ferris: Inference of attitude from nonverbal communication in two channels. The Journal of Counselling Psychology 31(3):248–252, 1967.
- [ML87] Tom De Marco with Timothy Lister: Peopleware: Productive Projects and Teams, Dorset House, 1987
- [PMI13] PMI: The high cost of low performance: The essential role of communication, May 2013, https://www.pmi.org/~/media/PDF/Business-Solutions/The-High-Cost-Low-Performance-The-Essential-Role-of-Communications.ashx