Chapter 10: Project Communications Management

Information Technology Project Management, Fourth Edition

Learning Objectives

- Understand the importance of good communications in projects.
- Explain the elements of project communications planning, including how to create a communications management plan and perform a stakeholder communications analysis.
- Describe various methods for distributing project information and the advantages and disadvantages of each, discuss the importance of addressing individual communication needs, and calculate the number of communications channels in a project.

Learning Objectives (cont'd)

- Understand how the main outputs of performance reporting help stakeholders stay informed about project resources.
- Recognize the importance of good communications management for stakeholder relationships and for resolving issues.
- List various methods for improving project communications, such as managing conflicts, running effective meetings, using e-mail and other technologies effectively, and using templates.
- Describe how software can enhance project communications management.

Importance of Good Communications

- The greatest threat to many projects is a failure to communicate.
- Our culture does not portray IT professionals as being good communicators.
- Research shows that IT professionals must be able to communicate effectively to succeed in their positions.
- Strong verbal skills are a key factor in career advancement for IT professionals.

Project Communications Management Processes

- **Communications planning**: Determining the information and communications needs of the stakeholders.
- **Information distribution**: Making needed information available to project stakeholders in a timely manner.
- **Performance reporting**: Collecting and disseminating performance information, including status reports, progress measurement, and forecasting.
- **Managing stakeholders**: Managing communications to satisfy the needs and expectations of project stakeholders and to resolve issues.

Communications Planning

- Every project should include some type of **communications management** plan, a document that guides project communications.
- Creating a stakeholder analysis for project communications also aids in communications planning.

Communication Techniques

- Formal, Impersonal approaches
  - project documents
  - deliverables
  - memos
  - change requests
  - project schedules
  - data dictionaries
  - error tracking procedures
- Formal, Interpersonal approaches
  - status review meetings
  - design review meetings
  - code inspections
- Informal, Interpersonal approaches
  - group meetings for information dissemination and problem solving
- E-communication
  - E-mail
  - E-bulletin boards
  - Web sites
- Interpersonal Network
  - informal discussion with those outside the project

Communications Management Plan Contents

- Stakeholder communications requirements.
- Information to be communicated, including format, content, and level of detail.
- The people who will receive the information and who will produce it.
- Suggested methods or technologies for conveying the information.

Communications Management Plan Contents (cont'd)

- Frequency of communication.
- Escalation procedures for resolving issues.
- Revision procedures for updating the communications management plan.
- A glossary of common terminology.

Table 10-1. Sample Stakeholder Analysis for Project Communications

Stakeholders	Document Name	Document Format	Contact Person	Due
Customer management	Monthly status report	Hard copy	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	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	11/1/2006
Software subcontractor	Software implementation plan	E-mail	Najwa Gates	6/1/2006

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

Information Distribution

- Getting the right 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 include:
  - Using technology to enhance information distribution.
  - Formal and informal methods for distributing information.

Distributing Information in an Effective and Timely Manner

- Don’t bury crucial information.
- Don’t be afraid to report bad information.
- Oral communication via meetings and informal talks helps bring important information—good and bad—out into the open.

Importance of Face-to-Face Communication

- Research says that in a face-to-face interaction:
  - 58 percent of communication is through body language.
  - 35 percent of communication is through how the words are said.
  - 7 percent of communication is through the content or words that are spoken.
- Pay attention to more than just the actual words someone is saying.
- A person's tone of voice and body language say a lot about how he or she really feels.

Encouraging More Face-to-Face Interactions

- Short, frequent meetings are often very effective in IT projects.
- Stand-up meetings force people to focus on what they really need to communicate.
- Some companies have policies preventing the use of e-mail between certain hours or even entire days of the week.

Table 10-2. Media Choice Table

KEY: 1 = EXCELLENT	2 = ADEQUATE			3 = INAPPROPRIATE		
How well medium is suited to:	Hard Copy	Telephone Call	Voice Mail	E-mail	Meeting	Web Site
Assessing commitment	3	2	3	3	1	3
Building consensus	3	2	3	3	1	3
Mediating a conflict	3	2	3	3	1	3
Resolving a misunderstanding	3	1	3	3	2	3
Addressing negative behavior	3	2	3	2	1	3
Expressing support/appreciation	1	2	2	1	2	3
Encouraging creative thinking	2	3	3	1	3	3
Making an ironic statement	3	2	2	3	1	3
Conveying a reference document	1	3	3	3	3	1
Reinforcing one s authority	1	2	3	3	1	2
Providing a permanent record	1	3	3	1	3	1
Maintaining confidentiality	2	1	2	3	1	3
Conveying simple information	3	2	1	1	2	3
Asking an informational question	3	2	1	1	3	3
Making a simple request	3	3	1	1	3	3
Giving complex instructions	3	3	3	2	1	2
Addressing many people	2	3	3 or 1*	2	3	1

Galati, Tess. Email Composition and Communication (EmC2) Practical Communications, Inc. (www.praccom.com) (2001).
*Depends on system functionality

Understanding 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.
- Nine women cannot produce a baby in one month!

Personal Preferences Affect Communication Needs

- Introverts like more private communications, while extroverts like to discuss things in public.
- Intuitive people like to understand the big picture, while sensing people need step-by-step details.
- Thinkers want to know the logic behind decisions, while feeling people want to know how something affects them personally.
- Judging people are driven to meet deadlines while perceiving people need more help in developing and following plans.

Other Communication Considerations

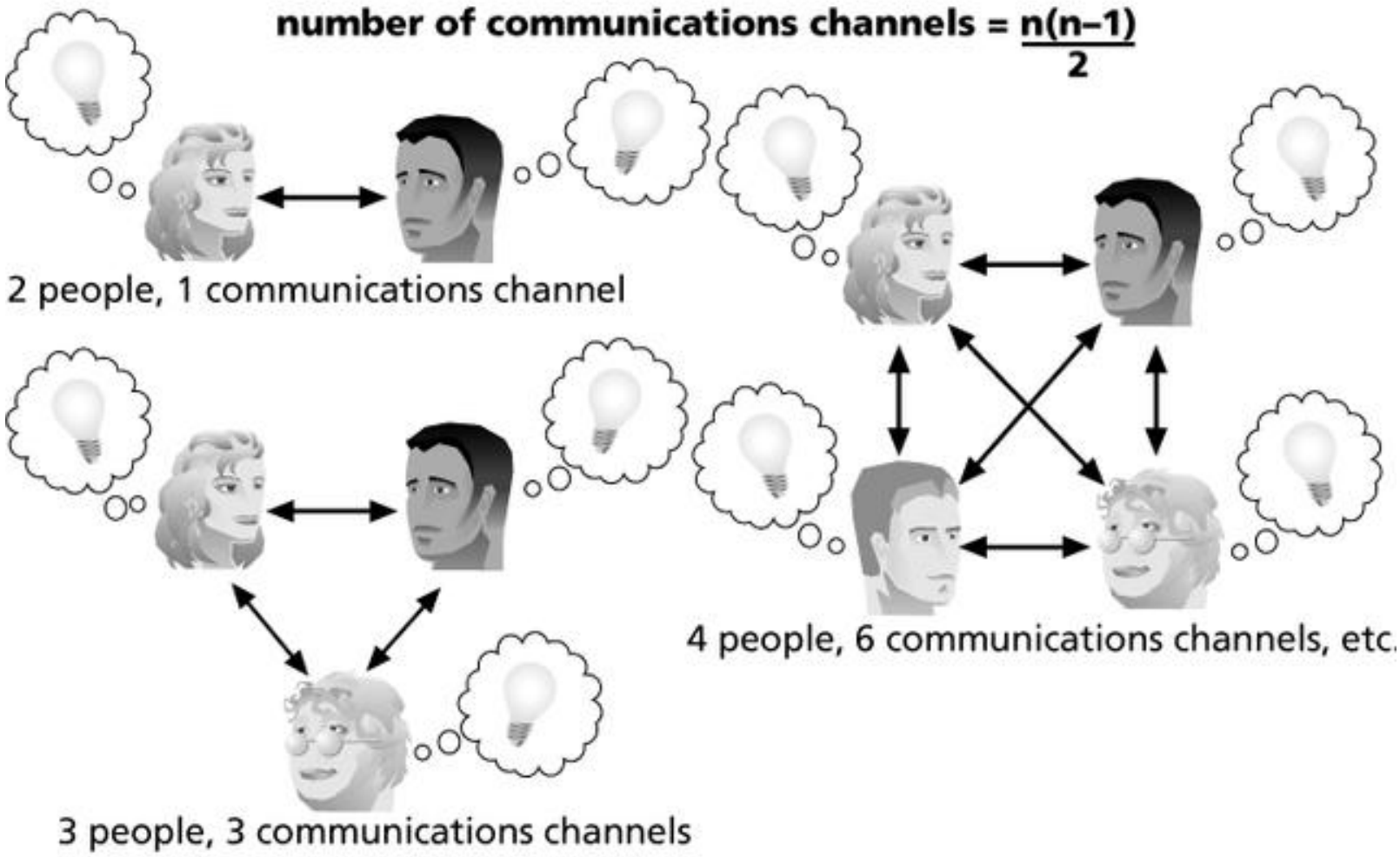
- Rarely does the receiver interpret a message exactly as the sender intended.
- Geographic location and cultural background affect the complexity of project communications.
  - Different working hours
  - Language barriers
  - Different cultural norms

Determining the Number of Communications Channels

- As the number of people involved increases, the complexity of communications increases because there are more communications channels or pathways through which people can communicate.
- Number of communications channels = $\frac{n(n-1)}{2}$

  where n is the number of people involved.

Figure 10-1. The Impact of the Number of People on Communications Channels



Performance Reporting

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

Managing Stakeholders

- Project managers must understand and work with various stakeholders.
- Need to devise a way to identify and resolve issues.
- Two important tools include:
  - Expectations management matrix
  - Issue log

Table 10-3. Expectations Management Matrix

Measure of Success	Priority	Expectations	Guidelines
Scope	2	The scope statement clearly defines mandatory requirements and optional requirements.	Focus on meeting mandatory requirements before considering optional ones.
Time	1	There is no give in the project completion date. Every major deadline must be met, and the schedule is very realistic.	The project sponsor and program manager must be alerted if there are any issues that might affect meeting schedule goals.
Cost	3	This project is crucial to the organization. If you can clearly justify the need for more funds, they can be made available.	There are strict rules for project expenditures and escalation procedures. Cost is very important, but it takes a back seat to meeting schedule and then scope goals.
Etc.			

Table 10-4. Issue Log

Issue #	Issue Description	Impact on Project	Date Reported	Reported By	Assigned To	Priority (M/H/L)	Due Date	Status	Comments
1	Servers cost 10% more than planned	Slight increase in project cost	5/15	Jean	Oded	M	6/15	Closed	The sponsor agreed to provide additional funds to meet the deadline.
2	Two people left the project	Need to reassign personnel	9/26	Gaurav	Karen	H	10/2	Open	If Karen cannot reassign people within a week, she should talk to Peter directly.
etc.									

Suggestions for Improving Project Communications

- Manage conflicts effectively.
- Develop better communication skills.
- Run effective meetings.
- Use e-mail effectively.
- Use templates for project communications.

Conflict Handling Modes

1. **Confrontation**: Directly face a conflict using a problem-solving approach.
2. **Compromise**: Use a give-and-take approach.
3. **Smoothing**: De-emphasize areas of difference and emphasize areas of agreement.
4. **Forcing**: The win-lose approach.
5. **Withdrawal**: Retreat or withdraw from an actual or potential disagreement.

Conflict Can Be Good

- Conflict often produces important results, such as new ideas, better alternatives, and motivation to work harder and more collaboratively.
- **Groupthink**: Conformance to the values or ethical standards of a group. Groupthink can develop if there are no conflicting viewpoints.
- Research suggests that task-related conflict often improves team performance, but emotional conflict often depresses team performance.

Developing Better Communication Skills

- Companies and formal degree programs for IT professionals often neglect the importance of speaking, writing, and listening 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.

Running Effective 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.
- Build relationships.

Using E-Mail Effectively

- Make sure that e-mail is an appropriate medium for what you want to communicate.
- Be sure to send the e-mail to the right people.
- Use meaningful subject lines.
- Limit the content to one main subject, and be as clear and concise as possible.

Using E-Mail Effectively (cont'd)

- Limit the number and size of attachments.
- Delete e-mail you don't need, and don't open e-mail if you question the source.
- Make sure your virus software is current.
- Respond to and file e-mails quickly.
- Learn how to use important features.

Using Templates for Project Communications

- Many technical people are afraid to ask for help.
- Providing examples and templates for project communications saves time and money.
- Organizations can develop their own templates, use some provided by outside organizations, or use samples from textbooks.
- Recall that research shows that companies that excel in project management make effective use of templates.

Figure 10-2. Sample Template for a Project Description

Project X Descripton

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.

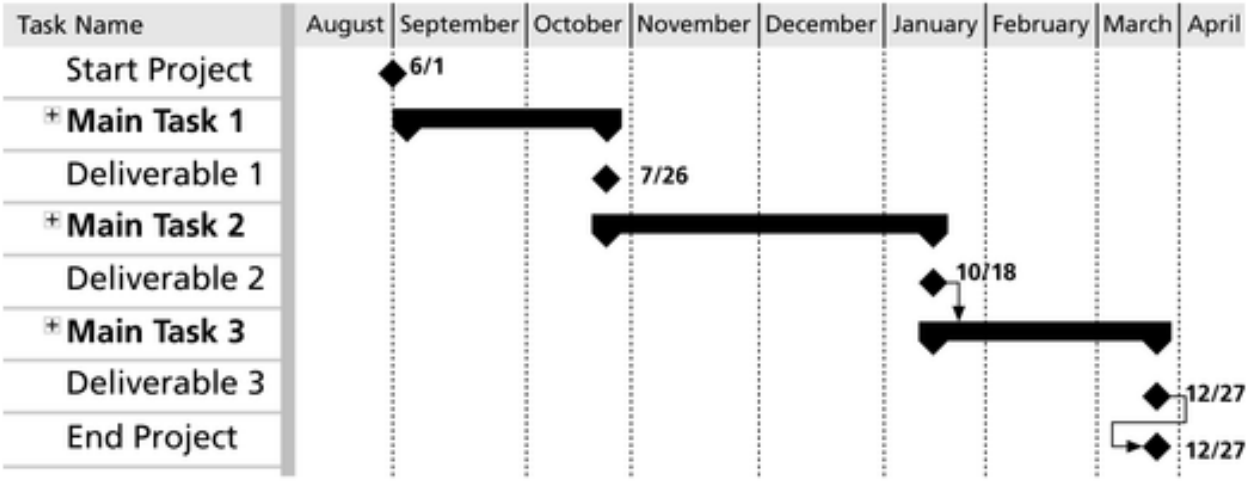


Table 10-5. Sample Template for a Monthly Progress Report

I.	**Accomplishments for Month of January (or appropriate month):** • Describe most important accomplishments. Relate to project's Gantt chart. • Describe other important accomplishments, one bullet for each. If any issues were resolved from the previous month, list them as accomplishments.
II.	**Plans for February (or following month):** • Describe most important items to be accomplished in the next month. Again, relate tothe project's Gantt chart. • Describe other important items to accomplish, one bullet for each.
III.	**Issues:** Briefly list important issues that surfaced or are still important. Managers hate surprises and want to help the project succeed, so be sure to list issues.
IV.	**Project Changes (Date and Description):** List any approved or requested changes to the project. Include the date of the change and a brief description.

Table 10-6. Final Project Documentation Items

I.	Project description
II.	Project proposal and backup data (request for proposal, statement of work, proposal correspondence, and so on)
III.	Original and revised contract information and client acceptance documents
IV.	Original and revised project plans and schedules (WBS, Gantt charts and network diagrams, cost estimates, communications management plan, etc.)
V.	Design documents
VI.	Final project report
VII.	Deliverables, as appropriate
VIII.	Audit reports
IX.	Lessons-learned reports
X.	Copies of all status reports, meeting minutes, change notices, and other written and electronic communications

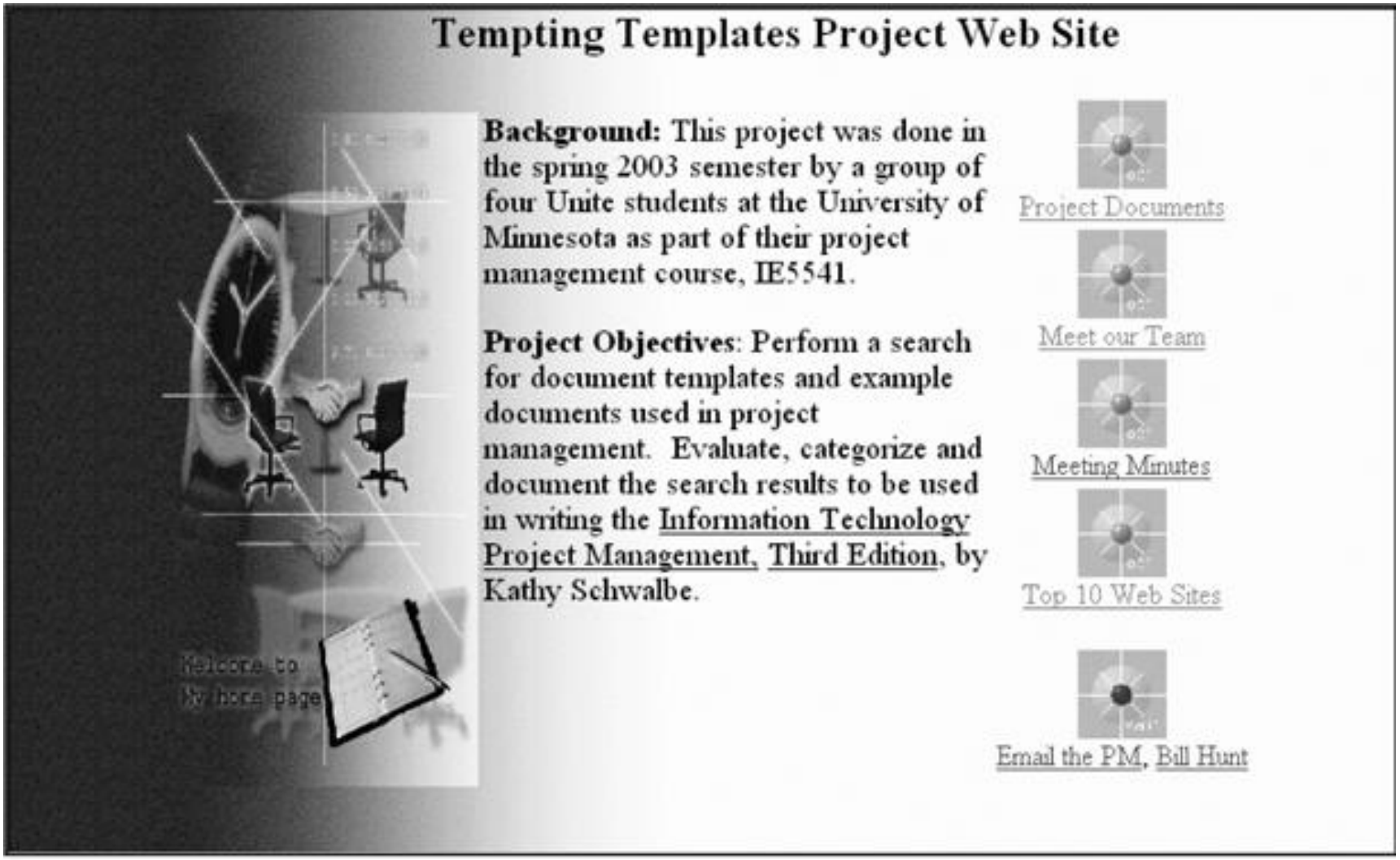
Lessons Learned Reports

- The project manager and project team members should each prepare a **lessons-learned report**.
  - A reflective statement that documents important things an individual learned from working on the project.
- The project manager often combines information from all of the lessons-learned reports into a project summary report.
- See template and sample in Chapter 3.

Project Web Sites

- Many project teams create a project Web site to store important product documents and other information.
- Can create the site using various types of software.

Figure 10-3. Sample Project Web Site



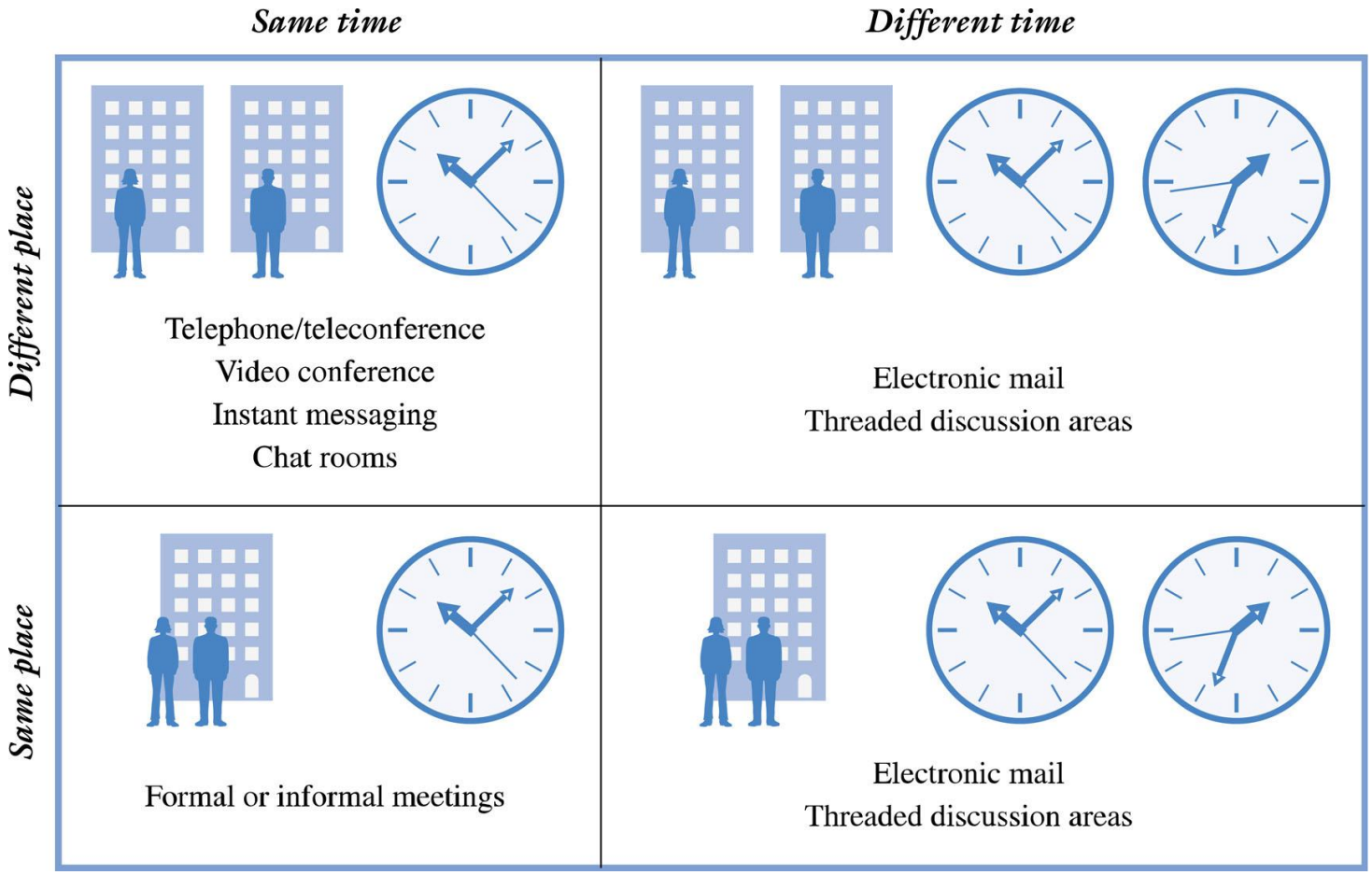
Developing a Communications Infrastructure

- A **communications infrastructure** is a set of tools, techniques, and principles that provide a foundation for the effective transfer of information.
  - Tools include e-mail, project management software, groupware, fax machines, telephones, teleconferencing systems, document management systems, and word processors.
  - Techniques include reporting guidelines and templates, meeting ground rules and procedures, decision-making processes, problem-solving approaches, and conflict resolution and negotiation techniques.
  - Principles include using open dialog and an agreed upon work ethic.

Using Software to Assist in Project Communications

- There are many software tools to aid in project communications.
- Today more than 37 percent of people telecommute or work remotely at least part-time.
- Project management software includes new capabilities to enhance virtual communications.
- New tools, such as instant messaging and blogs, can enhance project communications.

Communication and Collaboration Matrix



Chapter Summary

- The goal of project communications management is to ensure timely and appropriate generation, collection, dissemination, storage, and disposition of project information.
- Main process include:
  - Communications planning
  - Information distribution
  - Performance reporting
  - Managing stakeholders