

Succeeding as Distributed Teams

A tale of suspense, danger and the
ultimate victory

Mark Polhamus,
VP Marketing / Membership, PMI Mount Baker

Mt. Baker Chapter
Dinner Meeting
10 May 2010

Agenda



- Disparate and Coordinated
- Effective communications
- Effective (and not) techniques
- Privacy and security
- Group exercise & Discussion

Disparate and Coordinated communications



Disparate - "distinct in kind; essentially different; dissimilar"



COPYRIGHT JUSTIN CEDERHOLM AIRLINES.NET

Disparate and Coordinated communications



Coordinate - "To harmonize in a common action or effort"



How it all started...



- It was a great idea
- Let's do it!
- Oh, by the way
- Can we reschedule?

Effective communications



- Terminology
- Common Threads
- Challenges
- Team
 - Health
 - Culture
 - Expectations

Terminology



- "Virtual teams are groups of people who work interdependently with shared purpose across space, time, and organization boundaries using technology to communicate and collaborate." (Lipnack and Stamps, 2000)
- "What often leads a team to be considered 'virtual' is if some or all members work from dispersed locations, which may be in different buildings, cities, and in many cases different organizations, states/provinces, countries or continents." (Gibson & Cohen, 2003)

Common threads



- Team of contributors
- Interdependent
- Shared purpose
- Functional, organizational, temporal, and/or geographic separation
- Using the same tools to communicate and collaborate

Common Challenges



- With Virtual Teams, Everything is Magnified and Amplified
- Relationship development
- Developing trust
- Feelings of isolation
- Role ambiguity
- Greater potential for misunderstandings
- Difficulties with technology

Team Health



Creating and maintaining a healthy team

- Perform a team 'health' check initially
- Lock-in sponsor support!
- Get the unknowns on the table
- Deal with expectations, concerns and anxieties of team members EARLY
- Introduce the topic of cultural differences and the positive aspects, the potential challenges.
- Repeat periodically!

Team Health



Quick Project Health Check

Enter a number between 0 and 10, where 10 represents the maximum confidence you have in the statement

Project Statements	Confidence Level
The Delivery Team output will match the requirements	6
The Business Case is still valid and understood	7
The Delivery Team understand what needs to be delivered and when	6
Project progress is monitored	4
Project monitoring is accurate	4
Project monitoring is up to date	4
Business risk has been quantified and mitigated	6
Technical risk has been quantified and mitigated	7
The Project is under control	7
The Customer is confident that their requirements will be met	8
Scope creep is being managed	6
Team members are happy with Project communications	7
Team members understand their roles and responsibilities	7
The Delivery Team have all the required skills	4

Team Culture



There is no formula, and you can't purchase this:

- It is always 'home grown' and varies by each unique set of personalities and projects
- It will develop, be aware, stay engaged
- It is a set of learned values, meanings and attitudes shared by the group
- A deliberate, cognizant sensitivity is required to enhance trust and grow respect

Team Initiation



- Get the 'right' people
- Having an up front face-to-face meetings is nice
- Agree on the critical success factors
- Develop 'ground rules' for all aspects of effort
- Set up communication tools at the beginning
- Agree on project methodology (the answer is...)
- Commit to a Team Operating Agreement

Effective techniques



- What is the point?
- General principles
- Virtual Tools Review
- Virtual Tools Example
- To email (or not)

Effective techniques



- General principles
 - A common set of tools which every one can access and / or update is good.
 - Using the web magnifies, amplifies and simplifies
 - The access and organization should be simple and straight forward
 - Version control is nice
 - Backup and recovery is critical

Effective techniques



- Virtual Tools Review
 - What are some options?
 - [Tools Inventory](#)

Technology	Examples	Pros	Cons
Two tin-cans	Campbell Soup	Cheap, simple	Poor signal-to-noise ratio
E-mail	Outlook, GMail	Universal, virtually free Useful for one-on-one, or one-on-two communication, immediate, more personal than an e-mail	No verbal or physical communication cues, often over-used Interruptive, less personal than a phone call, not good for complex discussions
Instant messaging	Windows Live, Google Chat, Adium, Skype, lots of them	Less interruptive than a phone call, effective for simple messages and updates, More personal than e-mail, verbal cues, good for complex discussions	Damaging to thumb tendons, sometimes too cryptic, generational differences, not effective for complex discussions
Text messaging	All cell phones and PDAs		
Phone call	Land line, cell phone, VOIP		Interruptive
Voice mail	Major office systems, phone providers	Time-shifted, verbal cues	Impersonal No visual communication cues, dreaded "phone silence", timezone-sensitive
Teleconferencing	Many major commercial providers	Global group discussions made possible	
Video conferencing	Skype, many major commercial providers	Both verbal and physical communication cues available, sharing of virtual docs and sharing of desk tops. Skype works well with contacts through out the world	Often a technical challenge to coordinate systems, video quality improving but not ideal Lacks the immediacy of a side-by-side collaboration (phone conference can help), security?, document retention and backup
Online document collaboration	Google Docs, Zoho, Microsoft Office Live	Time-shifted (time coordination not required), good for capturing ideas and brainstorming	On-demand, only made available to project members when they review the portal
Intranet / project portals	Microsoft Sharepoint, LinkedIn Huddle	Group information sharing, dedicated information on a particular project	Still dependent upon working together at the same time
Desktop sharing	Skype, WebEx / GoTo Meeting / Live Meeting	Good collaboration, verbal cues Excellent tool for distributing information to a group, either on-demand or 'push' with RSS	Not very good for two-way communication, time-shifted so no immediacy
Blogs / RSS	Wordpress, Blogger		

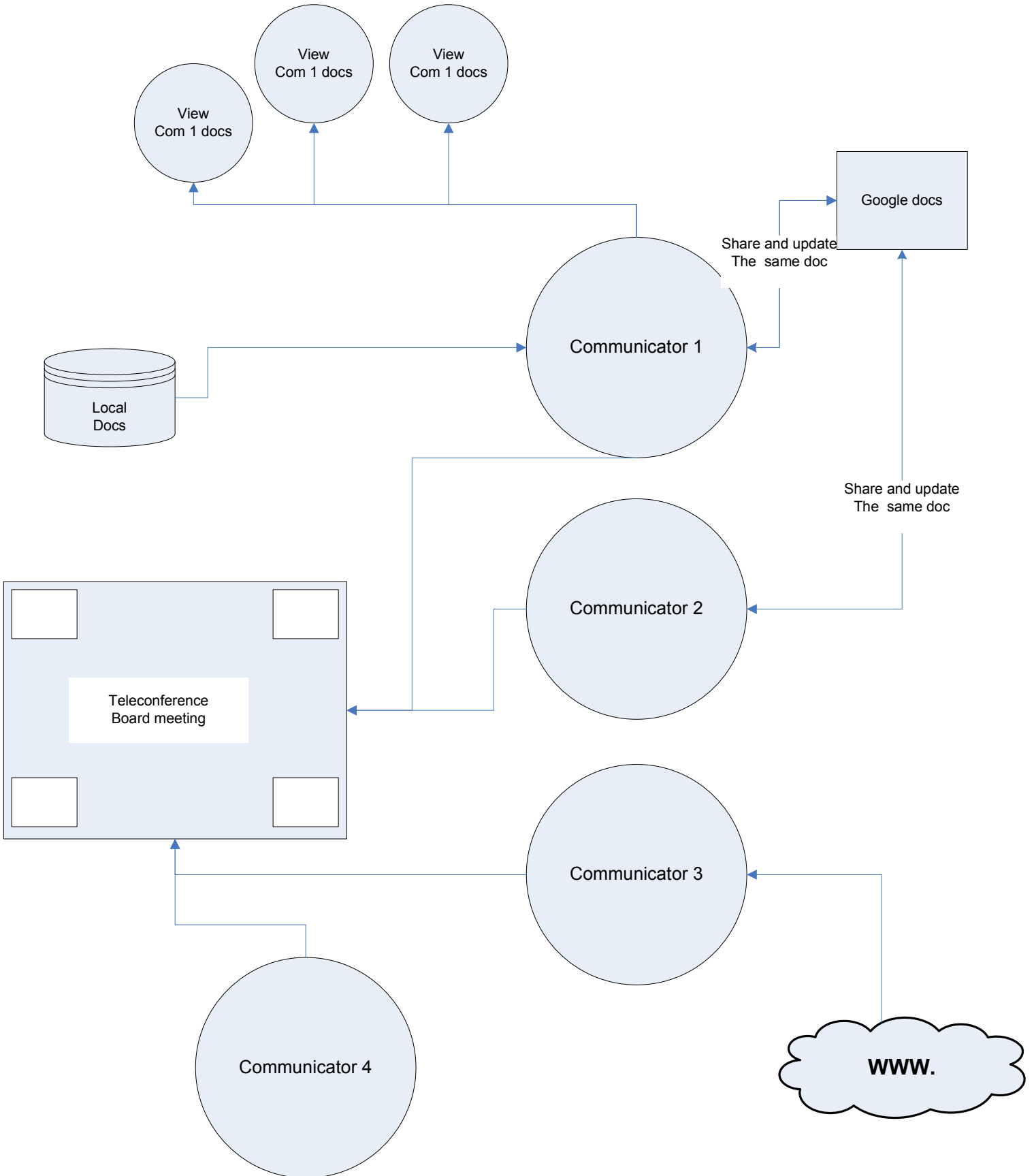
Micro-blogging	Twitter	Good for keeping a group connected on more immediate updates	Easily overdone, misunderstood Limited functionality or customizations available for specific teams, often free versions are restricted by project or team size, costs.
Online project management tools	BaseCamp, LiquidPlanner, many others	Reasonable project tools for smaller teams, or less complex project portfolios	Heavy lifting to set up properly, expensive for smaller teams,
Enterprise project management	MS SharePoint, MS Project Enterprise	Powerful tools for coordinating larger teams, project portfolios	

Effective techniques



- Virtual Tools Example
 - How does it really work?
 - [Life in The Cloud](#)
 - Collaboration on this presentation
 - Skype conversations with Mike
 - Working on same spreadsheet in Google
 - Viewing Mikes desk top, or mine

Web Based Communications



Effective (or not) techniques



- To email (or not)
 - What's the point?
 - Are there better ways?
 - Next Steps

Privacy and security



- Privacy policies
- Document retention policies
- Authentication, authorization and audit
- Third world programmers
- Open wireless networks

Group Discussions



- Scenarios to solve
- 5-10 minutes of group discussion
- Group review of resulting ideas



Cultural Comm. Styles - Group Exercise #1

Frank is a young project manager on a project that is key to his company's immediate future. He's under a lot of pressure to deliver a successful project on time 3 months from now. He has team members in Omaha, Portland and the United Kingdom.

The UK team members don't seem to take the project seriously and have been late on some time-sensitive deliverables. Their manner on some conference calls has rubbed some of the Omaha team members the wrong way.

At the same time, contributors from the UK have told Frank that the "Americans don't get it - they're all work and no play." As a result, there's friction within the team now and normal communications are breaking down.

What do you do?

Virtual Communications - Group Exercise #2

The body is not dead, yet, but the victim is barely breathing, buried beneath a mountain of email, crushed by the weight, risk, uncertainty and time requirements. Do you carefully read 107 emails, or do you skim and delete, what if you miss the gun pointed at you....?

Challenge:

- **Agreeing as a team on how you would like to use email**
- **Agree on what you won't use email for**
- **Managing the communications - identifying and apprehending "Obfiscation" and his side kicks "CYA" and "Miz Communic"**
- **Who will be "The Enforcer", and with what sort of authority?**

The end of the story



Success!!

The team is:

- Communicating / relating well
- Completing the project
- Meeting sponsor expectations

The team is not:

- Flying between cities and countries
- Spending a lot of effort mis-communicating
- Being buried in email

Virtual "*Do*"s and "*Don't*"s



- DO get the right people
- DO manage expectations early
- DO invest up-front in face-to-face time
- DO acquire sponsor support
- Use quality mic and camera

- DON'T assume it's a silver-bullet
- DON'T forget 'Magnification' and 'Amplification'
- DON'T assume technology will work
- DON'T ignore project basics

Questions?



Thank You!



Mark Polhamus, PMI Mt. Baker
mark.pmi.pmp@gmail.com

References



- *Managing Global/Virtual Project Teams*, Pritchard and Hambley, 2007, Mount Royal University Project Management Workshop
- *Virtual Teams: People working across boundaries with technology*, 2000, Lipnack and Stamps
- *Virtual Teams That Work*, 2003, Gibson and Cohen