Coping with Multitasking During Project Meetings

Dr. Jim Black
Preliminaries

• Courtesies
  – Please turn off cell phones and PDAs
  – Workshop logistics

• Contact Information
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This Talk In A Nutshell

1. People are very busy
2. Culture is changing
3. People are increasingly multitasking to get more done
4. Unmanaged multitasking hurts projects
5. There are techniques and tools to manage this challenge
“Life is busy, but some people seem to get more done than others --- multitaskers! They’ve found a way to do several things at once.
Can’t focus on the teleconference? Join the club

By Alorie Gilbert

Story last modified Thu Dec 16 19:51:28 PST 2004

Workers are sharpening their multitasking skills—but the boss might not notice.

Ninety percent of people who participate in conference calls find things to keep them busy, according to a new survey from audio and video conferencing company Raindance Communications.
Is It A Social Transgression?

- Public Safety
  - Doing IM while driving 75 mph on I-25

- Successful Project Execution
  - Doing IM during key project meeting
The Damage to Your Project

- Issues not being resolved early or at all
- Wasting scarce time

EDS: Observed Benefits of Multitasking

• Enhances employee productivity when meeting cannot utilize all of employee’s attention resources

• Does not hurt team productivity if employee gives only excess attention resources to multitasking

• If these both are true, multitasking enhances the organization’s overall productivity

EDS: Multitasking Damage Scenarios

- Multitasking attempts exceed skills
- Overallocate attention resources to local space
- Fail to shift to high attention when needed
- Incorrectly assess importance of competing claims

EDS: Concept of Attention Resources

Strategy for Dealing With Multitasking

• Recognize that multitasking is here to stay
• Understand that it impacts your projects
• Take action to manage multitasking’s impact on your projects

“Treat project meetings as though you are not in control of what participants are doing and selectively compete for their participation.”
Strategy: Compete Selectively for Eyeballs!
Why Compete Selectively

• Be respective of participants’ needs to manage their own time
• There may be intervals when the meeting does not need them
• Get them back and keep them back as long as they are needed
Take a Cue from NBC Nightly News

Replace this…

…With this!

Requires less sustained attention

Attention Resources Available for Multitasking

Attention Resources Required for Meeting
Prepare Meetings Using this Approach

Replace this…

Requires less sustained “brain work” to fulfill meeting goals

…With this!

Requires less sustained “brain work” to fulfill meeting goals
Rich Media Speaks to Audiences

Less than 1 second after ignition, a puff of smoke appeared at the aft joint of the right booster, indicating that the O-rings burned through and failed to seal. At this point, all was lost.

On the launch pad, the leak lasted only about 2 seconds and then apparently was plugged by putty and insulation as the shuttle rose, flying through rather strong cross-winds. Then 58.788 seconds after ignition, when the Challenger was 6 miles up, a flicker of flame emerged from the leaky joint. Within seconds, the flame grew and engulfed the fuel tank (containing liquid hydrogen and liquid oxygen). That tank ruptured and exploded, destroying the shuttle.

As the shuttle exploded and broke up at approximately 73 seconds after launch, the two booster rockets crisscrossed and continued flying wildly. The right booster, identifiable by its failure plume, is now to the left of its non-defective counterpart.

The flight crew of Challenger 51-L. Front row, left to right: Michael J. Smith, pilot; Francis R. (Dick) Scobee, commander; Ronald E. McNair. Back row: Ellison S. Onizuka, S. Christa McAuliffe, Gregory B. Jarvis, Judith A. Resnik.
Rich Media Tells a Better Story

What the engineers used in their meeting

A graph that was made after the disaster

Forecasted Launch Temperature

Risky Trend in O-Ring Damage Vs. Temperature

26°–29° range of forecasted temperatures (as of January 27, 1986) for the launch of space shuttle Challenger on January 28
Contrast in Required Concentration

- Text-oriented PowerPoint presentation to decide fate of shuttle Columbia
- Recent call-to-action documentary on global warming
Case Study: Cicero Project

• Sequence of related projects
• Unresolved issues from previous project
  – Lateness
  – Customer satisfaction
• Fresh issues on current project
• Audience
  – Plenty of pre-conceived diagnoses
  – Busy and impatient
Had to Answer Three Questions

- Is project team capable and credible?
- What happened on earlier project?
- What will we do on this project?

Concise, Clear Presentation → Correct Decisions
Project Data Sources

- Notes and Logs (Excel, Paper)
- Email Folders (Outlook)
- Project Plans (MS Project)
- Reports and Presentations (Word, Ppt)

Persuasive Presentation → Correct Decisions
Visual Tools and Techniques for Projects

Insert shapes from stencils, copy titles to them, and adjust shape geometry to conform to dates

Plan revisions, dates

Cut and paste shapes from Visio to PowerPoint

Configure shapes to animate in sequence
Status and Recommendations for Project Cicero

Jim Black
Director, Project Management Office
Pluribus-Acme Software
Project Cicero History

2003 Development Timelines

Jan Feb Mar Apr May Jun Jul Aug Sep Oct Nov Dec

- Cicero Development and Test As Desired
- Desired Additional Cicero Dev and Test
- Cicero Cert As Desired

Draft bottoms-Up Schedule Ready Sept-Oct 2004 for exit from cert
Demand for aggressive compression of schedule to deploy in Dec. 2003.

Re-scoping and re-planning begins.
More aggressive planning assumptions used.
Spec changing.
Engineers writing Cicero code as fast as they can, with or without spec.
Testers need final spec to write good test cases.

First Baseline Schedule Ready, Spec completed.
Accepted as Plan of record.
- Code complete on Feb 12
- Testing complete on Mar 4
- Certification exit on Apr 13

Certification Exit Asked For by Management

Demand for aggressive compression of schedule to deploy in Dec. 2003.
Project Cicero History

2004 Development Timelines

Jan  Feb  Mar  Apr  May  Jun  Jul  Aug  Sep  Oct  Nov  Dec

Cicero Development/Test  A22 Test  Cicero Test  External Certification  Customer Lab Test and Field Trials

KEY

- Commercial introduction
- Major Project Event
- External certification date

Development Timelines:
- Major release
- Minor release

Events:
- Schedule slips 2 months: already had aggressive schedule on "old" features - new features added - replan the testing
- New feature accepted: Feature foo/bar demanded by regions
- New scope accepted: Switch firmware from X to Y
- Schedule Slips 6 weeks
Project Cicero History

2004 Development Timelines

Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec

Cicero Development/Test | Test | Dev/Test | Dev/Test | Test | External Certification | Customer Test and Field Trials

- **External Certification**
- **Customer Test and Field Trials**

**KEY**
- Red diamond: Commercial introduction
- Blue square: Major Project Event
- Green triangle: External certification date

**KEY**
- Major release: Development
- Minor release: Development

**Notes:**
- Vendor fatal errors observed Schedule Slips 1 month.
- New scope accepted: Switch firmware from X to Y Schedule Slips 6 weeks.
Project Cicero History

2004 Development Timelines

Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec


Vendor fatal errors found. Schedule Slips 1 month.
Vendor fatal errors fixed.
Release Candidate 1 enters External Certification.
Release Candidate 1 enters External Certification.

KEY
- Commercial introduction
- Major Project Event
- External certification date
Learnings: Define Fast and Stay Realistic

False Economy Development Timelines

What we intend to happen:

But definition decisions drag on, so reality looks like this:

Ignoring reality, we compress development to try to meet original end date:

Which results in more defects, causing actual end date to be much worse
Pluribus-Acme Software
Presentation Outline

• Project Cicero Dev and Test History
• Field Deployment Quality Issues
• Current Development Status
• Going Forward Plan

Will not show the rest of the Cicero presentation, but it turned out well!
Lessons From Project Cicero Review

• Media-rich project stories are very effective with busy people
  – Concise, clear graphical narrative
  – Headlines recounting memorable events
  – Time-based (cause and effect) sequencing

• Building media-rich project stories is a pain
  – Built the same way Walt Disney made first *Mickey Mouse* cartoon!
  – 40 person-hours of tedious work to make 10-minute segment of a presentation
World’s Shortest Books?

- Best-of-Breed 2005 FEMA Emergency Projects in New Orleans, Louisiana
- 10 Lessons from the Successes of the Boston’s “Big Dig” Project
- Handbook for Using Visualization in Project Team Meetings
Why Project Meetings are Media Poor

• Value of rich project media not recognized
• Project managers are rushed
• Preparing mediagraphics is tedious
How Can a Busy PM Prepare Visuals?
Click a Button Inside Microsoft Project…

![Microsoft Project screenshot]

- **Launch OnePager to create graph**

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<th>Predecessors</th>
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... to Create Fit-for-Purpose Visuals
Tools for Showing Project Dynamics
Case Study: Project Tenderfoot

- See Sean Hearne (Charles Schwab and Co) and Jim Black at PMI Global Congress on Tuesday, October 21 at Colorado Convention Center
- Customer-facing IT project
- Stakeholders: 12-person steering committee
- $750K final budget ($150K initially)
- 150 people on project team
- 25 distinct organizational groups in 8 locations
Project Collaboration Chart

Project Tenderfoot (Project ID-45)

Core Functional Teams
- Infrastructure Team 1
- Infrastructure Team 2
- Infrastructure Team 3
- Infrastructure Team 4
- Display Channel #1
- Display Channel #2
- Display Channel #3
- Display Channel #4
- Display Channel #5

Project Tenderfoot Matrix Team

Extended Teams
- Printing Team Statements and others
- E-Mail Communications Group
- Infrastructure Team #5
- Infrastructure Team #6
- Infrastructure Team #7
- Offshore Support
- Risk Analysis

Business and Corporate Support Teams
- Legal – Corporate Counsel
- Corporate Compliance
- Business Owner & Accountable Exec.
- Regulatory Product Management
- Operations Team – Type 1
- Operations Team – Type 2

12/27/2007

NOT an ORG-CHART
Use for Collaboration and Project Planning

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Trouble Brewing Early On

9/15/2006
Scope of project nct nailed down

10/2/2006
Determined two more functional groups must be included
• Trouble indicators
  – Numerous unanswered questions
  – Handling key legal and compliance aspects not agreed upon
  – Each week, a new detail was being uncovered
  – Each week, started working with another new group
  – Frequently revising the schedule on a weekly basis

• Difficulties in uncovering important details at team meetings → clearly some team members were not as engaged in project business as the team needed them to be!
Project Manager Changes Course

- Quickly organized web meetings with sub-groups to flush out all remaining issues
- Made extensive use of SharePoint to bring new team members up to speed (via a “welcome package”)
- Presented agenda in advance
- Began using OnePager graphic timelines, which
  - Focused and shortened discussion durations
  - Minimized misunderstandings and unnecessary arguments
  - Kept team out of the weeds
  - Projected authority and calm
Project Survives!

• Finally, used better information gleaned from these meetings to request formal scope and budget changes from sponsor and executive
• Changes were approved after a series of stakeholder briefings, some of which benefitted from TimeArrow movie tool to clearly review what had happened
• Project manager refers to his successful strategy as “fact-based reasoning”
• Project has now progressed successfully through the risky construction phase and looks well on its way to a successful deployment
Best Practices

According to the project manager, the virtual meeting-management practices that ultimately tipped the project dynamics in the right direction were:

- Agendas that were adhered to
- Courtesy
- Setting the right meeting tone
- Use of auditory and visual cues
- Use of rich visual media
Summary

1. Multitasking is here to stay
2. Unmanaged multitasking hurts projects
3. Techniques and tools to manage it
   • Get over it!
   • Compete for their attention when you need it
   • Work creatively to lower their effort to engage (rich project media!)