

One Project and Three Teams to Rule them All: What can happen when you fail to communicate¹

Pablo Cruz

PMP & Scrum Product Owner

You've heard the phrase "Communication is so important in a relationship". This phrase is correct and the reason is that without the ability to communicate how the person feels, whether happy or upset, can create a precarious environment for the relationship, which one can say would be a rocky start. This can be said about projects because without effective communications, a project will be at risk before it starts.

In working on a large complex project using Scrum/Agile as the methodology, the project was split into 3 teams. Each team had its own Project Manager, Product Owner, Scrum Master, IT, and Business Client. The deployment date is the same for all 3 teams but the requirements are all different except that all three teams are dependent on each other's work. In addition, team 2 and team 3 must agree on which product will be primary and which one will be secondary before product mapping can begin otherwise there will be an inconsistent report between revenue and volumes.

Team 1, completed building requirements, user stories, grooming, and development. They were able to communicate effectively and efficiently with all team members to complete the work 2 months ahead of schedule.

Team 2 scheduled several calls to begin discussing which product would be considered primary and secondary. After 3 meetings which spanned 2 weeks, one member realizes that team 3 is not part of the discussion. Team 3 joins the 4th scheduled meeting but has issues trying to catch up. Team 3 required a 5th meeting to get up to speed. The Project Manager failed to communicate across teams to coordinate an important requirement. The impact to the project was critical due to the release date was three months away.

This project required a dimensional cube for reporting. Although Team 2 is working on volumes and Team 3 is working on revenue, the list of dimensions is the same between teams. Team 2's Product Owner begins to create user stories to list the dimensions that will be part of the cube but fails to engage Team 3's Product Owner. Team 3's Product Owner creates her own version of the user story with different dimensions. It is during the grooming session that it is realized the discrepancy between both teams. This mistake created modifications to the user story and required a second grooming session with all team members. The failure of the Product Owners and Scrum Masters to engage and communicate between each other created confusion and delays.

¹ How to cite this article: Cruz, P. (2018). One Project and Three Teams to Rule them All: What can happen when you fail to communicate; *PM World Journal*, Vol. VII, Issue VIII - August.

Every project requires a list of roles and responsibilities. At the start of every project the team should discuss who is responsible for what and what their goals should be. Without this component, each team member will create their own perception. During Team 3's release there were several examples of what can happen when roles and responsibilities are not define before the start of a project.

The majority of the work was to be completed by the business. They were the SME and responsible for product mapping. Two months before the end of the project, the Data Governance (DG) member requested the timeline with deliverables from the PM. It was discovered that the due date for having products mapped in the system was within 2 weeks. The Scrum Master requested a status of the mapping effort from the DG member. DG had no information as he was not responsible for working on that effort. A team meeting was scheduled to discuss who was working on the product mapping and if they would be able to meet the due date. During the meeting, it was determined the business is the member responsible for the product mapping. The business client, as well as other team members, was not made aware of the upcoming deliverables timeline.

Neither the PM nor Scrum Master at any time during the project provided information on upcoming deliverables, status of sprints/deliverables, or issues. Team members were not aware of who was working on what and when they were expected to be completed. The product mapping deliverable was completed 3 weeks later.

In addition, Team 3 failed to properly discuss status of each member's work during the daily scrum call as described in the Scrum Methodology and it failed to include the business client in the daily scrum call. The team lacked cohesion among members, which created multiple deficiencies and placed the project at risk multiples times.

It's important as Project Managers to realize the importance of effective communication among all stakeholders, especially when you have a large project that is split into multiple teams. Collaboration between PM, Scrum Master, and Product Owner is critical and must ensure that all team members are kept up to date with timelines, completed and upcoming deliverables, issues, and to collect information from the team. Each member should know what they are responsible for to ensure goals and deliverables are completed. It's not just the responsibility of the Project Manager to own the project but of all team members. Each team member wins when the project is successful.

About the Author



Pablo Cruz, PMP

Dallas, TX, USA



Pablo Cruz (PMP, Agile Product Owner) has over 24 years of experience in the Information Systems field which includes Project Management, Network Administration, and System Support. Previous certifications include Microsoft Systems Engineer, Oracle Administrator, Wireless Network Administrator, and Microsoft SQL.

Pablo is a Lead Financial Analyst at AT&T. He is currently working as a team member of the Alliance Business Intelligence Data Warehouse responsible for an enterprise wide effort to provide business intelligence data from a centralized data warehouse. Pablo lives in Texas with his husband Adam and their loving daughter Karina Ruth.

Pablo Cruz can be contacted at Pablo.f.cruz@att.com