



Let's talk

# Project Management

**How to bridge the big gap that is swallowing  
your projects: Communication.**

Davey Montooth



I love to read. I want you to read this whole book, but, sometimes I like to know what I'm getting into.

So, here's the **tl;dr** for this book.

Poor communication is a leading factor in project failures. As a project manager, your responsibility is to make sure communication is smooth and effective.

To ensure that, you can use the following communication frameworks to help establish - clarity, objectives, expectations, priorities and results.

Clarity:

- Grow
- 5 Point Star
- PPRT

Objectives:

- OKRs
- SMART Goals

Expectations:

- VERB
- DACI
- RACI

Prioritization:

- MoSCoW
- MoAR
- ICE



Results:

- SBAR
- BLUF
- Minto Pyramid

There are many other frameworks to explore but these are a good start to helping you improve communication.

If you have questions, comments or suggestions, please feel free to email me - [davey@gapbridgebooks.com](mailto:davey@gapbridgebooks.com).

If you like the book and want to buy me a coffee, you can do that with this link: <https://buymeacoffee.com/gapbridgebooks>

If you want to know about future books, updates or other interesting finds, you can join the free GapBridgeBooks Substack: <https://substack.com/@gapbridgebooks>

I greatly appreciate you reading this and I hope to hear your thoughts.

Thanks.

# Preface

Before you read this, I have to let you know - I'm not a Project Manager.

I wrote this book because I've been building software products for close to 25 years. I've worked with startups, global companies and everything in-between. I've been on teams that worked really well together, and teams that... didn't.

This has afforded me the invaluable opportunity to experience different ways to get work done. Both good and bad.

This has taught me an important lesson. When facing challenges, take step back and look for the gaps. Gaps in skill, experience, resources, etc.

Regardless of tools, knowing how to identify and bridge gaps is one of the most valuable skills, especially in Project Management.

So, I started Gap Bridge Books.

My vision is to offer short, to-the-point guides that help others bridge gaps they face in their work.

I'm somebody who loves to share, so most of the Gap Bridge Books will be free.

All I ask is - if you like this book, share it with others.

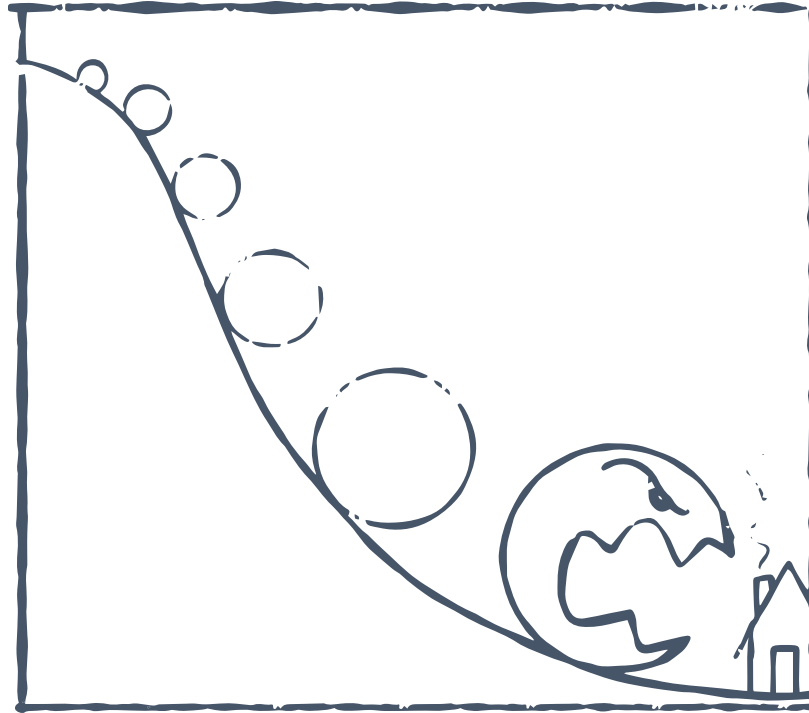
As this book is about communication, please feel free to communicate with me:  
[davey@gapbridgebooks.com](mailto:davey@gapbridgebooks.com)

Gap: Communication

**Poor communication is a contributing factor in 56% of projects that fail.**

Source: Project Management Institute

# Intro



Communication gaps have a snowball effect.

Like avalanches in a cartoon.

They start with a tiny, harmless snowball at the top of a snowy hill.

As it rolls downhill, it gets bigger, and bigger, and bigger. Finally, it's big enough to swallow the small town at the bottom of the hill.

I'm sure you know where I'm going with this.

As a project manager, if you don't bridge those communication gaps, the small town will be your project.

# Intro

To ensure your project doesn't get swallowed up, you have to master how to communicate a few key things:

- 1. Clarity**
- 2. Objectives**
- 3. Expectations**
- 4. Prioritization**
- 5. Results**

That's the goal with this book - to help you bridge communication gaps and bring clarity to your projects.

Since clarity is the goal, that's where we'll start

Gap: Clarity

**37% of project failures  
are due to a lack of  
clarity.**

**Source: Teamstage.io**



# Clarity

**“A problem well stated is half solved.”**

Charles Kettering, Head of Research at General Motors

This is a great quote to express the importance of communicating with clarity.

It means - if you can understand and clearly explain a problem, you're halfway to a solution. When everyone knows exactly what the problem is, it's easier to find solutions.

Sometimes though, those driving projects are the ones creating the clarity gaps.

We'll explore 3 simple to use communication frameworks to help establish clarity:

- 1. GROW**
- 2. 5 Point Star**
- 3. PPRT**

Each of these frameworks are best used at the initiation of a project. They can however be used at any point when there is a gap in clarity.

Let's check out how they work.

# GROW

It's common to come up with a goal and be fuzzy about how to achieve it.

GROW helps clear up fuzziness.

It does so by asking 4 simple questions designed to help define the following:

## **Goal(s)**

What do you want to achieve?

## **Reality**

What is the current situation?

## **Options**

What can be done?

## **Way forward**

What are the next steps?

When I learn something new, I like to have examples. Let's practice GROW with one.

Since this book is about communication, we'll use that as our topic. Imagine you're managing a cross-functional team that is experiencing frequent miscommunication.

### **Goal:**

I want to improve team collaboration to reduce miscommunication and delays.

### **Reality:**

Right now, team members work in silos and only communicate at the last minute. This is leading to miscommunication and delays. These delays are costing money.

# GROW

**Options:**

We could have more cross-functional meetings and co-working sessions. We could try something new like Design Thinking.

**Way forward:**

As the Project Manager, I'll start by scheduling cross-functional meetings and looking for Design Thinking courses for the team.

Working through these questions, you'll help move towards a clearer picture of where your project is going.

Let's move on to the 5 Point Star framework, which is designed to help establish vision.

# 5 Point Star Framework

This framework is simple by design. However, if you practice it with intent, it can have a big impact on your project, team or business.

You simply have to ask these 5 questions:

- 1. What problem or unmet need do you want to solve?**
- 2. Who do you want to solve it for?**
- 3. What are they currently feeling, saying or doing about it?**
- 4. How do you plan to solve it?**
- 5. How will you measure the effectiveness of your solution?**

Though it's designed to be simple, the key to this framework is to be specific with your answers.

Once you answer these questions, you'll have everything you need to define your vision and mission statements.

If you're not familiar with Vision and Mission statements, here's a short description of each:

## **Vision Statement**

A definition of what you aspire to achieve. An aspirational and inspirational statement of your long-term goal for the future.

## **Mission Statement**

A description of your main purpose and goals. It describes why you exist, what you do, and who you do it for.

Let's use the same communication example that we used for the GROW framework.

# 5 Point Star Framework

Given that our cross-functional team is facing challenges with communication, let's apply the 5 Point Star framework.

## **What problem or unmet need do you want to solve?**

The team is experiencing frequent miscommunications. This is leading to missed deadlines, confusion about project requirements, and rework.

## **Who do you want to solve it for?**

All product team members, including developers, designers, and other stakeholders involved in the process.

## **What are they currently feeling, saying, or doing about it?**

Everybody feels frustrated and stressed due to unclear instructions. Missed deadlines and rework are bringing morale down. Because of the frustrations, they're withdrawing into silos to avoid collaboration.

## **How do you plan to solve it?**

Implement a team channel on Slack to encourage open communication. Set up regular, cross-functional meetings with clear agendas. Consolidate project management tools to develop ubiquity.

## **How will you measure the effectiveness of your solution?**

We'll measure effectiveness by tracking project timelines and monitoring deadlines. We'll do regular morale checks to assess satisfaction with the new practices. We'll clearly document and share requirements and expectations.

As you may notice, GROW is a great framework to use at the initiation of a project. The 5 Point Star framework is great for further refinement and defining a vision and mission.

We have one more that is very similar to both. I include it as an option for you to exercise your preference.

# PPRT

I first found this framework in a blog post on the Asana site by Justin Rosenstein.

In the post, Justin identified 3 kinds of clarity found in high performing teams:

## Clarity of Purpose

A clear understanding of why you're doing what you're doing. If you've crafted your vision statement, you can include that here.

## Clarity of Plan

How you're going to achieve your purpose. When defining your plan, you'll want to include your mission, strategy, objectives and tasks.

## Clarity of Responsibility

Clearly define who is doing what, and why.

After reading and practicing this framework, I added one more kind of clarity - **Time**.

In defining clarity of time, you establish expectations for your roadmap. When does your project start? When do you expect to reach important milestones? When do you expect your project to end?

With the addition of Time, that gives us the PPRT framework - Purpose, Plan, Responsibility and Time.

There is some overlap with GROW and 5 Point Star frameworks. Though similar, each have their own strengths. You can use them individually or all together.

However you choose to use these frameworks, they give you a solid foundation to move confidently to the next topic - **Objectives**.

Gap: Objectives

**44% of projects fail due to a lack of alignment between business and project objectives.**

**Source: [Teamstage.io](https://www.teamstage.io)**

# Objectives

**“If everyone is moving forward together, then success takes care of itself.”**

Henry Ford, Founder of Ford Motors

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Now that you've established clarity, it's time to create alignment. To do that, you need to set clear goals. This helps provide direction.

There are many goal-setting frameworks, each with their own merits. For the sake of clarity, I'm going to focus on two.

- 1. OKRs (Objectives and Key Results)**
- 2. SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound)**

The reason being - these are two of the most popular. Maybe the most popular.

They share similarities but they serve very different purposes and focus on different outcomes.

**OKRs** focus on setting big aspirational goals - Objectives. They help you measure progress by tracking specific outcomes - Key Results.

**SMART goals** are more specific and focused on individual goals. They're ideal for creating well-defined plans that need clear steps and timelines.



# Objectives - OKRs

Continuing on with our communication theme, let's explore how we can use OKRs and SMART goals.

Imagine something for me.

Based on our continuing quest to improve communication, our team has come up with an idea for a product. It's going to be a tool to help improve cross-functional team communication.

We've worked through our clarity building frameworks and now need to inspire and align our team to create it.

We need to start by defining our objectives. We'll use the OKR framework for this.

We know that our Objective should be aspirational. We also know that we need to set some specific outcomes that can measure our progress.

Let's define our first set.

## Objective:

Create the industry's best tool for cross-functional team communication.

## Key Results:

**Key Result 1:** Collect positive feedback from 95% of customers within 6 months of launch.

**Key Result 2:** Reach 1 million active users within the first 18 months.

**Key Result 3:** Receive 3 industry awards for best communication tool.

This OKR sets a clear goal with key results that measure success. Please note, each key result includes a number to be used for that measurement. This is important as it creates a metric that can be objectively substantiated.

# Objectives - SMART Goals

Let's explore how we might communicate the same intent using SMART goals.

## **Specific**

Build and launch a new cross-functional team communication tool that improves team collaboration and efficiency.

## **Measurable**

Achieve a 95% user satisfaction rate within the first 6 months and reduce cross-functional project delays by 25%.

## **Achievable**

Perform user research and gather feedback to ensure the tool addresses key pain points.

## **Relevant**

This tool fills a critical gap in the market by providing a seamless communication platform for cross-functional teams. This is evidenced by improvements in our own team communication.

## **Time-bound**

Launch the product by the end of Q3 and reach the adoption and performance targets by the end of Q1 next year.

There are clear similarities between the OKRs and SMART goals, but the SMART goal takes a step closer to defining activities and expectations.

Let's continue on to the next big topic - **Expectations**.

Gap: Expectations

**Only 47% of employees strongly agree they know what is expected of them at work.**

Source: Gallup.com

# Expectations

**“The most common reason that employees fail to meet performance expectations is that those expectations were never made clear in the first place.”**

Paul Marciano, Fashion designer and businessman

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Setting clear expectations is one of the most important things a project manager can do.

When everyone knows what's expected, it keeps the team on the same page and helps avoid confusion.

In project management, the two most important set of expectations you need to be clear on are:

- 1. Requirements**
- 2. Roles and responsibilities**

Requirements come in many forms. You may need to communicate functional requirements, business requirements, or simply write tickets.

# Expectations

For roles and responsibilities, you may need to define who does what at two distinct levels:

- 1. Decision Making**
- 2. Task Execution**

We'll cover frameworks for setting clear expectations in each area, starting with requirements.

# VERB

This is a great framework for communicating individual requirements or expectations. It can be used for new work or re-work like communicating a software feature or bug.

**VERB** stands for:

## **Vital**

What are the critical details?

## **Explicit**

Is your communication clear and specific?

## **Repeatable**

If somebody followed your communication step-by-step, would they end up with the desired result?

## **Beginner-friendly**

Can somebody with zero prior knowledge or experience understand your communication?

Let's practice with an example.

Imagine you're managing a project to launch a new website to market our new communication tool.

The site is still under development and has a QA version for testing and a production version.

There is a feature that allows people to sign up for announcements, deals and other communications.

# VERB

When they sign up, they get access to a members area. They have to log into this members area using their email and password.

There is a bug with the login process.

You found the bug and have to report it to the web developer who is responsible for this feature.

Let's explore two examples of how this bug might be reported in a ticketing system.

## **Ticket #1**

### **Description:**

The login screen on the new website is broken. I tried to log in and I can't.

## **Ticket #2**

### **Description:**

While trying to log into the members area on the QA website, the log in button appears to do nothing when clicked.

### **Steps to Reproduce:**

1. Navigate to <https://qa.gapbridgebooks.com/members> (links to site)
2. Enter the following email and password
  - a. Email - davey@gapbridgebooks.com
  - b. Password - ThisIsNotaRealPasswordToAnything
3. Click the log in button
4. Verify that nothing happens and no error is presented

### **Expected Behavior:**

When I enter my credentials, I am either logged into the members area or I'm shown an error message if an error exists.

# VERB

## **Environment:**

Google Chrome version x.x.x

Windows Operating System version x.x.x

I wish that the first ticket was a joke. It isn't. As a software engineer, I've spent an insane amount of time tracking down context for tickets like that. That's time that could be spent getting stuff done.

Time that could be saved with good communication.

Now that you have a framework for communicating requirements, it's now time to communicate roles and responsibilities.

For that we'll cover DACI and RACI - two similar frameworks to outline who does what.

Though there is some overlap, they focus on different level of roles and responsibilities.

DACI focuses on the who's who at the decision making level.

RACI focuses on who does what at the task execution level.



# DACI

As stated, **DACI** is a framework for communicating who's involved in the decision making process.

It stands for:

## **Driver**

Who leads the decision making process?

## **Approver**

Who gives the final approval?

## **Contributors**

Who provides input and expertise?

## **Informed**

Who needs to be kept in the loop?

For our communication tool, it may resemble the following:

### **Driver:**

The project manager or product manager, depending on the team composition.

### **Approver:**

The Product Owner, VP of Product or Chief Product Officer.

### **Contributors:**

Designers, developers, UI/UX experts, etc.

### **Informed:**

Marketing, sales, copywriters, customers, etc. Anybody who may be need to interact with the project or it's output.

# DACI

A good rule of thumb is to identify and document these groups of people. Share this document with everybody involved on the project.

Now, let's move to the RACI.

# RACI

This framework shares a lot of overlap with the DACI. That's why I included it. It brings familiarity into how to communicate responsibility at all levels.

**RACI** stands for:

## **Responsible**

Who is doing the work?

## **Accountable**

Who reviews the work and ensures it's done correctly?

## **Consulted**

Who gives input or feedback?

## **Informed**

Who needs to be kept in the loop?

The overlap with the DACI is a good thing. It lends to a natural progression from the macro to the micro levels of responsibility.

Let's review an example application of this framework as it relates to our new website.

### **Responsible:**

John is the engineer responsible for developing the members area.

### **Approver:**

Jane is the technical lead who ensures that John's work adheres to the agreed upon design.

# RACI

**Consulted:**

The design, UX and content teams will need to give feedback on the implementation.

**Informed:**

All teams up to and including those listed as the decision makers and approvers.

Depending on the complexity of a project, there may be several levels where this is applicable. It doesn't hurt to document these levels but, depending on the tools you use, the documentation may live in the tools.

For example, if you use something like Jira to manage the engineering side of this project, simply assigning tasks to individuals will suffice as documentation.

Now that we know how to communicate expectations, let's cover how to communicate priorities.

Gap: Prioritization

**39% of projects fail due to a change in the organization's priorities.**

**Source: [Simplilearn.com](https://www.simplilearn.com)**

# Prioritization

**“Decide what you want, decide what you are willing to exchange for it. Establish your priorities and go to work.”**

H.L. Hunt, American oil tycoon

Before I get into prioritization, I have to share something. I debated on several quotes to start this section. I had some other really good ones.

I chose this one because it encompasses two important aspects of prioritization:

- 1. What to focus on**
- 2. What's at risk when focus needs to change**

It's extremely common for priorities to change in a project. And, that's ok, sometimes. But, when priorities change often, this can derail any project.

As a project manager, you have one priority - deliver your project successfully.

Anytime something puts that at risk, you have to become a great negotiator. You have to be able to communicate what the change in focus puts at risk.

This helps those working with your team to understand how important prioritization and focus is. And, how damaging excessive context switching can be.

# Prioritization

In the spirit of prioritizing clarity and brevity, we'll cover these prioritization frameworks:

1. MoSCoW
2. MoAR
3. ICE

There are too many more to cover, but these are great frameworks to start with.

Let's dig in.

## MoSCoW

The MoSCoW framework is a simple yet powerful prioritization tool. It focuses on what must be done now versus what can be postponed.

It stands for:

- **Must have**
  - Essential for the project to succeed
- **Should have**
  - Important but not essential. Should be included if possible
- **Could have**
  - Nice to have, but not essential.
- **Won't have now (some people use Wish list)**
  - Agreed upon as not being included in this phase or iteration

This is especially useful when you're dealing with a large backlog of work and have tight deadlines.

## MoAR

MoAR is very similar to MoSCoW but arranges work based on what is required, what is optional and what can be removed.

# Prioritization

The important difference is the definition of what can be removed.

This changes the focus to what to add or subtract from a project to manage scope creep.

MoAR stands for:

- **Must have**
  - Essential for the project to succeed
- **Optional**
  - Items that aren't critical but could be included if there are resources available
- **Additional**
  - Items that can enhance a project but aren't critical
- **Removed**
  - Items that are removed to manage scope

While these two frameworks are great for prioritizing based on necessity, the next one is great for prioritizing based on impact.

## ICE

ICE prioritizes work based on three key factors:

1. **Impact**
  - a. How much positive effect the work will have
2. **Confidence**
  - a. How certain you are that it will have this impact
3. **Ease (or Effort)**
  - a. How easy it is to complete the work

To determine each of these factors, you score them on a scale.



# Prioritization

It's often a scale from 1 - 10 where 1 is the minimum and 10 is the maximum.

That scale works perfectly fine but I tend to use a scale from 1 - 5. This just makes it easier to communicate.

Here's an example of how you'd score adding an FAQ section to your marketing website.

## **Impact: 10**

An FAQ section would help users with common questions. It will also reduce common support requests, freeing up time for our support team.

## **Confidence: 8**

We know that we get a lot of the same basic support questions. We're very confident that this addition to the site will reduce those.

## **Ease: 10**

It would be very easy to collect the most common support question and answers and put them on the site.

Now that we know how to score, we need to understand how to prioritize based on the score.

The objective is to prioritize items based on the highest score down.

The formula for calculating the score is:

Impact \* Confidence \* Ease

Pretty straight-forward, huh?

Now that we know how to communicate clarity, objectives, expectations and priorities, it's time to get to the topic you'll be asked about most - **Results**.

Gap: Results

**65-80% of IT projects fail to meet their objectives, run late, or cost far more than planned.**

**Source: ClickUp.com**

# Results

**“Effective teamwork begins and ends with communication.”**

Mike Krzyzewski, Hall of Fame collegiate and Olympic basketball coach

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This quote is a fitting way to wrap up.

Communication is key. Especially when it comes to expressing the thing people want to know most about - results.

This can be difficult sometimes because results might not be what we want.

We know projects can go over budget. We know they can miss deadlines. We know that people don't like to hear these things.

So, the best way to communicate them is to be pragmatic and forthcoming. Wherever possible, communicate next steps or remedies to problems.

In this final section, we'll share 2 1/2 frameworks to help you learn how to communicate with precision. These frameworks work in both positive and not-so-positive scenarios because they focus on getting straight to the point.

Note: I say 2 1/2 because two of them are nearly the same. They have just enough nuance to warrant listing them both distinctly. Let's get to them.

# SBAR

There's a famous military acronym that people use when something is not going well.

FUBAR.

I'll let you Google what it stands for.

This is a term that most people involved with a project do not want to hear. Hopefully you won't have to communicate a project in that situation. But, it's common to have to communicate situations that are moving in that direction.

To communicate those situations effectively, you can use the **SBAR** framework.

**SBAR** stands for:

## **Situation**

What's happening right now?

## **Background**

What's the context or background information?

## **Assessment**

What do you think the problem is?

## **Recommendation**

What you suggest we do next?

I'm going to depart from conjuring up examples because these frameworks are pretty self-explanatory.

Let's move on.

# BLUF & Minto Pyramid

I'm combining these two because they are so similar. Both are very useful because they focus on getting straight to the point.

Many people have a tendency to overshare, bury the lede, or fail to get to the point. In this age of distractions and short attention spans, it's crucial to be precise with your communication.

Both of these frameworks help with that.

**BLUF** is another framework with military origins.

It stands for:

**B**ottom-**L**ine **U**p**f**ront.

In the spirit of practicing BLUF, it's meaning is clear in the name.

The **Minto Pyramid** shares the same goal with **BLUF**.

They both break communication into 3 parts that form a pyramid.

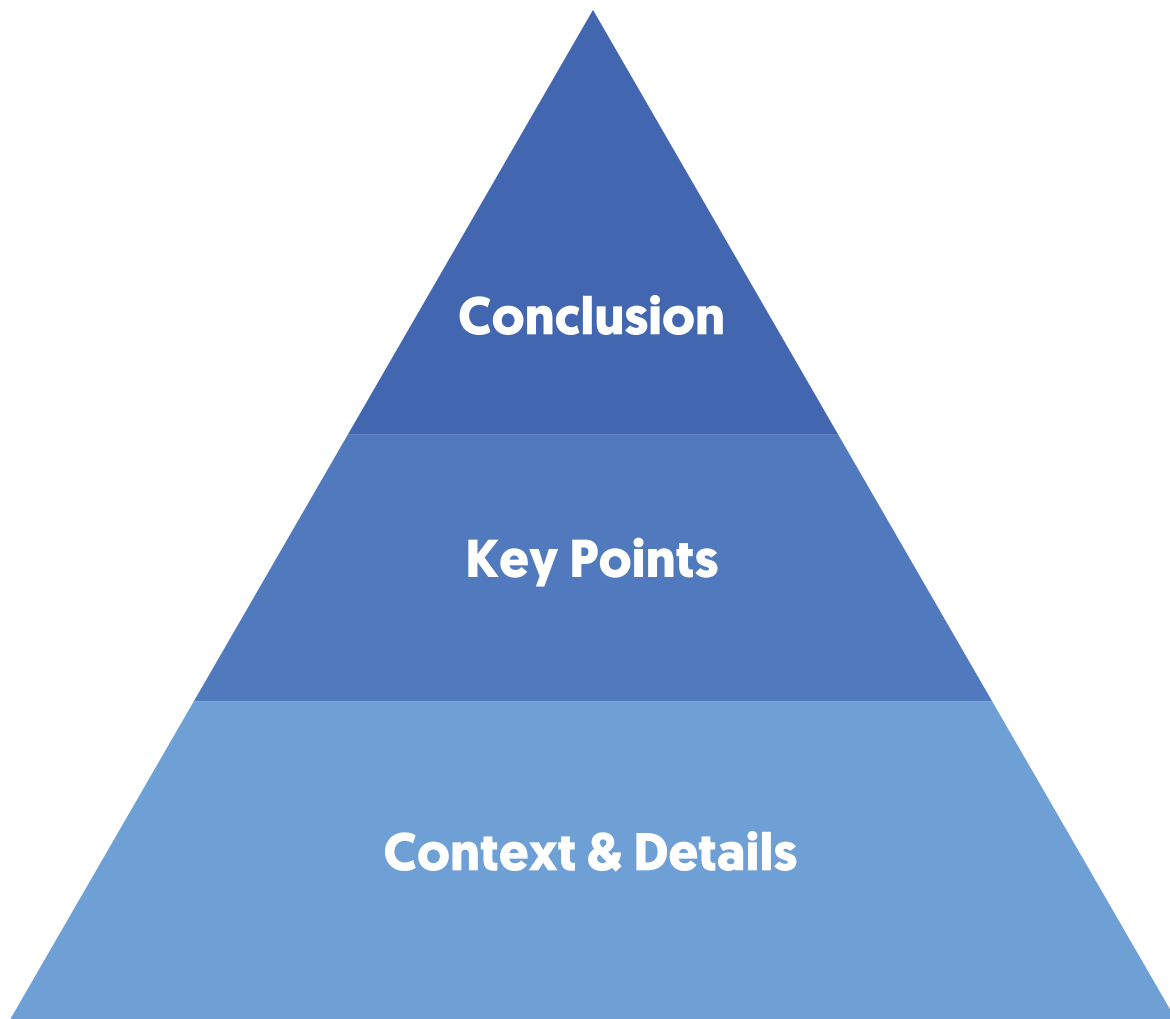
At the top, the point, is your **conclusion**.

Below your conclusion are the **key points** that hold up the conclusion.

The foundation is all of your **detailed context and background** information.

The next page has a visual to help illustrate the idea.

# Minto Pyramid



<https://untools.co/minto-pyramid/>

# SBAR Example

To round out this book, let's check out some examples of how I'd communicate the necessity for the book itself.

We'll start with SBAR to communicate from the recommendation perspective.

Then we'll use BLUF & Minto Pyramid to communicate from a more conclusive perspective.

## SBAR

### **Situation:**

Most project teams are struggling to deliver because of poor communication. They miss deadlines, go over budget, and often launch with broken features.

### **Background:**

Good communication is critical to effective project management, but it's challenging. Many people think that just talking is communicating but it's more than that. There are proven frameworks to help make communication more effective.

### **Assessment:**

Our project is at risk of failure because our team's communication is poor. If these communication issues aren't addressed, this isn't the only project that will likely fail.

### **Recommendation:**

We should read this book because it shares some simple communication frameworks that are tailored to project management.

# BLUF Example

## **Bottom-Line:**

Our teams are struggling with effective communication and it's leading to project failures. I found a book that I think can help our teams improve communication.

## **Details:**

This book shares simple communication frameworks that are effective in the context of project management. It's short and easy to read.

## **Next Steps:**

Have our teams read the book and start practicing the frameworks. Have them track their progress to determine if the book helps. If it does, thank the author. If it doesn't, tell the author to write a better book.



# Minto Pyramid Example

## **Conclusion:**

Our teams are struggling with effective communication and it's leading to project failures. I found a book that will help our teams improve communication.

## **Key Points in the book:**

1. Communication is critical to project success
2. Key communication points - Clarity, Objectives, Expectations, Priorities, and Results
3. Apply some simple communication frameworks to improve key communication

## **Supporting Details:**

- The book includes simple (and well-known) frameworks along with examples of how to use them
- Each chapter focuses on a different aspect of communication, from setting clear expectations to ensuring that everyone is on the same page
- With better communication, we'll reduce the risk of project failures

You can note the differences in approach with each framework, yet the intent and value is the same - get to the point of recommending this book.

There is a pragmatic clarity with each of these. In a time when many of us are juggling multiple things at once, brevity is powerful.

So, go recommend this book ;)

# Summary: Communication

To summarize, you now have the following frameworks to help you practice good communication:

## **GROW**

Ideal for the initiation phase when you need to articulate goals and objectives.

## **5 Point Star**

Best for bringing clarity to your vision and mission

## **PPRT**

Great for communicating your clarity of - Purpose, Plan, Responsibility and Time

## **VERB**

For communicating expectations like requirements and work tickets.

## **DACI & RACI**

Great for mapping out key roles and responsibilities.

## **MoSCoW**

Ideal for prioritizing work based on need.

## **MoAR**

Great for prioritizing work based on what is required.

## **ICE**

Best for prioritizing work based on the greatest impact.

## **SBAR**

A great framework for communicating progress, results as well as situational risk assessment.

# Summary: Communication

## BLUF and Minto Pyramid

Two great general communication frameworks that focus on getting to the point.

With these communication frameworks, you have a foundation for improved communication. This foundation is your collection of bridges over the communication gaps that you'll face in project management.

Practice them. Build on them. Find more frameworks and share with others.

Thanks for reading.

Gap: Not enough thanks

# Thank You!

Source: [GapBridgeBooks.com](http://GapBridgeBooks.com)