



Project Management Institute Troubled Projects Specific Interest Group Newsletter

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Dear [REDACTED]

Welcome to the October 2010 PMI TPSIG newsletter.

• From the President

Greetings Everyone,

The time has come. This is our last official newsletter at the PMI Troubled Project SIG. However, in saying that, with the transition to a Community of Practice (CoP) I plan on continuing the communications on a regular basis through our new web portal once I am handed "the keys".

During this transition, much of my time and the boards time have been focused on ensuring that we don't lose the spirit of the message and the main reason we all joined the SIG in the first place. We are all part of a community of project leaders who are interested in sharing and discovering stories, ideas, tricks and tips in the area of troubled and failing projects. I encourage each one of you to continue sharing your information in our new format, once it becomes available. In the mean time, please continue to make use of our LinkedIn group to its fullest, as I have no plans to shut that down at all. Our LinkedIn group is a good way to attract new PMs to our group, and a great way to give back some of our experience and advice.

I believe that once I get to the PMI Congress this year, I will be given

**So Long and Thanks for
All the Fish**

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more information and instructions to share with you all. So stay tuned for that.

I look forward to the new online home that PMI gives us, and I look forward to working with you all to populate content and feedback for all our members. As a board, we plan on offering more webinars and various presentations going into 2011 once the dust settles from our transition.

On behalf of the board, let me say thank you for sticking with us during this transition, and I look forward to a new chapter for us all very soon.

Brian

• Rescuing a Troubled Project

By Paul H. Lohnes

This conversation occurred several years ago between a client and a project rescuer concerning a troubled project for which the consultant was being asked to service.

Continued

• Join TPSIG on LinkedIn

Join the PMI Troubled Project SIG on LinkedIn. LinkedIn is a business social networking group. This is a work in progress and your valuable contributions will be greatly appreciated. Not registered on LinkedIn? Go to <http://www.linkedin.com/>

• Don't Trouble the Troubled Project

By VS Srividhya, PMP

That's easier said than done. If you are the department head of a project that is in trouble or part of some corporate function that oversees projects, this short message is for you.

Continued

• Join TPSIG Google Groups!

Join the PMI Troubled Project SIG Group. Here you will interact with other members on threaded discussion regarding Troubled Project topics, as well as share important files to the member community. This is a work in progress and your valuable contribution will be greatly appreciated.

You can accept this invitation by clicking the following URL: <http://groups.google.ca/group/tpsig/sub?si=xWzQgAAAB4yddBdMWlux4rXjL1ZLxm&hl=en>

**• Favorite Project Management
Quotes**

Props to Barbara Nowak-Rowe for starting this discussion on the Certified Project, Program & Portfolio Managers LinkedIn Group:

Continued

• Introducing the Risk Doctor Network

This Network is for people who wish to receive regular email updates (about every 8 weeks) on current issues in risk management. Why not

[give us your feedback](#) or tell us what topics you'd like to see addressed in future briefings?

If you want to receive Briefings in French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Russian or Farsi, please [click here](#) or send an email to translations@risk-doctor.com. Remember to say which language you want!

If you want to read or download previous Briefings (in English or translations), [click here](#) or go to the Publications/Briefings page of our website www.risk-doctor.com.

• *TPSIG Goodies at Cafe Press!*

Check out the TPSIG store at [Cafe Press](#). Everything you need... now with a TPSIG logo.

• *So Long and Thanks for All the Fish*

It's been a good run. Since August 2006. When we started the every other month publication schedule, we basically reprinted info from the PMI website. Now we get 3-4 articles submitted by TPSIG members each month. Thank you so much for your interest. Our group is made stronger by the interest of our members.

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Rescuing a Troubled Project

(continued)

"Glad you could make it, today. We really need to get cracking on this project issue," he said quite matter-of-factly.

"Happy to help, Mr. Blamet, my schedule was open when you called," I said.

There was more small talk for another 30 seconds or so, and then I asked the big question:

"So tell me why you think you need my services on this particular project?"

The VP of R&D's face fell immediately, and he swallowed hard and long,

"I believe this one is in trouble, and I can't seem to get answers on its status," he said.

"All right, let's begin with this task -- can you assign me an IT person that is skilled in the workings of your communications systems: email, file archives, reporting system?"

"Yes, but I do not understand, why communications?" he stammered.

I paused, looking thoughtfully before answering,

"I have usually found that the quickest method to discovering what is going on with a project is to review its actual communications between the project manager, the project team, and the project's stakeholders.

Projects that are doing well compared to plan usually have up to date and accurate reports and communications to stakeholders while those that are suffering in silence, do not. It's just a commonality I have found over the years in helping to rehabilitate troubled projects."

Mr. Blame picked up the phone and asked his assistant to tell Mr. Pickering in IT to send up his best company communications tech, someone that knows how to retrieve emails, reports, and documents from the archives.

He hung up the phone, and turned to me, and said,

"How long do you think it will take to figure something out? Can we at least expect something by next week or so?"

Looking him in the eye, I told him, "Brad, I can tell you this afternoon once I review the communications dump. It is not brain surgery. Give me about 2 hours with your comm tech, and I should be able to have at least a preliminary report.

Does that work for your schedule?"

He simply muttered, "Unbelievable, I should have called you in sooner," and then almost under his breath, "if you can deliver..." trailing off as he lowered his head back to the papers littering his massive, oak desk, indicating to me the interview was over.

From this point on in facing a troubled project, it is important to review only what has a *minimal probability* of being altered, faked, or reported in error. While you would hope that fakery is not an issue, troubled projects may involve a need to obscure reality, and this usually manifests itself in problem communications.



In reviewing the communications dump, I was able to discover two items that needed further investigation:

1. Communications with stakeholders all but ceased 4-5 weeks ago, and
2. project emails between the team members dropped almost 72% during the same period.

Once I had an idea about where to begin my review, I asked the comm tech for access to the project archives particularly the stakeholders register and the risk register. Upon completing the archive search, only one of the two registers was available: the stakeholders. It was evident that risk management was not a part of this project's planning.

I made some calls to the key stakeholders, and asked two questions:

1. Can you tell me what you believe is the current status of the project?
2. When was the last time you received any communications (reports, emails, etc) about the project?

From the answers to these questions, I was quickly able to determine that something major had occurred about 5 weeks in the past for which the project manager had stopped all stakeholder communiques, and severely limited his contact with the project team. Again, the communications, or lack of it, led me to the issues that needed to be addressed with this troubled project.

Armed with the communications and answers from the stakeholders, it was time to meet with the project manager. However, before confronting a sitting project manager, I would suggest that you obtain his/her background/bio or organizational HR dossier so that you understand his/her history, experience, and skills for project management.

In this case, it was quite evident that while Todd was an excellent optical engineer, he was not trained in project management and the management skills and capabilities he might need to run a project successfully.

I spoke with Todd, and asked him what happened 5 weeks ago. His head almost snapped off his neck as the realization that someone else knew something about the problems with his project. I mentioned that one of the main functions of a project manager is to communicate truthfully, accurately, and timely all status and performance issues related to his project. Keeping bad information to himself was only delaying the inevitable since the project could not be carried forward in this manner indefinitely.

He seemed relieved that he no longer had to carry his secret, he told the story:

Five weeks ago, the sole supplier of the photonic phase-tuning circuit (PPTC) for the laser based interferometer deliverable of his project had gone out of business due to bad management. He had not completed a risk identification or risk management plan so using a sole-sourced component was not considered a risk event nor planned for with a risk response. When he found out that this critical component was not going to be provided, and there was not enough time to find, procure and deliver a suitable replacement, he panicked and tried to hide the fact by cutting off communications hoping he could fix it somehow.



In writing up the report for Mr. Blamet, I mentioned that had the project manager come to him, as the project sponsor, with the problem when it occurred, there may have been enough time to repair the issue without dramatically altering the schedule or budget of the project. Now, it seemed that unless Mr. Blamet was willing to allow the project the time and cost of second-sourcing the PPTC, it would be best to close down the project or roll it into next year's R&D portfolio.

Using the best numbers from both the severely out-of-date project financials, Todd's project notes, the organization's best optical engineers, the cost of rolling the project forward would be roughly \$420,000 vs. \$485,000 to find, contract, and obtain a new source of the PPTC plus allowing another 6 weeks for the effort.

Since it would have past the time for the industry conference at which the organization was going to announce the new product (the laser interferometer), Mr. Blame decided that he would roll the project forward to next year's R&D portfolio. Todd, the excellent optical engineer, but under-trained project manager, was released back to the engineering staff for re-assignment after the normal "dressing-down" for trying to hide the project's problems from the stakeholders.

As the project rescuer, I used something I have discovered over the many years and many troubled projects:

Do not assume that what you read, see, or hear about a project from the standpoint of reports, EVM/EVT analysis, or performance measurements is accurate as to the honest status of the project especially if it is in trouble. Many project manager's do not like nor want to deliver bad news, and are sometimes likely to try and stall or hide it while they search for a "workaround" that will get them out of their predicament.

I use the communications inspection as a very quick, but excellent methodology for finding out what is going on with a trouble project since it is very hard if not impossible to alter or mask communications given the networking and security technologies and applications that support the communications infrastructure used in most organizations today.

As a trouble project rescuer, be diligent and fair, but be skeptical until proven otherwise - use the project's communications or lack of it to lead you in the right direction rather than being taken in by wonderfully prepared reports, excellent analysis profiles, or nicely purported presentations.



taken during a project in Alaska about 5 years ago.

Paul H. Lohnes has been active in project management for over 25 years beginning soon after he left the US Navy in 1981. After obtaining his BS(CS) and teaching as an adjunct at the UC Berkeley's Extension



University for 6 years during which time he completed his MBA (Finance/Op Mgmt) at Golden Gate University, San Francisco, Paul started up a private consulting practice in project management of technical and computing projects. His clients over the years have included Fortune 100 companies in telecommunications, computing, networking, and finance in addition to developing and delivering over 500 technical and management seminars to over 10,000 attendees around the world.

Mr. Lohnes holds the PMI PMP certification, and is currently beginning the application process for the PMI's new risk management certification, the RMP. Mr. Lohnes is completing projects in the upstate New York area and returning to the MD/VA/WDC area for the purpose of starting a new company offering advanced project and risk management services to clients needing such components to their business management endeavors. Mr. Lohnes has developed several proprietary risk management and indexing tools that he uses in service of his clients and customers.



Don't Trouble the Troubled Project

(continued)

A troubled project attracts the attention of the senior management for the right/wrong reasons and is subject to a lot of questions and reviews. At most times, an already troubled project goes into further trouble because of the extra pairs of eyes gazing at it.

Before you offer to review and look into the project, here is what you should first do - get into the psyche of the troubled projects' manager. What do you think goes on in his/head mind? Firstly, it is "what did I do to deserve this". Secondly, it is "if it just had not been for this source of trouble, I think it would have been a smooth sail" or "I wish I could wish this one away". But most fundamental of all is "how will this impact me? What do my seniors think of me? What does my team think of me? What do my customers think of me". So, when there are questions about the project or the list of troubles and risks, there is a flight or fight behavior exhibited by the project manager. Then what follows is either a tragic-comedy or a comic-tragedy depending on the final state of the project and the state of all the people associated with the project.

Here are constructive steps that can actually help in offering succour to the projects in trouble.

1. View inside out – The project team and stakeholders are called for a "virtual dissection" session. This should be a facilitated meeting where each person is asked to air views on what he/she thinks is the single thing that she would like to change about the project. All views are noted and probed, however no judgment is passed during the meeting.
2. View outside in – This is a series of reviews of all artifacts and trends of all project metrics related to the project done by an external person/persons. Those who are not involved in the project but have some interest in getting the project out of trouble are good candidates to participate in this. The slant of the interviews and probes should be on finding the current process/people loop-holes with a view of fixing them rather than an appraisive one. "Troubled" Project time is not the right time to evaluate people on their performances or on their career progressions. These activities are ill-timed if done when the project is on fire and there would be serious repercussions since the tempers are normally high and people are sapped of their energies.
3. Offer support – Once both the above views are obtained, senior management and project manager could get together to take decisions on what the top list of "to-be-fixed" items are. For e.g. if there are 100 defects in a product and the product design team is also not sure if some of the features they have built are exactly what the user wants, a decision needs to be taken on whether the defects needs to fixed or whether the design needs to be re-looked at. But whatever it may be, the decision making process is of utmost importance here and the experience of seniors who have handled several failures and turn-around stories are roped in to offer support to the project manager. Team motivation and morale would have reached its nadir and it would take great leadership and courage to keep the flagging spirit of the team high. Picking



up cab and lunch bills for a team stretched to meet its goals is a small but sure way of getting the “team spirit” back.

4. Be firm – Once a decision is taken on the steps to be taken, be very firm on following the recovery plan and do not relent to the team or manager’s request for relaxation of deadlines or new policies/steps put in place.
5. Constantly communicate – Through all these steps, it is very vital to constantly communicate the right set of information to the corresponding stakeholders. For e.g. the team would need to be told that there may be a change in the direction of the project and that the decision would come on Friday post the meeting with the director. The program sponsor needs to be told that the team will provide 3 alternate plans by day x each of which would have cost implications attached and that the decision making needs some undivided attention and time. The architect needs to be told that the entire product design may have to be re-done based on the customer beta meeting and that he/she needs to make him/herself available for the next 2 months and vacations may get cancelled.

No matter which step it is once the project manager understands that others in the organization outside the project are out to help and make the project succeed, there will surely be light at the end of the tunnel.



Favorite Project Management Quotes

(continued)

"It is said that the road to success is sometimes bumpy but you'll never know for sure unless you travel it." - Amanda Curtis Kane

"It's easy to be a critic, but being a doer requires effort, risk, and change." - Wayne W. Dyer

"Things that matter most should never be at the mercy of things that matter least." - Goethe ; This is similar to "Don't major in the minor stuff." – unknown

Nothing will work unless you do. - John Wooden

"Remain open -- but don't compromise." - Ed Yourdon, from his presentation the other day for New York City Software Process Improvement Network (NYC SPIN).

I dunno how ya doin on the inside honey...but your HAIR sure is holdin up beautiful. - Dolly Parton's character in Steel Magnolias

"Running is not a plan. Running is what you do when a plan fails!" - Fred Ward (From the movie Tremors)

Great things are done by a series of small things brought together. - Vincent van Gogh

"Talk does not cook rice." -Chinese Proverb

"Great minds discuss ideas. Ordinary people talk about events, while small minds chatter about people." W. Churchill

"If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there." - Lewis Carroll

"I think there is only one quality worse than hardness of heart and that is softness of head." Theodore Roosevelt

Don't eat yellow snow - Frank Zappa

"Only put off until tomorrow what you are willing to die having left undone." - Pablo Picasso

"Genius is 1 percent inspiration, 99 percent perspiration." Thomas Edison

Thinking is easy, acting is difficult, putting thoughts into action is the most difficult thing in the world. - Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

"Don't try. Do, or do not. There is no try." Yoda

Planning is an unnatural process; it is much more fun to do something. The nicest thing about not planning is that failure comes as a complete surprise rather than being preceded by a period of worry and depression. The late great Sir John Harvey-Jones

"The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man." G. B. Shaw

"The secret of success is to go from failure to failure without any loss of enthusiasm." Winston Churchill



"Never argue with an idiot. They drag you down to their level then beat you with experience." Dilbert (Scott Adams, too)

You only have to do a very few things right in your life so long as you don't do too many things wrong - Warren Buffet

"If everything seems under control, you're just not going fast enough." – Mario Andretti

"Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do, and they will surprise you with their ingenuity." – Gen. George S. Patton

"The person who says it cannot be done should not interrupt the person doing it." – Chinese proverb

"As we know, there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns -- the ones we don't know we don't know." - Donald Rumsfeld

"Never let your morals interfere with doing the right thing" Issac Asimov

Insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results - Albert Einstein

If you don't know where you're going, you're unlikely to end up there. – Forest Gump

If something can go wrong, it will –Murphy

My grandfather once told me that there were two kinds of people: those who do the work and those who take the credit. He told me to try to be in the first group; there was much less competition - Indira Gandhi

"Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it." - Dwight D. Esienhower

"Nobody cares how much you know, until they know how much you care." - Theodore Roosevelt

Keep your friends close, and your enemies closer. -Sun-tzu, Chinese general & military strategist (~400 BC)

Minds, like parachutes, work best when open. - Frank Zappa