

Global Project Strategy (011) (603) 862-3374

PM Lessons from the Arab Meltdown

The Arab world has brought with it a reminder of how best to manage complex environments and many of these lessons can be “translated” directly to project management.

Project leaders ask, “Can an increase in scope improve organizational outcomes?”

The totally unexpected meltdown in the Arab world has brought with it a reminder of how best to manage complex environments and many of the lessons we can learn from these events can be “translated” directly to project management.

Certainly the problems in countries like Bahrain, Tunisia, Yemen and Libya had been brewing for decades. Yet they were largely ignored. First Lesson: Ignore project problems at your own risk. Seldom will persistent problems go away on their own.

Overconfidence within these regimes led to minimizing the nature of the problems and minimizing their consequences. Lesson: Overconfidence, when defining project strategy, can be dangerous to your project’s health.

Creating a culture where dissent and critical analysis are discouraged can hide the real issues and opportunities. Lesson: Limiting constituents to those who are similar in thought can limit the opportunity to create outcomes that better meet stakeholders’ needs.

One of the most cited reasons why projects fail is poor communication. Indeed it is on everyone’s critical success factor list. For many countries in the Arab World communication was one way. Lesson: One-way communication doesn’t work.

Unwillingness to change direction in the face of a failed strategy is difficult in all situations. In the Arab World some countries such as Tunisia and Bahrain recognized the necessity for a peaceful change. Libya saw it

another way. Lesson: It may be necessary to pull-the-plug on projects when they no longer promise to meet the needs of the organization.

Maintaining a firewall between the top of the organization and lower levels does little to create effective performance. In projects, the prevailing strategy today is to involve a wide range of stakeholders from the beginning to the end of the project. Lesson: Ignoring stakeholders can lead to outcomes that few people want.

What is really surprising is that we all know these basic principles of management but under the right or wrong circumstances, such as political pressure, we succumb to acting in way that jeopardizes our own and our stakeholders’ interests.

Project Managers and Project Leaders

There are many differences between project managers and project leaders. On is the ability of managers to engage stakeholders in assuring that the project exceeds its expectations.

Most often this means that the project manager must work with those stakeholders, like customers and suppliers, to relentlessly explore the appropriateness of project scope. Can an increase in

scope improve organizational outcome.

Project leaders do the right things project managers do the right things.