

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

“No one put an end to the process that has devastated our economy”

The Scope has narrowed, but we are assured that the project will be executed on schedule.

No One Wants to Kill a Project

The current recession and the need to justify keeping a project in the project portfolio has raised the question of when to kill a project.

Working with companies in North America and the European Union that question has been raised twice in the last few weeks.

One company put it this way. We carefully evaluate a project proposal. Scope, budget, and schedule are scrutinized by the project sponsor, program management office and steering committee. But then, once it is approved, the project takes on a life

of its own. There is a momentum that builds, and it is very difficult to stop it.

Problems may occur, but the momentum serves to camouflage the implications of the problem.

Then, as more and more money is spent on the project, the trap is set to continue spending. Finally when the project is completed, and if it fails, pundits ask why the symptoms were ignored.

Sounds hard to believe. Common sense tells us that when things go wrong early, they should be fixed or the project abandoned?

We might even ask how intelligent people could continue when the outcome is even known!

But wait a minute.

Isn't this how we backed ourselves into the financial crisis and the recession. There were plenty of signs that we were headed in the wrong direction, many prominent economists warned us, but no one listened. No one put an end to a process that has devastated our economy.

Indeed killing a project is difficult. Why? Often the answer is found in the politics of the situation.

Santa's Big Project

In a rare interview with Santa at the North Pole, we learned that, in spite of many problems this year, the big Christmas Eve project is still on schedule. The good news for all children is that St. Nicholas will soon be there.

Referring to his new motto, "Better, Faster Cheaper," borrowed from an astronaut he "ran into" at the space station, Santa told us that quality

may suffer a bit this year and that the scope of the project has been cut back, but that he will do his best to make sure that a smaller budget goes a longer way.

Indeed, for the first time ever, Santa was sighted camping out at Wal-Mart in anticipation of a 4 AM opening on Black Friday. Then on Cyber Monday his elves kept a bank of 200 computers busy all day.

Clearly, the financial crisis and recession have affected everyone! Even Santa.

"Not since the Great Depression had I been through such a tough time," said Santa. "I never lost hope. Not with so many of 'my' children depending on me."

Continued Page 2

Santa's Big Project ... Continued

91 South Street
Portsmouth, NH 03801
USA

PHONE:
(603) 862-3374

MOBILE:
(603) 767-0480

E-MAIL:
bshore@globalprojectstrategy.
com

We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.globalprojectstrategy.com

About two months before the 2008 project began, during the initiation phase, it was suggested that a significant transformation needed to take place. Now, with the economy in crisis, it was necessary to initiate those changes that would ensure the survival of the annual Christmas Project for future generations.

It seems that the Program Management Office at the North Pole wanted to appoint a Steering Committee and Project Sponsor.

The steering committee, as it was presented, would keep tabs on Santa's plans as well as his criteria for doling out presents. The Sponsor would ensure that funds would keep coming so that budgets would no longer be so vulnerable to the ebbs and flows of financial markets.

When Santa heard about this effort he told us that he fumed. "I have been doing this job for hundreds of years," he said. "Why would anyone think that I would have trouble steering this project in the right direction. Last year I had very little to steer. Donner and Blitzen did most of the work and besides, I picked up a Garmin nuvi 660 GPS with 4.3 inch screen. It was great!"

Just as we were about to suggest, that steering committees do more than steer, he interrupted.

"As if that was not enough, the issue of procurement was raised."

"I was told that wage rates at the Pole were relatively high, and that we could save money by transferring some or all of our work to Asia."

Now he was out-of-control, certainly not his usual jovial self. "I've got the best trained elves in the world," he shouted. We are a 100% PMP certified shop and this year five of my elves earned 2 PDUs in "Wrapping" and "Tying."

"Further, I can't imagine how we could integrate a project that would span Siberia."

"And we have improved every year, especially since we formalized the Post-Mortem two years ago."

"If you remember, some families reported that a real clatter appeared out on their lawns, forcing many to spring from bed to see what was the matter.

Well, we learned.

This year I can assure you that we are much more agile in making our

deliveries. The days of clatter are done. They're over."

"Look at our delivery fleet," Santa added. "You can't get any greener. Doesn't leave any carbon footprint. I do it all with eight tiny reindeer and a miniature sleigh."

OK, we also have a Garmin nuvi 660, but it prevents us from making wrong turns and getting lost. It keeps us on the critical path. Plus, it's very useful if we run out of fuel for the reindeer."

Before we left the North Pole we had one more question for him.

"Santa, what's your view on the economy?"

He reflected for a moment and then with a wink of his eye, he said, "Keep visions of sugar plums dancing in your head, in the long run you have nothing to dread."

Then, we heard him exclaim as we drove out of sight, "Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good night."

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