BS2K

Bzzzzt. Bzzzzzzt.

An ancient line printer sings occasionally in the corner of a Fortune 100 company's computer operations center. It is connected to the outside world through a phone receiver that is duct taped to an ancient analog modem. The sign taped to this kluge says, "Do not turn this printer off or hang up this phone!!!" What's happening here? A mission-critical production system is operating.

Bzzzzt. Bzzzzzzt.

Looking back on D Day, June 6, 1944, General Eisenhower recalled how the allied armies gained a toe hold in Fortress Europe. "The planning was everything," he explained. "The plan was nothing." In spite of planning for over three years, almost nothing in the operation unfolded according to plan. They could not have achieved the objective without the planning; yet sticking to the plan as it fell apart would have guaranteed failure.

Bzzzzt. Bzzzzzzt.

> *"Getting what we want often requires accepting different terms than we expected."*

History teaches one immutable law. Getting what we want often requires

accepting different terms than we expected. Accepting these terms creates success. Rejecting them guarantees failure.

My first large system experience illustrates this idea. I protested when my department's VP announced, "We've decided to go!" "Half of the system hasn't been tested," I whined, "We have no documentation!!" He insisted, "Dedicating the computer to production problems will help us resolve the issues more quickly. Splitting the processing between test and production is causing our slow progress." This decision was like jumping off a cliff to fix a scuffed shoe. "This decision will be the most disastrous of your career!" I predicted as I left fuming.

I was almost right. Most of what I'd feared came true. But while the company brought itself to its knees, unlikely heroes found their hind legs. Any rational advisor would have counseled employees to abandon the clueless executives, but few left. We who remained discovered a purposeful time; a time when we were more alive! Most of our plans failed. Our objectives were not necessarily compromised. Kluges and make-do solutions abounded. We duct-taped together inelegant but operable systems. The auditor's comments on that year's annual statement referred distantly to "conversion problems having minor effects on operations." We'd survived, but not on our antic-

ipated terms.

Bzzzzt. Bzzzzzzt.

Information Week named this organization one of their top 100 technology users of 1998! I doubt that they could have achieved this honor without that foolish implementation decision. I would have engaged more confidently in the clean-up work had I known that this catastrophe would clear the way for a world-class environment.

This company still experiences occasional mission-critical service blackouts, just like every company in the world. I know when the newspaper reports that "conversion problems" disabled a certain bank's automated teller network, that this means some people were surprised by the terms of their success. Cars are recalled. Flights canceled. Even though we've each experienced these interruptions hundreds of times, we are always

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surprised when some ancient line printer attached with duct tape to some equally antiquated modem "accidentally" stops working. Unpredictability is a constant element of everyone's everyday life. We survive anyway. We usually thrive. We travel by unplanned, unsettling routes. When we can keep our wits, we arrive anyway.

Today we sit on the edge of another so-called unavoidable catastrophe. The year 2000 bug threatens. We imagine only terrible outcomes: airplanes plunging, electrical grids fizzling, and economies going bust. Few imagine a world better for these experiences. The experts sound too much like that long-ago me: "We are not ready! It will be a catastrophe!"

I am an amateur observer. I am not as familiar with our limitations. Have the experts forgotten history's lesson? Throw us a good catastrophe and we adapt in successful and surprising ways. Catastrophe never insists upon failure, only different terms for success. When fortune brings startling terms, success requires accepting them.

Classic project management says success comes from knowing how we'll get there, from following "the map." This is only true when the future unfolds as predicted, but the future often turns up looking different than foreseen. Taking an unanticipated path in these instances is never by itself failure. Failing to adapt meaningfully creates more catastrophes than failing to follow any plan.

Being certain in the face of the unknowable is no help. Such certainty breeds a blinding confidence. These confident ones are the most likely to confuse the crumbling plan for a lost objective.

I am not alarmed that our plans predict Y2K failure. Our plans often predict success and yield failure. What

no plan has ever shown is how those focused upon achieving the objective will achieve that objective in unforeseeable ways.

Please don't misunderstand these comments. Planning is useful! I am not recommending pared-to-the-bone strategies that demand delivery on unreasonable terms. I am merely echoing Eisenhower's suggestion:

"The planning is always more important than the plan."

The planning is always more important than the plan. As long as the future insists upon showing up in surprising guises, our plans must be disposable if we expect to satisfy our objectives. We won't always have to dispose of them to succeed, but we'd better be able to discard even the most highly regarded among them. We must never mistake adapting the method for compromising the mission.

In the noise and the hustle surrounding Y2K compliance we have failed to confirm the capability of the only system really critical to our continuing success. Ourselves. In this world where plans must fall apart, we cannot rely upon our ability to create the map that will guide us to safety. But then we never have been able to rely upon this ability. What does it mean to make ourselves Y2K compliant? It

means:

1. *Checking our Certainty,*

2. *Confirming our Adaptability, and,*

3. *most of all, Reaffirming our Humanity.*

We check our certainty to stay alert for cues that the world is surprising us. We confirm our adaptability, confident only that we will finish this race in a different way than we originally expected to finish it. We reaffirm our humanity because it is our secret weapon. Humans escaped the primordial swamp because we adapted better than the other species, not because we planned better!

This is real Y2K compliance. Our plans will fail us. Guaranteed. What we do when our plans fail affects our success more than our ability to plan around these failures.

Not even the new millennium or its renowned bug is likely to rescind history's most powerful lesson. Our new millennium will work, but not on our own terms.

Bzzzzzt. Bzzzzzzt.   das

Check Certainty:	Confirm Adaptability:	Reaffirm Humanity:
There's a difference between being confident and being certain. Maintain confidence in your ability to cope with whatever hand uncertainty deals you. You cannot predict everything and survival doesn't need you to. Confidence never was just the opposite of uncertainty. If you have to be certain, is it really confidence?	How many different ways can you imagine your project succeeding? Those with just one scheme balance precariously. Those with many stand firm. **"If you find the perfect strategy, kill it."** Falling in love with one strategy dooms your project.	Humans are not machines. We meander and we explore, frustrating in the process each other's sense of propriety. We might wish that all those "out there" would simply line up and "behave", but this upsetting diversity is our real strength. No one needs your fixing except, perhaps, yourself. das

Calling True North pgs, Inc.

It happened again last week. A prospective client called. They'd heard from one of True North's community members. "If you want the best project management training in the world," they heard, "call True North pgs."

They had been considering contracting with the Project Management Institute. After all, PMI is the professional institution. They have the Project Management Body of Knowledge.

They were also considering hiring the Software Engineering Institute. SEI has the maturity model. They specialize in "maturing" software development organizations.

But this prospective client was concerned. They work in a complex environment. Some projects are routine, others are cutting edge, and many have parts of both. Factions skirmish constantly. Some say all should use a single method, and others scorn this idea. PMI has the answer. So does SEI.

The client was concerned because one answer could only satisfy a few in the community. They are concerned that SEI and PMI have both mistaken managing projects for an engineering problem, and they recognize the mistake in this. Besides, they do not want certification or maturation. They want results.

You see, most of the people managing projects in their environment do not have the title of project manager. And most don't want it. "Hell," they confide, "most don't even want to be managing projects! They just have to." Everyone has to manage projects in their environment. No one's exempt.

And managing projects is not their only job. They also have a full time job they are supposed to fill while managing their project. PMI calls this behavior unprofessional. SEI calls it immature. True North calls this what it is -- normal in fast-paced, high technology companies.

I tell them that we don't have their answer, but they do. Hiring PMI to fill an already over-flowing vessel with more knowledge won't resolve anything. This problem is not about knowing. SEI cultivation and maturation takes so long that by the time you achieve maturity, the garden has evolved out from underneath the plants. I talk about brief consulting and continuous, Just-In-Time learning.

We share stories easily. I describe how Mastering Projects is different from managing them. I suggest root causes that allow participants to preserve their own definition of maturity. I prescribe alternatives that put individuals in charge of their own learning. We reframe most of their hopelessness.

They ask if we can visit. I insist. I tell them that if there is no buzz after we visit, we are not the right outfit for their environment. If, however, we leave the halls buzzing about these geeks with the curious ideas about managing projects, we might be able to do them some good.

True North pgs has no competitors. PMI and SEI are not in the same business. We can see that they might wish they had access to our unique understandings, but the barriers to entry are enormous. You have to let go of how people and projects are supposed to be and accept them as they are. This is impossible for those who already know best.

One PMI-certified project manager summed it up after attending the Mastering Projects Workshop. After PMI certification he knew all about managing projects. After attending the Mastering Projects Workshop, he could manage them. das

What Traditional Project Management Training Doesn't Teach You About Managing Projects Can Hurt You!

1. You are the most powerful project management tool you will ever use.

Rather than trying to automate the management of projects, try tuning up the tool that is most likely to make a real difference. You!

2. The key to managing projects effectively is to create self-managing projects.

If the project is not able to take care of itself, it won't succeed. More projects fail because they are unmanageable than because they have been mismanaged!

3. The key to creating self-managing projects is to encourage open rather than closed-system behavior within your project community.

Classic project management strategies focus on closing the system, saying "Put the project in a box and defend the boundaries." Many projects today defy such predictive management. They must instead be managed by an adaptive process -- an open rather than a closed system strategy.

4. Project work is more effective when its fun.

Project team members who are enjoying their experience create higher-quality products than those who are suffering. Ignoring the quality of experience is an act of sabotage and an act of self-destruction for a project manager!
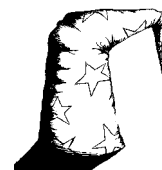
Notices:

Upcoming Weinberg and Weinberg Problem Solving Leadership Workshops:

The week of March 6, 1999 Albuquerque- I will not be facilitating.

The week of June 13, 1999 Albuquerque- I will be facilitating

Contact Susie Brame at Wk: (503) 721-0908 or Fx: (503) 226-9066 or **Suzeque@ aol.com** for details.

About *Compass*

Compass is published quarterly by *True North pgs, Inc.*, and is distributed free of charge to a project-oriented community now numbering over 3000.

Compass is a navigation tool for continuing your process of becoming a project manager. *Compass* shares stories and insights to serve as the basis for you to provide more effective project leadership to your team. We enable each other to improve the quality of our project experiences through sharing our stories and our insights.

*"You are
the most powerful
project management tool
you will ever use."*

Percent Complete

Technology is the knack of so arranging the world that we do not experience it.
Rollo May

A participant at a recent workshop asked what I thought of reporting status as a percent of work completed. I know that many managers use this shorthand technique to simplify status reporting. The technique distills reporting down to a single value for each task. In this method, a completed task is 100% complete, a half-completed task is 50% complete, and so on. Reducing reporting down to such unambiguous values simplifies the job of updating task plans. In spite of this apparent ease, I have never seen this technique work.

I responded to this question with the off-hand comment that I thought percent complete was a great technique when you could determine your percentage complete and a terrible one when you couldn't. This might sound like a typical consultant's response, but there was some depth lurking there.

Status reporting is for making coherent meaning of what's happening on the project. This requires some dialogue between the reporter and a more objective person. These encounters hold the possibility for worse than miscommunication. Reducing communication to any single element co-opts most of the meaning-making potential from these interactions. Only the certainty of misunderstanding remains.

Determining percent complete requires knowledge of future events. You have to know when the task will be completed- and with what effort. People who lay concrete can refer to a book with statistics showing how long it should take to complete the task. This data is typical of "stuff" intensive projects. When are you 50% done drafting a document? When are you 25% completed building a critical relationship?

The old joke says that software is always 90% complete after 10% of the effort, even though the last 10% of the work always takes 90% of the labor. Beware of those who report that they have found the last bug or are nearing completion of the first draft. These things cannot be measured like concrete.

"Beware of those who report that they have found the last bug..."

Requesting percent complete information amounts to a double bind for your project team members. It is almost always the wrong question. Responding to it encourages misunderstandings. This is not the purpose of status reporting.

Percent complete is an easy way to update schedules but most things scheduled are not meaningfully assessed in this way. It is usually better to talk when assessing status. This might seem inefficient, but status reporting is not simply about updating the schedule. Given the choice between easily updating the schedule and gaining understanding I'll choose understanding every time. das

David's Note

This edition of Compass has articles from True North's community. I was fortunate this last quarter to attend a workshop designed by my old friend and colleague, Rich Van Horn. Rich's workshop is on the subject of mindset management. There was time in my life before I learned that I was in charge of my life. Everything is different since I learned who is in charge. Rich's workshop is essential training for all of us- as a reminder for those of us who know we are driving and as a first step for the rest of us to take full charge of our selves. Contact Rich at **rich@mindset-map.com**.

I should also mention two more community members, who made their WWW debut this last quarter: my PSL faculty partners Eileen and Wayne Strider, aka Strider and Cline. Wayne and Eileen offer an array of consulting services including something called Middlehaven. They also sponsor a retreat/workshop (Leader's Forum) each June in Mt. Crested Butte, CO. Check them out at **www.striderandcline.com**.

We'd like to offer distribution of this newsletter via the internet. If you'd prefer to receive Compass via the internet, please send your email address to **Compassmail@yahoo. com**. We'll put you on the email list.

Watch for our website, scheduled to come online this quarter @ **project-community.com**.

Also, True North pgs and the Oregon Graduate Institute will offer open enrollment Mastering Projects workshops this year, in May, September, and November. Sign up for these workshops at **www.ogi.edu**. das

Appreciations:

Don Willerton of LANL for recognizing Shinola.

Maysa Peterson of LANL for green chile stew!

Eileen Strider for that trip to Jemez Springs.

Susie Pecuch for chiseling.

Susie Brame for being open to the unlikely possibilities.

James Huntzicker of OGI for remembering well.

Kathy Carey for patiently editing.

Wilder Schmaltz for the graphics.

Peter De Jager for Y2King me.

Mark Gray for tasting shapes.

Managing Your Mindset

by guest columnist Rich Van Horn

A number of years ago, I was hired to help a project team in trouble. To find out what was going on, I decided to interview team members. The first person said: "Everybody on the project team is out for themselves; they'll stab you in the back if you let them." This seemed pretty clear, until I talked to the second person, who said, "People on this team are wonderful. They listen to your ideas, respond honestly, and treat you with respect." Where was the truth?

These two people provide a stark example of what happens constantly inside organizations: we create in our own mind the organization that we experience. How does this happen? We each have different Mind-Sets. Each MindSet creates a different picture of the organization-as-experienced. How we choose to interact with others is driven by our personal picture of our organization.

I have spent nearly 15 years developing techniques to help people discover and manage their MindSet. I have recognized four basic, universal MindSets. Each MindSet creates its own unique picture of the organization around us. One MindSet sees the organization as hostile and threatening, another sees it as a set of guidelines for how to act and gain recognition, still another sees it as open forum for exploring new possibilities for achieving results. Three people can work together on one team with each experiencing entirely different organizational realities. This individual internal experience becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

What is the importance of this for you if you are a project manager? Aligning your team requires that you first manage your own MindSet. Make sure you see an organization that best serves your needs. Then manage your Team's MindSet. Align individual team members with your Mindset and with each other's Mind-sets, then act from this shared reality. rvh

Confessions of a Chiseler
by Amy Schwab

When asked how he created a magnificent sculpture from a plain block of marble, Michelangelo responded, "I see the statue inside the block and chip away at what isn't it."

A friend of mine, prioritizing her work, reminded me of this story. I had repeatedly encouraged her to first define what she wanted and prioritize based on what was most important to her rather than on what she felt obliged to do. Whenever I asked her what she wanted, she'd regale me with the merits of the half dozen or more things that she *had* to do first. She acknowledged that she really needed to take the time to define her vision, but too many other things seemed more urgent.

One evening I caught us replaying this same conversation. This time I asked even more persistently than usual, "So, what is it that you want?" I fully expected the same result, but she surprised me. The next morning, scribbling as she waited for me to arrive for our breakfast meeting, she captured what she wanted. By the time I arrived at the restaurant, my usual 15 minutes late, she had it! Our breakfast conversation helped clarify her goals. We even discovered some existing relationships that could enable her to get what she really wanted. Her dream job, which had seemed a far distant dream, was well within her grasp, now. She wouldn't have to wait.

With her vision clear, she quickly prioritized her list of tasks. She would have to drop some agenda-cluttering items. This requirement reminded me of the necessity of "chipping away" at whatever isn't the statue. We first chip away at finding the space to do what is most important, defining our vision of the statue inside the block of marble. After that it is possible to start removing the marble that isn't going to be the finished statue.

This is easier to talk about than to do. I usually have to spend some time chipping away at whatever seems to be in the way of defining what I want. This feels like a lack of time. However, as I rediscover each time, once I remove this barrier, it never takes more than a few short minutes to get clear about what I want. With this clarity, I can focus on what I want and begin removing the stone that doesn't contribute to my goals.

Many projects fall victim to vision-less quests. They march to a plan of work without clearly envisioning the figure inside, as if a block of marble, a hammer, and a chisel would automatically discover the form within. Focusing on all those urgent to-do list tasks can chip away all potential, leaving just a pile of marble flakes for the effort.

A project without vision exhausts its possibilities chip by chip; whittling away a potential nose, then a potential chin, until only a pile of lost possibilities remains. The statue evaporates under this undirected effort.

> *"See the statue inside the marble block and then chip away at what isn't the statue."*

Our results are defined by what we choose not to do.

Happy chiseling. aas