

Compass

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Project Management Reported Dead

Crowds take to the streets

Conspiracy said behind demise of ancient tradition

Reports on the death of project management are flooding in from all points of the compass. Details are sketchy at press time, but a conspiracy seems to have been involved in the death. No criminal charges have been filed.

"It was it or us," cheered one jubilant passer-by, who claimed to be a member of a *project community*. "We finally realized that management was more the source of our project's problems than the key to its salvation. How many more meaningless estimating exercises were we going to have to endure while our project community went unrecognized and unrewarded? It finally seemed as if the process was more important than our project's product, and that just didn't seem right to any of us."

Witnesses described project management as being overly concerned with building and maintaining speculative models of the future. "I'd go to management for some help with a real, human problem and find them huddled around a PC, trying to

balance resources across five simultaneous sub-phases, what ever that means," a thoughtful technical-type recalled. "They'd put a plan together without including most of us who would be building the product. Then they'd ask us for daily status reports showing OUR progress against THEIR speculative map! Good riddance!"

Spokespersons for this emerging *project community* hinted that an indictment against project management had been circulating widely in recent months. This underground indictment is the basis for conspiracy claims.



Project Community

Orthodoxy Numb!

"If they would have brought their issues up at the regularly scheduled status meetings, I'm sure they would have been duly noted and either addressed or added to the active issues list for evaluation of the potential impact on the project," one red-faced Project Management representative re-

ported. "We can't just change the plan without due diligence. I mean, sponsor meetings have to be scheduled well in advance, the technical review committee has to assess impact to the overall program, and contingency plans and budgets have to be drafted. If the issue isn't adding demonstrable technical value to the project, it probably won't be worth pursuing, anyway."

Stunned groups of certified project managers shuffled around the periphery of massive street celebrations in most high technology development centers. "We've had it," one commented. "If they've done away with project management, my certification is worthless."

"Like it never wasn't," jeered one passing celebrant.

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A replacement for project management appears to already be in place. "We've replaced project management and their focus upon models and processes with a series of local *project communities*," explained one representative of the overthrowing forces. "We must refocus our attention upon product, balancing those activities required to chart, confirm, and maintain our project's course. Project management assumed that there could be a reasonably accurate map of untraversed territory. We reject that idea, believing that our primary focus should be on the objective, not on our speculative notions of how we might get there.

"In the end, project management became the primary roadblock to building product. We've cleared the way for real, human adaptation to take over."

Public Sector Shocked!

A stunned public sector recoiled from the news. "Without our activity-based, earned value audit procedures, our projects will spin out of control," fussed one Department of Defense spokesperson. Amused onlookers, apparently associated with the conspiracy, asked, "So how will that be different from the way it is now?" The DOD spokesperson refused comment.

"Most project management traditions dated back a century or more," explained another conspirator, "to a time when information moved at the speed of a walking horse and most projects were about manipulating very predictable materials in space and time. Eiffel and his tower

come to mind. It was reasonable for Eiffel to develop very detailed plans of his project and also for him to use those plans as the means of determining the quality of his construction's progress.

"Today we're given projects that are the equivalent of scrambled-up Rubic's cubes. It just doesn't make sense to plan the steps for solving these efforts. Detailed plans just get in the way of creating the finished product. I guess the bottom line is that project management couldn't adapt to the information age. The old evolutionary rule holds true, adapt or die. We've just helped evolution out a bit."

"It was only a matter of time before project management did itself in, anyway," continued the conspiracy-member's partner.

When asked to detail the strategy for replacing project management, most *project community* members simply laughed. das

David's Notes



True North Changes Course:

Why would a successful "project management training and consulting firm" declare the death of project management? One client remarked recently, "Whenever I act like a project manager, my team rejects me." How many discussions with senior management before we finally caught on that they aren't interested in project management, either? If project management is the only constituency that's really interested in

project management, perhaps, we concluded, it's time we focus on the real business at hand! Hence the death of project management.

What takes its place? We think product is king. Product delivery is what really interests everyone across the enterprise. True North [project | product | process | personal] guidance strategies rounds out this perspective.

We found in our three and one-half year history that simply pinning the term Project Management to something was enough to give it a deficit starting position. Furthermore, people innocently muster images of iron-age projects and expect similar behavior from their silicon-age undertakings. So, we're out of the project management business.

Good riddance to an idea truly behind its time! das

New Compass Heading:

With this edition, our Compass newsletter changes heading; we become more tightly focused. Future editions will be smaller than past ones and will focus upon a single issue: This one is on the death of traditional project management and its tools. Future editions will be distributed bi-monthly. Quarterly publication is too infrequent for effective, adaptive, dead-reckoning navigation!

Compass via Email:

Thanks to all of you who asked to have your edition of Compass distributed via email! We expect that by the end of the year, most recipients will receive this newsletter via the internet. If you'd prefer to save a shrub and receive Compass electronically, please

send your email address to **Compassmail@yahoo.com**. We'll put you on the email list.

True North's Website:

Our website **projectcommunity.com** continues to unfurl! Drop in and see what's new. das

Project Scheduling Tools Proven Inaccurate

Scientist proves enormity of error

Shocking news comes from Los Alamos National Laboratory, where Mark G. Gray, Ph.D., a computational physicist working "behind the fence" at LANL read the Compass V2N2 piece entitled "Why Schedules Fall Apart." He took me to task for my sloppy use of technical terminology, a charge to which I plead nolo contendere.

This scientist doubted my conclusion that even small individual task risks explode into unassessable complexity as individual tasks are associated into dependent task networks; as they become project plans. My piece said that probability degrades under these conditions. Dr. Gray correctly notes that I should have characterized the *variance* around the series as exploding.

The effect, however, is similar.

Dr. Gray completed a study of this effect in his recent work, "A Treatise on Project Time Estimation," where Gray reviews the very basic theory underlying all automated project scheduling tools. This theory concludes that "the (average) completion time of a project composed of a network of tasks can be robustly estimated as a function of the (average) completion time of each task."

"When good estimates of task times are not available," Dr. Gray continues, "humans prove poor estimators of (average) completion times. Task completion times typically have skewed distributions, and humans find medians or modes more natural measures of central tendency in these cases. When the estimates are not (averages)," the scientist discloses, "the estimation formula simply does not apply; there is no simple relationship between the median or mode task completion times and the median or mode of the project completion time."

What does this disclosure mean to your project schedule? Plenty!

Dr. Gray has proven what you already knew. He has (finally) explained why your schedule falls apart, even though you perform what seems like due diligence when estimating task durations. "When rework is likely, classical task estimates are **always** low," Dr. Gray concludes, "and often by large factors. If the tasks are strongly dependent, so that the nature of tasks change depending on the prior history of the project, then calculation of project completion time becomes intractable." He means it's simply impossible!

Dr. Gray's revelation shocked me! His comment to me, in summarizing his post treatise critique of Why Schedules Fall Apart, was, "You were optimistic."

What do these revelations mean to the practical management of your project? Your project plan is probably wrong, and probably by a surprisingly large factor. Your project plan should have a large notice printed on it saying, "This is not the map for how we will get there!"

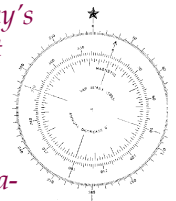
"This is not the map for how we will get there!"

Save the millions of dollars you were going to spend on that enterprise-wide scheduling tool. It can produce more detail than accuracy- and more misunderstanding than fact. As Dr. Gray notes, "Although Equation 3 [the classic formula for calculating the (average) completion time for a series of tasks] is mathematically correct, it may be of little help in estimating project completion time."

What he's really saying is that the schedule is wrong.

This does not mean that you should not plan. It does, however, change the meaning of the completed plan. When the plan is provably incorrect, it should not be used as the baseline against which goodness is measured. It may be productively used to provide perspective on the undertaking. No power can give you a map of untraversed territory. das

For a copy of Dr. Gray's *Treatise on Project Estimation*, contact us at www.projectcommunity.com, we'll give you the citation once it's published.



Appreciations

Mark G. Gray, Ph.D. for his threatening treatise!

Jim Zahnizer for dumbing me down (slobber, slobber)...

Joanne Scherm for staying engaged!

Orion for sharing community!

Notices:

Project Management died!

Enroll here to learn what comes next!

True North pgs' Mastering Projects Workshop Open Enrollment Schedule

September 28

November 29

See our web site-

www.projectcommunity.com for online registration and the most current schedules!



About *Compass*

Compass is published bi-monthly by *True North pgs, Inc.*, and is distributed free of charge to a project-oriented community now numbering 4000.

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

our insights.

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David A. Schmaltz, President

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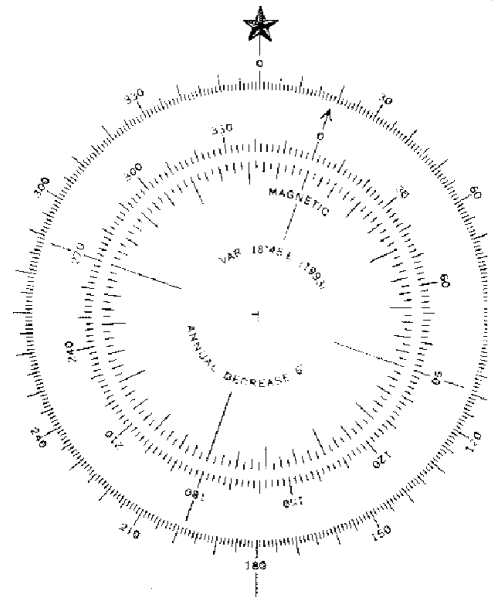
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