Do Ostriches Make Good Project Managers?

Before Bending Metal

Boeing wouldn't build a new plane without computer designs and simulation of in-flight performance. Ford wouldn't put a new vehicle into production without computer modeling to test the design's response to various driving conditions. Investment firms simulate many performance scenarios before committing large amounts of funds.

Customers, investors and regulators would roundly criticize any company that would "bend metal" without first subjecting designs to the rigors of modeling and performance simulation.

Getting It Precisely Wrong

Thousands of companies wade into complicated, multi-million dollar initiatives without the benefit of modeling and simulation. They miss the opportunity to examine the complex interactions that will determine whether their efforts are likely to meet expectations.

Some companies confuse excruciatingly detailed project schedules and budgets with effective project design. Traditional project scheduling and reporting – with tools like Microsoft Project, Primavera or Artemis – typically overlook nearly half of what actually determines the ultimate outcome of these projects and programs.

What's missing? Realistic attention to the cost, time and risk associated with coordination. Including the communication, decision-making, waiting and rework common in most projects and programs – particularly in this age of global teams, extended enterprises, outsourcing, quality improvement and speed-to-market.

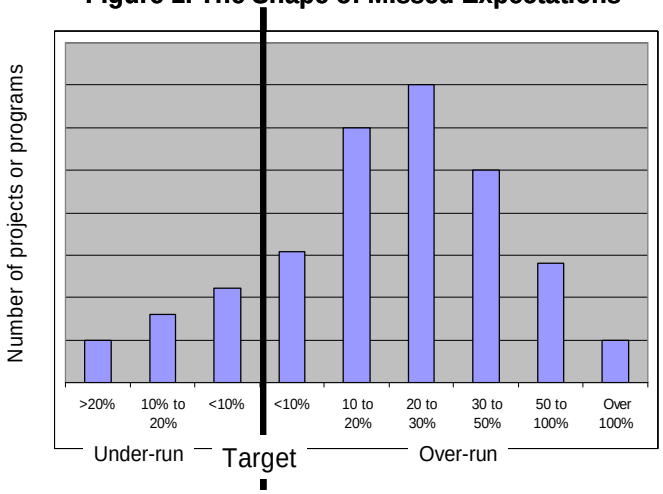
The Consequences of Hopeful Thinking

Most organizations intuitively know that results of their projects look something like the picture on the right.

Relatively few companies, however, have the gumption to keep this kind of record on their overall project performance – or to make the analysis visible to their leadership.

Even fewer have a clear view of the root causes for these missed expectations – external factors, internal factors, or simply "project management by hopeful thinking."

Figure 1. The Shape of Missed Expectations



One definition of insanity goes something like this – *continuing to do things the same way, but expecting different results.*

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Dialog Starter

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Getting Beyond the Ostrich Approach

A "head-in-the-sand" orientation to project accountability may have been winked at in the past. However, today's climate of corporate and management accountability turns the spotlight of reality on leadership and governance.

And the hard questions are being asked:

- Do we design projects with the same kind of rigor and insight we use in designing products and services? Why not?
- Can teams collaborate to model projects and use insights from simulation to make realistic commitments – particularly during a project's "fuzzy front-end"?
- Do our plans reliably reflect the 40% or more of total project effort, time and expense consumed in coordination– rather than in doing direct work?
- If our methods and tools neglect critical coordination aspects of real projects, should we be surprised that we miss expectations more often than not?
- Can we solve this problem by demanding more detail on every aspect of project scheduling, reporting and control? Or should we accept the wisdom that "it's better to be roughly correct than precisely wrong?"
- Can we use design and simulation to guide inevitable mid-course adjustments? Or, do we just track the original schedule until the wheels really fall off?
- Do our culture, measurements and performance evaluations foster candor and high integrity – or do we encourage "wishful thinking" in project management?

Project Performance Can Improve

IF questions like these strike a chord, you can do something about your organization's approach to complicated programs and projects. Improving the performance of complicated business initiatives requires a fresh approach.

Global Project Design (GPD) works with leading global organizations to improve business initiative performance.

A Fresh Approach

- GPD has turned extensive research[1] on actual projects, teams and outcomes into a practical approach.
- GPD's TeamPort™ software encourages teams to quickly but effectively collaborate on modeling, simulation and forecasting of projects.
- GPD's project professionals, working with your project leaders and teams, can deliver powerful insights, feasible plans and stronger buy-in.
- Initial planning sessions generate meaningful scenarios. Teams refine their designs in near real-time. And make better-informed mid-course corrections.
- GPD's method and TeamPort™ software helps all this happen quickly, and with much greater insight, than traditional techniques and tools allow.

(1) GPD's method and TeamPort™ software incorporate insights from complex projects across industries include electronics & aerospace new product introduction; software & systems integration; petroleum exploration, chemical production, and management of offshore call centers. GPD's approach incorporates extensive research at MIT, University of Tokyo and University of Connecticut into the interaction and performance of teams in actual complex global environments.

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