# Project Management

Greetings, PDWG Team Members. Hoping this issue of the *Practitioner* finds all of you and yours safe. This month we are publishing this issue a bit early to echo the issuance of the Department of Energy - Office of Project Management COVID-19 Response Article for the newsletter titled "Navigating, Communicating, and Managing Your Project During Uncertain Times." We hope you find the article and the *Practitioner* both informative and useful.

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# Navigating, Communicating, and Managing Your Project During Uncertain Times

## Department of Energy - Office of Project Management COVID-19 Response Article for the Newsletter

*By Craig Hewitt, Washington River Protection Solutions (WRPS), and Dave Kester, Office of Project Controls (PM-30)*

In mid-March of 2020 the United States entered into unprecedented times as the COVID-19 virus enveloped both our professional and personal lives. During this period the one constant is uncertainty. Uncertainty may range from falling short of having full understanding and knowledge, to an almost complete lack thereof, especially about an outcome or result. The COVID-19 virus has recast the belief in our ability to predict the future, as few, if any, saw this epic event coming. While we cannot be expected to control an event outside of human activity, we can be expected to control our reaction and response to the event. With few exceptions, a measured, calculated, and informed approach is beneficial when faced with adversity and uncertainty.

# Managing Your Project During Uncertain Times

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Our individual and collective project management response to the impacts of the COVID-19 virus is the theme of this article.

Like many other projects, your project's risk register is not likely to include the likelihood of a pandemic event so a coherent mitigation strategy is most likely nonexistent. Thus, the project team finds itself helplessly watching the project schedule free-fall uncertain of when the slide will subside. The project team may feel the urge to jump into a recovery mode and take actions to stop the slide. In all likelihood, your project team has met with the client (socially distancing of course) to strategize recovery efforts. These discussions likely included ideas for altering the baseline plan to subdue the barrage of unfavorable performance metrics resulting from the unforeseen pandemic event, the need for replannings and rebaselinings, and the desire to make retroactive changes. Because the pandemic event has left projects with the uncertainty as to when work can proceed under normal circumstances, making irrational and irreversible decisions from a position of anxiety is not the best path forward.

Before implementing changes to the baseline plan and until work can proceed under normal circumstances, the following recommendations offer guidance during the pandemic:

- For those work activities purposefully placed on hold, retain the current baseline plan to accurately record the impacts caused by the pandemic event;
- Meticulously update the forecast plan to accurately forecast the impacts caused by the pandemic event;
- Continuously communicate with the client the current state of the project's status following bullets 1 & 2; and
- Enforce the rigors of the certified earned value management system (EVMS), with the understanding that irrational and irreversible decisions may jeopardize the confidence internal and external stakeholders have in the ability of the implemented EVMS to provide timely, accurate, quality performance information from which they are to manage and make informed decisions.

These recommendations establish a set of high level principles to help guide project teams through this time of uncertainty. The first step the project team can take is to compile a comprehensive listing of impacts and considerations to inform the forecast plan. While a project team may not have enough information to make baseline changes during a time of uncertainty, they should have the capability to record an accurate status to include all impacts. For example, schedule delays, the most common impact caused by the pandemic event, should be isolated and identified in the Work Breakdown Structure (WBS) to provide traceability to the specific work scope activities that have been directly or indirectly impacted. Project teams should ensure, through rigorous criteria and process controls using the EVMS when applicable, that work activities not impacted by the pandemic event be separated from those work activities that are impacted. The

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inclusion of non-impacted work activities could be construed as a "get-well" plan, which is not the intent.

Unfavorable performance metrics tied to the delay-impacted activities are the expectation. The absence of unfavorable performance metrics begs the question: How is it possible to endure the impacts of the pandemic event without unfavorable performance metrics telling that story?

One answer is that change control action has already taken place. If so, which, if any, of the recommendations (above) were evaluated? The second plausible answer is that the baseline was not reflective of how performance was planned to be executed. The third answer is, of course, that the project predicted the pandemic event and had planned accordingly. None of these answers places the project in a good position for proceeding forward when work can proceed under normal circumstances.

It will take some time to assimilate the magnitude of the COVID-19 virus toll on projects. During this time of uncertainty, the project team should utilize the forecast plan to reflect the impacts. When all parties, both contractor and client, are adequately informed to the extent of the impacts, including the recommendations identified above, a well maintained forecast plan can be relied upon to provide a solid basis for making appropriate and coordinated changes to the baseline plan towards the successful completion of the project. If recovery planning is not in-line with this measured approach, pre-mature adjustments to the baseline plan may actually inhibit the project team's ability to demonstrate and quantify the COVID-19 virus impacts using the EVMS. As such, when acquisition and contract direction is eventually issued, projects which have previously acted appropriately, following the principles outlined herein, will find themselves in the best position to defend the needed actions resulting from the pandemic event's impacts.

Please stay safe during these uncertain times.

## It is not one world

### What we do and how we do it matters!

*April 24, 2013 Bangladesh Building Collapse Due to Shoddy Construction*



**The 2013 Savar building collapse, or Rana Plaza collapse, was a structural failure that occurred on April 24,2013, in the Savar Upazila of Dhaka District, Bangladesh, where an eight-story commercial building named Rana Plaza collapsed. The search for the dead ended on May 13, 2013, with a death toll of 1,134.**

## PDWG Goings-On
*Upcoming events:*

⌨ **The EFCOG Annual Meeting will be held virtually on June 3rd. More details on the agenda and how to connect to the meeting will be posted on the event website.**

# Behavior-Based Project Management

## Project intelligence starts with the computer between the ears

# Data vs. decisions – computers vs. the brain

In project management we rely a lot on data. We try to use data for just about every decision we make. However, data is just an input. So the question is, do we give data more credit than it's due?

To compare, let's look for a moment at the basic processes of a computer. At its most basic level, a computer consists of the following functions:



- Inputs – it takes in various types of data.
- Store – all the inputs are stored in its memory.
- Process – it takes the data stored from the inputs and through algorithms, with a series of logical commands, it processes the information, performs calculations, etc. Processing is the most critical function.
- Output – takes the different types of information that are processed and outputs it in various ways.

Between your ears there is a computer. This computer is programmed to protect itself and its offspring. Like any other mammal, the human brain is programmed to make sure it and its genes are safe. The computer on your desk or in your palm makes simple if/then logical calculations. Your brain does not.

But wait, we all say we're logical; can we trust our own brain to tell us that it is unbiased?

This is why it is important to distinguish between data and decisions. Data is the input to both the computer and the brain. However, the computer only makes if/then processing commands based on logical sequences, while the brain makes processing commands based on biased reasoning.  That reasoning is formulated from time-pressure, social pressure, ego maintenance, energy levels, loss aversion, risk aversion, and a whole host of other factors.

At issue here is whether just obtaining more and more data will change the outcome of the human decision if the processor (the computer between your ears) isn't first de-biased. We spend a lot of time, energy, and money on quality checks on data in software, hardware, and networks. But those elements do not make the final decision, the human does.

The key to changed outcomes is in the processing of data, not just the data itself. The question we are left with is should equal time, energy, and budget go to the key information processor (our brain) versus just the data inputs to it?
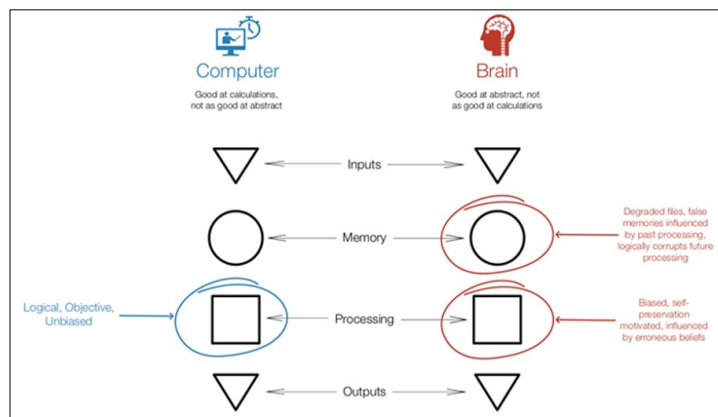
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# Just for Fun: May's Notable Events and Famous Birthdays

1 — Cheerios were first sold (1941), and Mr. Potato Head was introduced (1952), and singer Tim McGraw was born (1967).

2 — Pediatrician Dr. Spock (1903) and singer Bing Crosby (1904) were born.

3 — Boxing champ Sugar Ray Robinson (1921), and singers Frankie Valli (1937) and Jewel (1974) were born.

4 — Native Americans sold Manhattan Island for goods worth $24 (1626), **the record player was first demonstrated** (1878), and actress Audrey Hepburn (1929) and singer Randy Travis (1959) were born.

5 — Socialist Karl Marx was born (1818), Mexico won the Battle of Puebla (1862), the first train robbery occurred (1865), singer Tammy Wynette was born (1942), and Alan Shepard became the first American in space (1961).

6 — Psychiatrist Sigmund Freud (1856) was born, the Eiffel Tower was completed (1889), baseball star Willie Mays was born (1931), the Hindenburg exploded (1937), actor George Clooney was born (1961), and the English Channel tunnel opened (1994).

7 — Composers Johannes Brahms (1833) and Peter Tchaikovsky (1840), actor Gary Cooper (1901) and football star Johnny Unitas (1933) were born, and the Beatles released their final album (1970).

8 — The U.S. Post Office was established (1794), President Harry Truman was born (1884), **Germany surrendered to the Allies** (1945), and Mad Magazine debuted (1952).

9 — The first transcontinental railroad was completed (1869), Coca-Cola was invented (1886), the lawnmower was patented (1899), and singer Billy Joel was born (1949).

10 — Dancer Fred Astaire (1899) and singer Bono (1960) were born.

11 — Einstein presented his Theory of Relativity (1916), Muslim leader Louis Farrakhan was born (1933), and the first tubeless tires were manufactured (1947).

12 — The flush toilet was patented (1792), and actress Katherine Hepburn (1907), baseball star Yogi Berra (1925), and comedian George Carlin (1937) were born.

13 — Boxing champ Joe Louis (1914), singer Stevie Wonder (1950), and basketball star Dennis Rodman (1961) were born.

14 — The first permanent English settlement in the New World was established at Jamestown, Virginia (1607), Vaseline was first sold (1878), filmmaker George Lucas was born (1944), and Seinfeld aired for the last time (1998).

15 — The U.S. Department of Ag was established (1862), nylons were first sold (1940), and baseball star George Brett (1953) and football star Emmitt Smith (1969) were born.

16 — Root beer was invented (1866), and **singer Janet Jackson was born** (1966).

17 — The first Kentucky Derby was held (1875), and boxing champ Sugar Ray Leonard was born (1956).

18 — Baseball stars Brooks Robinson (1937) and Reggie Jackson (1946), singer George Strait (1952), and actress Tina Fey (1970) were born.

19 — The first Ringling Brothers circus was held (1884), and civil rights activist Malcolm X was born (1925).

20 — Actor Jimmy Stewart (1908) and singer Cher (1946) were born, and the Hubble Space Telescope transmitted its first photos (1990).

21 — The American Red Cross was formed (1881), and actor Mr. T was born (1952).

22 — The Great Train Robbery occurred (1868), baseball star Tommy John was born (1943), and Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood debuted (1967).

23 — Outlaws Bonnie and Clyde met their demise (1934), and actor Drew Carey was born (1958).

24 — Queen Victoria (1819) and singer Bob Dylan (1941) were born.

25 — The last Ford Model T was built (1927), and **the first Star Wars movie was released** (1978).

26 — Sportscaster Brent Musburger (1939), and singers Stevie Nicks (1948) and Hank Williams Jr. (1949) were born.

27 — The first "witch trial" execution was held (1647), and the pop-up toaster was patented (1919).

28 — Athlete Jim Thorpe was born (1888), and the Golden Gate Bridge opened (1937).

29 — President John F. Kennedy was born (1917), and Sir Edmund Hillary became the first person to reach the top of Mount Everest (1953).

30 — The bra was invented (1889), and bandleader Benny Goodman (1909), football star Gale Sayers (1943) and singer Wynonna Judd (1964) were born.

31 — Actor Clint Eastwood (1930), **football star Joe Namath** (1943) and model Brooke Shields (1965) were born, and the trans-Alaska oil pipeline was completed (1977).