

I didn't *SEE* the Iceberg! – and other Titanic Communication Mistakes

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MISTAKES

IT COULD BE THAT THE PURPOSE OF YOUR LIFE IS
ONLY TO SERVE AS A WARNING TO OTHERS.

The RMS Titanic

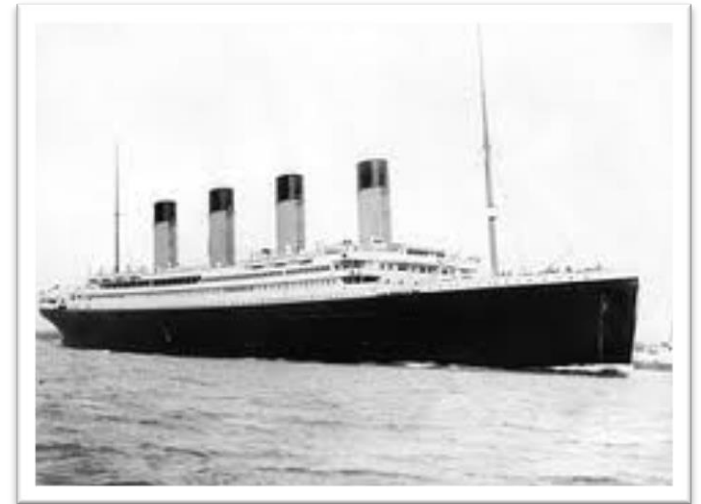
Crossing the North Atlantic from UK to USA

Maiden voyage, 2200+ people aboard

Largest, most luxurious ship afloat

Advanced safety features

Met Board of Trade standards



... yet it sank - killing over 1500 people!

Full Speed Ahead

www.ThinkReliability.com

Known icebergs; Captain kept speed at 18-22 knots

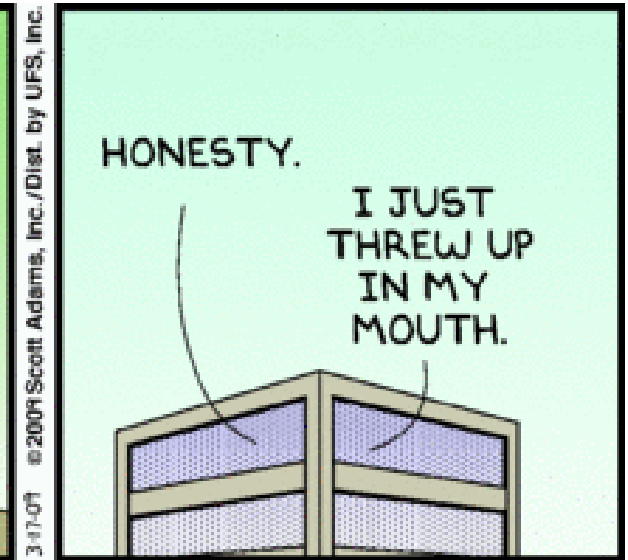
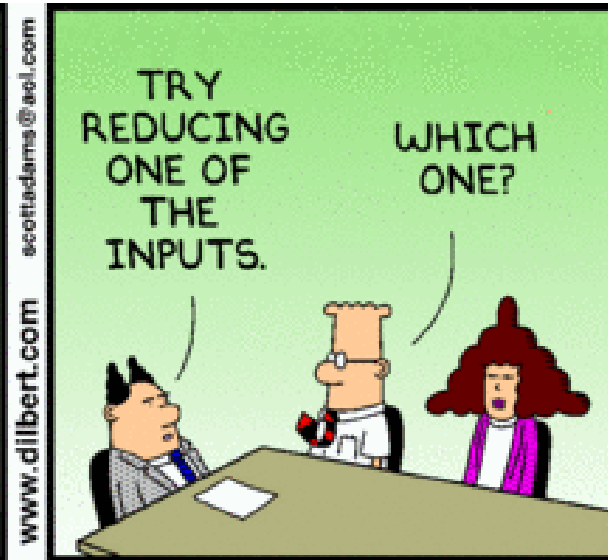
You must communicate more effectively when management directives significantly increase project risk.

“Move forward despite the risks”



.. yet **you** are held accountable for the outcome





What can be done??

First, Know the Business Reasons

Senior Management decisions incorporate:

- revenue (current / future)
- customer satisfaction
- profitability
- company goals

Business acumen

Risk communication ...



Second, Enhance Your Risk Conveyance

Typical value

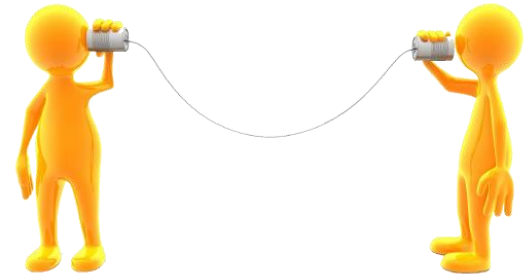
- “The risk of not making the deadline is high”

More precise

- “The risk of not making the deadline is 6 (on a 9 scale)”

More descriptive

- “The risk of not making the deadline due to delays in manufacturing is 6 (9 scale)”



Still not persuasive enough ...

Better Risk Communication

“The risk of not making the deadline due to delays in manufacturing will result in: (1) new customer revenue loss of \$200K due to late time to market , (2) a missed current customer sales opportunity of \$350K , and (3) a large customer will not renew their contract”

You have added work to your plate
Quantify and define the specific impacts
Address the critical concerns

- not only this project, but future or concurrent projects
(company opportunity costs)



What Senior Management Perceives

PM communicates risk and mitigation strategies
... therefore, probability and impact have become low!!

**the *outcome* of risk mitigation plans
needs to be well understood**

Risk	Probability*	Impact*	Value	Mitigation
"A"	3	3	9	"X"

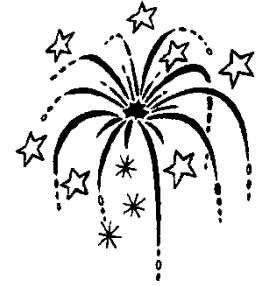
* Scale of 1 to 3

Stand up to management as necessary.

Activity

1. Touch his / her toes.
2. Turn around 3 times.
3. Say the months of the year in backward order.
4. Whistle.

Deafening Silence



Californian

Evaluate and prevent misinterpretation or blockage of communications.

Communications plans

- Establish, review
- Who, when, what kind provided, what kind needed, flow, response time, circumstances, format
- Precision Q & A

Don't turn off the radio!!



Issue Statement

The following is an **excellent** example of an issue statement to a high level manager. Note overall items:

- short but informative
- addresses what the MANAGER will be concerned about –
what happened, what is being done, what the impact is to
customer / financials / portfolio
- tone - fact based, non-emotional, addresses issue & impacts
- format - no long paragraphs - short and easy to read / follow

Example

Manager:

Here is an update on x.

What appeared to at first believed to be a part specific issue has been confirmed to be one of eight devices and we believe it is present on all devices with xxx. See table below for the parts that are impacted.

Yes, this is a very severe issue and I expect major customer impact. We have the right people working the issue and having 100% focus from the key players.

Mr. Smith just reported that by aligning certain events in the simulation environment that the issue has been recreated. This moves us toward root cause and the fix. However, I foresee that we will have to revise 14 devices to correct the issue.

I will try to explain why we have not seen this problem for the past three years when xxx parts have been out.

- The problem only occurs at a certain frequency xxx.
- The problem only occurs when the device is running at xxx.
- The problem shows itself to customers as xxx.

With the above said, not very many customers rely on the xxx to run at the maximum specified frequency. In fact for xxx reasons it run's at the lowest frequency their application can handle.

We will need to release an errata in the near future but I want to understand the root cause entirely before we broadcast the issue to the general public.

Daily meetings continue and we are progressing with the investigation with urgency. Please call me if you would like a more detailed update. Information on the investigation can be viewed at [\(URL\)](#).

Here is an update on x.

states purpose up front; if action required would have stated that also

What appeared to at first believed to be a part specific issue has been confirmed to be one of eight devices and we believe it is present on all devices with xxx. See table below for the parts that are impacted.

states old assumptions and what has changed; highlights more details at end; is **SUCCINCT**

Yes, this is a very severe issue and I expect major customer impact.

confirms natural reactions and doesn't shy from bad news **AND** doesn't overstate

We have the right people working the issue and having 100% focus from the key players.

immediately addresses first concern - who is working this and are they the right people

Mr. Smith just reported that by aligning certain events in the simulation environment that the issue has been recreated. This moves us toward root cause and the fix.

significantly states if root cause known and details of the following fix

However, I foresee that we will have to revise 14 devices to correct the issue.

high level impact details

I will try to explain why we have not seen this problem for the past three years when xxx parts have been out.

humble but knowledgeable about defining the problem; following bulleted for easy reading

- The problem only occurs at a certain frequency xxx.
- The problem only occurs when the device is running at xxx.
- The problem shows itself to customers as xxx.

With the above said, not very many customers rely on the xxx to run at the maximum specified frequency. In fact for xxx reasons it run's at the lowest frequency their application can handle.

noted customer use

We will need to release an errata in the near future but I want to understand the root cause entirely before we broadcast the issue to the general public.

what is important to do and when; what are the dependencies before further internal and external communication

Daily meetings continue and we are progressing with the investigation with urgency. Please call me if you would like a more detailed update.

level of urgency felt by the team stated / always be available

Information on the investigation can be viewed at [\(URL\)](#).

always tell where they can find more information if available

Bottom Line First!

- Ex: “We will miss the cost targets due to misappropriation of funds”
- And this happens:



OR!! ... this



Bottom line first WITH caveats

Ex: “We will miss the cost targets due to misappropriation of funds, **and** there are 3 areas that need to be understood to get a handle on this situation: resource availability, project priority, and quality concerns.

Quality (W)recklessness

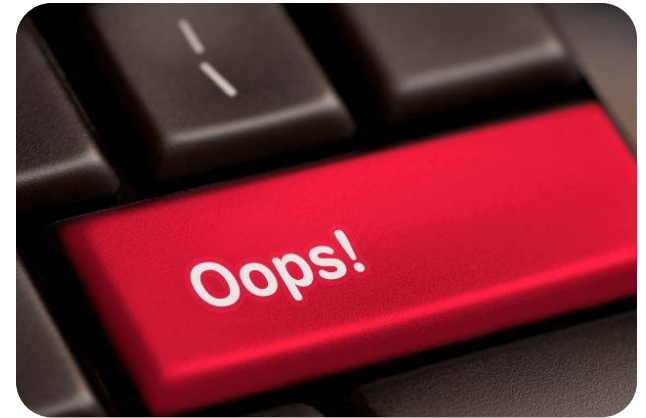
Why did the Titanic sink?

- Watertight compartments, rivets

Make sure you evaluate all high impact risks.

Probability of edge case might not be enough

- Respond to high IMPACT risks (if quality is critical)
- Company goals, safety, profitability, customer satisfaction, etc.
- Don't give in to 'Group Think'



Groupthink

www.disinfo.com/2012/06/conformity-and-the-elevator-experiment

I Didn't *SEE* the Iceberg!!

Another reason - late detection of iceberg by lookouts.

Binoculars were locked in a cabinet!!

*Create an environment of a
proactive and comprehensive decision making process.*

Formatting is critical...



Decision Matrix

Issue:

IMPACTS TO:	Solution 1	Solution 2	Solution 3	Solution 4
Schedule				
Resources				
Financials				
Scope / Technical				
Other projects				
Customer				
Competition				
Benefits				
Risks				

Summary



Full Speed Ahead

Communicate more effectively when management directives significantly increase project risk.



Deafening Silence

Evaluate and prevent misinterpretation or blockage of communications.

Quality (W)recklessness

Evaluate all high impact risks.



I Didn't See the Iceberg!

Create a proactive, comprehensive decision making process.



References

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www.thinkreliability.com

Precision Question and Answer - PQ&A

www.vervago.com

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