By Jon M Quigley

In our previous blog post, we discussed PPAP and objectivity or the check the box mentality. What happens when we communicate in an overly optimistic way? Below is an exchange between a supplier project management as well as the customer project management and a line manager responsible for verification.

**Chief Project Manager Supplier:** you must be completed with your integration testing no later than 2 weeks

**Verification Line Manager at the Customer**: There are more than 3000 systems level test cases, none of which are automated. This is not a two week test but probably more like 4-6 weeks

**Verification Line Manager at the Customer**: There is no way the testing is going to **happen** in the two week desired, too few people and resources for that to happen at this late of a request date. We will likely be through 10% in that time.

**Chief Project Manager Supplier:** I insist that your testing can and must be completed no later than 2 weeks. That way we can deliver the product to the field test personnel.

**Verification Line Manager at the Customer**: There is no way the testing is going to **happen** in the two week desired. It is not likely this can happen in that time.

**Chief Project Manager Customer:** we will do our best to meet your two week deadline

The meeting disbands. The line manager walks away thinking the rest of the organization wants and **believes** the testing will be completed in 2 weeks. Two weeks come and go, and the testing is not completed. The testing goes on to take 6 weeks. Now, this same organization laments that keeping their scheduled commitments is very difficult. In this exchange, perhaps we see some inclination as to why that may be the case.

Project management discipline includes expectation management. The project manager is one conduit for resolving communications difficulties and keeps the team pushing in the same direction. This includes understand the expectations upon each team member (performed one way via a Resource Allocation Matrix). This identifies who owns what part of the project and the authorities and responsibilities in their area. So why is this important? Well the CPM at the supplier has made a demand and the exchange above could suggestthat the CPM at the supplier **could in fact expect** the verification activities concluded in the time he demanded, though the verification group manager asserts this to not be possible. We have prepared this CPM for the news that we have achieved the goal of completing the systems verification by the date he desires….and we have professional experience and area of responsible person indicating that is not possible.

In discussions with other project managers, they confided that the above exchange was an easy way to diffuse the situation. A promise of doing our best did not accept (or exclude) the possibility of meeting the demanded duration from the supplier. As such, the stress or confrontation was averted. That may be true, on the other hand, it could easily be construed that the CPM at the supplier interpreted this exchange as we had in fact accepted the challenge. Imagine their surprise two weeks later, when the activities were not completed. We have failed to meet our commitment.

Is it better to avoid “conflict” than to explicitly indicate or state the facts? It sure looks like we averted the confrontation, but at what cost. In hindsight, the line manager had a good understanding of the work and the amount of time it would take to accomplish the job, and it was not the duration that the CPM at the supplier had wished. We averted any escalation to meet the un-meet-able, but in an organization that professes to have a problem with commitment and delivery; one can only wonder how much of that problem is self-inflicted. Accepting such a diffusion approach as necessary rather than rock the boat with facts, professional responsibility and experienced perspective set the level of expectation that we are very confident we will not reach.

Is it better to delay the “bad news” day? At some point, in this case two weeks later, we will hear from the CPM at the supplier. What happens when we fail to meet the target of two weeks? Is it really a target? Is it really a failure to deliver and is this a source of a reputation of inability to deliver?