

The TMC ADVISOR

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Come Hell or High Water *By Elleni Koskinen*

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Justifying a Project

Saving money is often the prime justification for undertaking a project. Perhaps it is an IT project to build an integrated video conference system. Costs include hardware to equip a conference room, software to allow off-site participants to join in and perhaps an in-house server system. The alternative of everyone "doing it themselves" becomes the justification for a corporate solution.

Cutbacks

When the corporate "belt-tightening" begins, all projects deemed non-essential are axed. It's a simple way for the business to get quick savings.

Consequences

Except that life is not that simple. The need that started the project in the first place has not gone away. The project users-to-be still need video conferencing.

So what do they do? Well, they go back to plan A - what they were going to do before your corporate project stepped in to "save money." There is the *Law of Unintended Consequences* rearing its head, and showing that cancelling a project that aimed to save money will, not surprisingly, cost money.

The corporate execs may think that belt-tightening is the only path to cost savings, but there is always room for a bit of slack if you are clever enough.



The Issue

It may be tempting to say that this is the fault of the execs who cancelled the project—as if they should have foreseen the cost of doing that. But did your project plan tell them what they needed to know?

A good Project Plan should clearly show:

- a) the projected cost of doing nothing
- b) the projected cost of doing the project

Then it is clear that the business faces cost (a) if it does nothing and cost (b) if the project is implemented. Importantly it also shows the implicated costs (a) of cancelling the project, which just might persuade the execs that doing the project as proposed is the best way to save money.

Lessons to be Learned

To start with, a project manager must make sure that the current cost-of-doing-business is clearly established and stated. This provides a foundation on which the project is built—and to which it will fall back if cancelled. Then the cost of doing the project must be shown with a clear split between one-time implementation costs and ongoing running costs. That will naturally lead to the justification for the project.

However, don't let your enthusiasm for cost savings lead you to the assumption that the project will be implemented. That is never a given. There are many reasons for abandoning projects so be clear what costs will be incurred should the project be abandoned. That may mean the project plan has to contain two sections—one showing the way forward without the project and the other with the project.

This is called planning for all eventualities." Good project managers should include plans for failure, including over-runs, in their plans.

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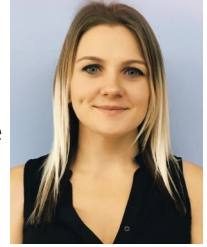
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Peter Aggus, as an engineer & technology management consultant, has developed innovative & cost-effective solutions for clients in many industries.

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Prevention

The community emergency plans for wildfire and flood preparedness paint bleak pictures for our province. More than two thirds of the communities surveyed did not have a detailed, costed flood plan in place. On the other hand, more than two thirds of the communities had wildfire plans in place, however they were relying on the provincial government for the funding needed to fulfill those plans.

The reality is that that funding is not enough. In the past twenty years, less than 10% of the necessary work to fulfill communities' wildfire preparedness plans has been completed, leaving many communities in British Columbia vulnerable to the deadly effects of forest fires. Smaller communities that are surrounded by forests face that risk every summer. But without funding, or permission to touch trees on Crown land, their hands are tied.

Action

The provincial government is more than willing to jump into action when natural disaster strikes, as evidenced by their Disaster Financial Assistance package that provides up to \$300,000 to each affected business or household to cover 80% of the cost of damages. On the other hand, when communities want to prevent wildfire or flood damage, the maximum funding that they are eligible for is \$150,000 per year, and only if they can demonstrate that they are at high risk.



Real Cost

The cost to fulfill all of the plans as they currently stand (and keep in mind that the true cost is likely much higher, as many of the plans are not fully priced out, or are over the recommended 5-year refresh period) is \$190 million for wildfire plans, and \$7.7 billion for flood plans. If communities expect to rely solely on government funding to move forward with their prevention plans, much of our province will be severely and permanently impacted by the hotter, drier temperatures, rising sea levels, and severe flooding associated with the climate crisis.

Another Way Forward

The City of Richmond, which is on average only 1 meter above sea level, is the only community in British Columbia that has put their money

where their mouth is, and made flood prevention a budgetary priority.

In fact, by the year 2030, they estimate that they will be collecting \$30 million per year in flood protection utility fees by way of a line item on all municipal utility statements. The fee, which was implemented in 2000, has gradually increased over time, and will continue to do so to ensure that the community is prepared for and protected against a variety of water-related natural disasters.

Other communities in BC have lamented the cost of wildfire and flood prevention, and stated that they simply cannot move forward without additional assistance from the government. However, Richmond's \$173 flood protection utility charge (2022) has shown that moderate-large communities do have the ability to help themselves, if they only make it a priority.

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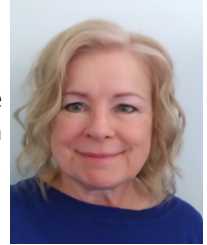
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Elleni Koskinen is the editor of the Advisor, a researcher, and oversees TMC benchmarking studies.

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The Moms

I worked with a small contact centre at a large post secondary institution. The group transferred calls to the main number from 6 am to 10 pm with shorter hours on the weekends. To this day, I have never met a more effective team.

They worked in shifts of three and when someone left, the remaining operators had a system of training the new person to effectively become a clone of the others.

As I spent more time observing them, I was repeatedly amazed. No matter what problem they were presented with, they were able to help. Students would call, "I'm lost, I don't know how to find my class" and "the Mom" would calm them down, ask questions and help them find their way. In another case, a caller said that they needed to reach "that professor, that math professor, the one with the complicated name." It took a few extra questions, but the information was found and the call was put through. If the call wasn't answered, the switchboard operator would take back the call and find another way to help the caller.

Their magic came from their attitude of finding non-standard ways to help and the DIY knowledge base that let them find any information about locations within and around the campus, course and event schedules, and people (faculty, staff and students).



They added real value and projected an image of "We are all here to help you. This is a great place to learn." In another organization, callers may have been met with "I'm sorry, if you don't know the name, I can't help you."

My advice to senior management was that this switchboard group should be nurtured and supported as they were superstars.

The Robot

She was good at her job—friendly and warm, yet people kept asking employees, "Is she a robot?"

I asked people to explain why they thought that, but "unnatural, not quite real" was all they could say. So I interviewed her, and I called in myself, to get the full caller experience.

I came to the conclusion that her naturally sultry tone, combined with

her unusual timing—"Good afternoon. Howww may I direct your caall?" gave callers the image of a machine doing its best to act like a human receptionist.

Upon consideration, she was judged to be an asset in the high tech company, and wasn't asked to change her style.

Calm Under Pressure

I observed a switchboard team at a large hospital and they did their jobs well. It was not until they shared "the book" with me that I understood how very good they were. They informally logged each unusual call and noted their response: calls such as "my girlfriend just fed me all of her birth control pills, will I turn into a girl?" and "help, the drugs are leaving my body." Their responses were calm, reassuring, and helpful.

Building a great call-taker team sometimes happens organically, but it usually needs intent, planning and guidance.

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Summertime conjures up images of days at the beach, holidays at the cabin, and barbecues on the patio. It may also bring to mind sunburns, highway traffic, and uncomfortably hot weather. However, summer temperatures can also damage your computer hardware and cause data loss. At risk are motherboards, CPUs and other components not designed to withstand extreme heat.



Keeping Hardware Safe in Warm Weather

Protecting your computer's hardware isn't difficult. Here are a few basic tips:

- Don't leave your computer in direct sunlight. Review your office layout and ensure that hardware is not exposed to the sun through windows and skylights. The risk of damage increases as temperatures exceed 32.2°C (or 90°F), although it's worth noting that the tolerance for high temperatures varies for different brands of computers. Check with the manufacturer or vendor to find out the tolerance level for your hardware.
- Let your hardware adjust to current room temperatures before booting up. This will allow components to expand or contract at a safe rate.
- Make sure that there is adequate air flow around your hardware. Don't position hardware on a surface that will stop vents and fans from working properly!
- Avoid working outside in conditions with high humidity, which can cause electrical problems in hardware.
- Don't leave your hardware in a vehicle for extended periods. If this can't be avoided, be sure that hardware is powered off. (A recently spotted billboard: *Children, pets, and*



computers: Don't leave them unattended in your car!)

Many people bring hardware with them on summer road trips, and leaving a laptop in a car might be unavoidable for a few hours. To prevent damage to your laptop:

- Park in a shady spot. Shade will allow the temperature in the interior of your vehicle to increase more slowly.
- If possible, store hardware in your vehicle's trunk. This compartment will be cooler than the interior of your vehicle. It is often safe to leave your laptop in the trunk for up to eight hours. Moreover, the laptop will be out of the sight of thieves: an important security consideration, especially in urban areas.

- Place a sunshade across your windshield to reflect sunshine away from the interior of your vehicle. If you've parked in a way that allows sunshine through your rear window, place a sunshade across it.
- Store your laptop in a cooler bag, which will prevent hardware from baking in your vehicle.
- If possible, remove the battery from your laptop. Store the battery in the trunk. Not only can a damaged battery decrease the performance of a laptop, it can become a fire hazard.
- Turn off your laptop completely. Do not keep it on standby, a mode that leaves it turned on.

Ideally it will be convenient for you to carry your laptop with you, but if not, these are effective ways to protect it.

And now it's time for the beach! Avoid overheating by staying in the shade and drinking cold liquids. There's no need to hide in your trunk.

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Guy Robertson is a senior planner at TMC and an instructor at the Justice Institute of BC and Langara College. He has written five books and numerous articles on corporate security and disaster planning, and offered workshops and lectures at conferences across North America and in the UK.