

PM WORLD TODAY – CASE STUDY – OCTOBER 2008**“Bravo” Company: Lessons Learned in Project Management**

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On September 16, 2008, the Industrial & infrastructure (I&I) Group of Fluor conducted a team building session with about 120 members of the Executive Management Team (EMT). While highly successful in achieving its primary objective, the lessons learned by one “Company” are instructional with respect to many of the attributes of good project management.

Project Location and Strategic Objectives

“Bravo” Company, was one of six I&I companies who engaged in a series of paintball “engagements” at the U.S. Marine base at Camp Pendleton. The objectives were team building and having fun, but for each company it was about competition and success. Not unlike how we meet many of our projects. Initially “Bravo” Company was to consist of 19 EMTs from I&I and a marine that would join each of the companies in paintball combat. The EMTs came from all units in I&I and include both some “veteran” players as well as paintball novices, not unlike the staff composition of most projects that we undertake. The obstacles to be faced were unknown to the team as well as the constraints they were to face.

As “Bravo” Company prepared for battle and gained experience, the team grew and strategy and tactics evolved. Leadership of “Bravo” company was selected randomly based on whether your chair had a piece of paper under it or not.

Missing Resources

Before “Bravo” Company could even begin the trip by bus to Camp Pendleton, it quickly learned that about 15% of its targeted staff would be unavailable for combat due to other commitments (sound familiar?). Rather than focus on this potential disadvantage, “Bravo” Company set out on a series of tasks which are actually the hallmark of good project management. Let’s look at each of these in turn.

Develop a Clear Strategy and Execution Plan

Taking advantage of the bus ride out to Camp Pendleton, “Bravo” Company quickly defined a set of strategic objectives for itself to accomplish. These built on the broad mission objectives of team building and having fun and were fairly singularly focused – we wanted to win. With an agreed-to strategic objective in hand, “Bravo” Company quickly tried to use all available team knowledge to better understand the challenges we were likely to face and what best practices might be engaged. Team expertise in “paintball”, strategy, combat operations, human resources and communications were tapped from the team members and a general strategy developed that would have the flexibility to respond to the particular challenges we would face and evolve as each combat mission unfolded.

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Key elements of this strategy included:

- development of a clear organization, with well defined responsibilities
- communication strategy for distance based communications if that became necessary
- recruitment strategy, focused on getting the best marine available
- recognizing and leveraging the different strengths of the team
- development of an execution plan that provided for independent operation within an overall strategy
- continuous communication and intelligence gathering
- resource management and sharing
- on-going lessons learned process

Putting the Plan into Action

“Bravo” Company recognized that in any large scale operation, especially one that was likely to be fast paced and spread out at some distance, that it would be hard for the Company commander to provide instantaneous direction to even our reduced force of 16. So a plan was developed to put in place both a chain of command as well as a communications strategy. “Bravo” Company, building on the collective experience of its team members, decided to establish three squads in order to provide for quicker communication in the field, more detailed planning within a common overall framework by each squad and facilitate coordinated but independent operations in the field. The team sought to gain a “force multiplier” advantage but concentrating specialized expertise in each squad.



The Bravo Company

The first squad, under the leadership of Annette, became “Bravo” Company’s flying or flanking squad. Members were assigned to this squad based on their self-assessment of their ability to run fast. First Squad’s job was simple in theory. Get as wide as possible on one flank and move forward as fast as possible. As the battle unfolded they were to provide flanking cross fire and in several instances, were able to get in behind the opposing forces. Theory was much easier than reality, but through excellent teamwork and supporting cover fire from the other two squads, First Squad was successful in its execution and contributed substantially to overall “Bravo” Company performance.

The second squad, under the leadership of Darrell, was “Bravo” Company’s base squad. Members were assigned to this squad based on their self-assessment of their ability not to

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run. Second Squad's job was to move to nearby highground, provide covering fire for the third squad of the company, and keep the opposing force under fire while First Squad went wide and deep on the opposite flank. They also anchored the flank opposite from First Squad to ensure that we in turn were not outflanked and surprised on the field of battle. They provided "eyes" to ensure that we did not lose sight of an evolving situation.

The third squad, under James, consisted of those who weren't smart enough to self identify their strengths or weaknesses and be assigned to one of the first two squads. The third squad became our suicide squad with the task of holding ground in the middle, drawing fire, and advancing deliberately while First Squad moved into the flanking position. Third Squad drew the heaviest fire but sustained some of the fewest casualties by carefully planning each move, coordinating closely not only within the squad but also by coordinating its moves with the other two "Bravo" Company squads in the field.

"Bravo" Company's effort were enhanced by strategic recruitment of the "best marine available" which was achieved through strong HR support provided by Floyd and by offering a compelling vision of what success might look like. Nicknamed "Rambo", he was clearly a strategic hire, and was quickly assigned to the suicide squad. Upon joining our company, "Rambo" was debriefed and his prior knowledge of the fields of battle and terrain used to refine our broad strategies and tactics. Although clearly a strong addition to the team, he was eliminated early in two of the four competitions, but our ability to learn from his expertise provided overall team improvement.

Constant communications before and during the execution phase was something "Bravo" Company recognized the importance of even before arrive at Camp Pendleton. Coordination of action was also recognized as important. So with this in mind, the "Bravo" commander and each of the squad leaders had programmed each other into their Blackberry's



The Battlefield

to allow for quick communication of a coordinated attack in the event they lost line of site communication. As the battlefield was shaped this communication strategy was not required but "Bravo" Company had thought through the possibility and put a contingency plan in place.

Learning & Adjusting

At the end of each phase (battle), "Bravo" Company quickly got itself ready for the next challenge by recharging their compressed air and reloading their paintballs. But preparation did not stop there. The team quickly debriefed from the prior encounter, identified weaknesses and developed corrective action plans and identified strengths that they could exploit in the next encounter. This learning process continued as we were assigned a "field of play" and high ground or low ground, with strategy and tactics refined as we gathered new information. Constant communication during battle allowed tactics to be refined as new challenges emerged. Overall strategy remained constant and provided a framework for successful, coordinated action by the three squads of "Bravo" Company.

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At the outset we were given 500 paintballs apiece. Resources would be constrained and therefore had to be used judiciously. In each of the first two rounds “Bravo” Company was able to take full advantage of its strategic dominance and husband its resources very carefully. By the third round however, the challenges became harder, and the experience of our opponent exceeded that which we had faced in the two prior rounds. We consumed 60% of our resources in this battle after having consumed only about 20% in the prior two combined. Victory was ours but we went into the final round with extremely limited resources and no room for failure.

We met this resource challenge prior to the start of the fourth round by reallocating our resources among the team and continuing the re-allocation process in the field. Giving up limited resources when you yourself are short and under fire is certainly a true hallmark of good teamwork and is a situation which is encountered on many projects. This learning and adjusting strategy paid dividends in the final round allowing us to win by superior numbers even as time ran out before final (but inevitable) victory.

Team Results

The results of teamwork and having some fun were also an exercise in project management and used many of the same strategies, tactics and processes that we apply in a larger scale on each of our projects.

Final results, “Bravo” Company, four wins and no losses, achy joints, a medal and the pride of accomplishment!

“Bravo” Company	
Annette	First Squad Leader
Keith B	
James	Third Squad Leader
Dave	
Al	
Melvin	
Juan	
Rick	
Ken	MIA
Bob N	MIA
Bob Pr	Commander
John	
Jeff	
Keith S	
Phil	
Ger	
Darrel	Second Squad Leader
Floyd	
Tony	MIA
“Rambo”	

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About the Author:***Robert Prieto****Author*

Robert (Bob) Prieto is a Senior Vice President for Fluor Corporation, one of America's largest engineering, construction and project management firms where he is responsible for strategy in support of the firm's Industrial & Infrastructure Group and its key clients. He focuses on the development and delivery of large, complex projects worldwide. Prior to joining Fluor, Bob served as chairman of Parsons Brinckerhoff Inc. He is a member of the executive committee of the National Center for Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, a member of the board of directors of the Business Council on International Understanding, a member of the board of the Civil Engineering Forum for Innovation, and co-founder and member of the board of the Disaster Resource Network. He currently serves on the National Research Council's committee framing the challenges on Critical Infrastructure Systems. Until 2006 he served as one of three U.S. presidential appointees to the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Business Advisory Council (ABAC) and served as chairman of the Engineering and Construction Governors of The World Economic Forum and co-chair of the infrastructure task force formed after September 11th by the New York City Chamber of Commerce. He is also a member of the board of trustees of Polytechnic University of New York.