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Project and Programme Management
In Obama's Inaugural Speech

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It was history being made in front of our eyes when Barak Obama sworn in to be the 44th president of the United States of America. It is such a frightening time in America, and all over the world, that the global financial system that has been far from being stringently regulated gradually starts to collapse. The growing mountains of sub-prime loans, the declining investor confidence, the inevitable contraction of company size (and the associated skyrocketing layoff rate), the declining commodity prices, and so on have made Obama's presidency such a critical happening.

For he knows that time is ticking on us all; he is trying to extend the bailout plan that was approved under president Bush, aside sketching his own stimulation plan. As can be depicted from recent media reports, most of the money under the bailout plan will go to the public sector Infrastructure Projects (some may be under Public Private Partnership (PPP) frameworks). Generally, it seems that it is time for project and programme management to get a hit in USA, and all over the world. What could project managers learn from Obama's inaugural speech anyway? Let me draw some points that I found interesting.

1. Cooperation

In his inaugural speech, Obama starts by thanking President Bush for his cooperation during the historic transition. This is a great lesson to all project managers in the world. Your project team members may have their own weak side. Yet, you shall start your day by thanking them to be part of the great project that you are managing. It may be hard to programme people as per desired, but all things are possible through negotiation, mutual understanding and positive thinking. Don't stick to your way, as their way may have more benefit to the project's success than yours.

2. Collective Failure

The success or failure of a given project is the result of the cumulative activity of each of the project staff. Hence, a project manager is expected to bring the spirit of collective responsibility within all of the project team members. Unless all the project team members could work in tandem, the deliverable of the project will not be due on time, within budget, and upon the specified quality standards. Thus, in listening Obama's words saying "...our economy is badly weakened, a consequence of greed and responsibility on the part of some, but our collective

failure to make hard choices...” project managers has to emphasize that the success of any project is a collective responsibility, as is its failure.

3. Worn-Out Dogmas

We are part of a changing world, as is the profession that we are working under. Provided that project management is evolving in its own way, so shall be the way we manage resources and people under our disposal. It may sometimes be challenging to leave aside the rigidness that we have acquired in our stay as technical practitioners (taking into account most of the project managers of this time were once down the ladder as technical experts). But project management requires more soft skills that would be manifested by being a good leader as well as a good manager.

To this end, we shall leave behind all our worn-out dogmas of management, and be flexible to evolve with the dynamics of the world.

4. Risk-taking and Making Things

In his inaugural speech, President Obama has retrospectively looked at the struggles of the nation builders of USA. He has mentioned their world as a world of “...risk-takers, the doers, makers of things...”. This will undoubtedly remind project managers of the two contrasting aspects of managing projects; making things happen, and minimizing risks.

No matter how much their contrasting nature, the two inevitably happen coupled. Hence, the proficiency of a project manager will be measured on the choice of an appropriate tradeoff. Then, the basic rule of thumb seems to be “going to make things happen while your eyes are staring at the risks”.

5. Spending Wisely

Cost management is one of the challenging tasks of project managers, especially in times of recession like today. No matter how efficient our project cost management system is, we shall not get tired of looking after project expenditures. A seemingly little reluctance might lead our project to failure. Always putting both of our eyes on the project costs will help to avoid bad things as such. Henceforth comes Obama’s principle of Spending Wisely, a good way of saying it.

The historic inaugural speech of President Obama has a lot to put forward to project managers. His presidency will hopefully come up with a better America. Meanwhile, it seems that the compass is turning towards infrastructure projects, of which Roads, Bridges, Electric Transmission Lines, ICT, Healthcare, Education, and Green Energy will be at the forefront.

We shall all be grateful to witness such a historic moment, and beyond that the lessons that it will bring to our lives, as it also helps us to explore more of ourselves.

Wish you a Happy PM Month.

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