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Titanic lessons for modern projects

Posted by Andrew Rylah on 27 October, 2010 - 15:32

The APM East of England branch held an event on the 7th of October 2010 in Hatfield entitled *Titanic lessons for modern projects* that was presented by Mark Kozak Holland.

Of course Titanic was sunk by an iceberg. Correct? Well not quite according to Mark Kozak-Holland. Mark and his colleague Martin Price presented a thought-provoking project analysis of this famous maritime tragedy. Using their "project regimes" framework they analysed the many positive aspects - and the fatal project flaws that made a disaster almost inevitable.

Yes, Titanic demonstrated much good project management:

Clear project goals. The White Star Line was losing market share. Bruce Ismay, its managing director, needed to reverse this trend. His vision was to create 3 luxury ships, where customer service was paramount.

Good business case – Ismay's strategy predicted 75% of revenue from first class passengers and break-even within two years. Ambitious, but feasible.

Excellent customer-supplier relationship – White Star and Harland and Wolff shipbuilders had successfully collaborated in previous projects.

Quality management. Harland and Wolff were the best shipbuilders in the world with dedicated master craftsmen.

Procurement, communications, best practice, leading edge technology. All these and more minimised project risks.

So where did it all go wrong?

Excellent customer service was part of the vision; it was also part of Titanic's downfall. Safety came a distant second. Titanic was unsinkable so why crowd the decks with lifeboats that blocked 1st class deck views? Why have high bulkheads and an ample double-skinned hull. Surely it was more important to allow more space for the 1st class ballroom and cabins. Maritime regulations lagged behind technology; sea trials were over in hours.

Financial pressures led to more and more compromises. And each compromise increased project risks. Yes, Ismay did know. But neither he nor others acted. So, when Titanic's side scraped along an ice-shelf, there was no panic, there was no rush. There was also no disaster recovery plan.

The rest is history. It wasn't the iceberg, but a series of cumulative compromises and the inability to manage introduced risks that led Titanic to sleepwalk to disaster. Salutary lessons for today's complex projects.

Mark's presentation can be downloaded below. This event is likely to be repeated in 2011.

For news on this and other APM events please click [here](#)

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Files:

[Titanic lessons for modern projects \(http://www.apm.org.uk/sites/default/files/Titanic_lessons_for_modern_projects\[1\].pdf\)](http://www.apm.org.uk/sites/default/files/Titanic_lessons_for_modern_projects[1].pdf)

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