

Lessons Learned from the novel Covid-19 pandemic in the United States 2020

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For over thirty years, I have studied project management lessons learned in large corporations and in international settings. I was a member of a merger team in 2003 at ConocoPhillips that developed a lesson learned framework for capturing, documenting, and disseminating project lessons learned to the world. In 2011, I travelled to Panama to conduct project management lessons learned training to the Panama Canal Authority. This became a Framework for my book, [Project Management Lessons Learned: A Continuous Process Improvement Framework](#).

This essay deals with the 2020 COVID Pandemic, and lessons learned from the United States' project of responding to the pandemic.

Background

As early as 2005, world leaders considered that a virus-type infection was likely to be created, either by bird-to-bird or bird-to-human interaction or by lab introduction.

In 2015, Bill Gates predicted that, based on his information, a virus would probably be identified in the United States within ten years.

The Obama Administration began to prepare for such a virus by assembling information on likely viruses, preparing a tabletop exercise to practice a virus response, and by identifying individuals with virus expertise as well as a list of certain essential products that might be useful to a team facing such a pandemic.

There is evidence that the COVID-19 virus was in the United States far earlier than initially believed. COVID-19 likely entered the West Coast of the United States in January 2020 through airline passengers from China. COVID-19 likely entered the East Coast of the United States in January 2020 States through passengers arriving in New York from Europe...

Facts about the novel COVID-19 Virus

- Highly contagious, usually spread by airborne particles, although surfaces can contain the virus
- Infected individuals may be symptomatic or asymptomatic
- First organs of attack are the lungs and pulmonary system
- Usually infects the elderly with co-morbidity conditions (diabetes, heart disease)
- Can affect young children who develop inflammatory conditions
- Virus information changes daily
- The proximity of individuals is key to transmission, so keeping individuals separated (“socially distanced”) is a key to controlling the virus.

What is Project Management?

Project management is a framework and methodology designed to turn “strategy” into “action” for an individual or organization. Larger corporations and governments often employ project management to create new products and services, as well as to develop integrated plans to combat threats to the national well-being.

Project Management Lessons Learned

Project management lessons learned are insights or experiences that can be used to improve the project management process of a particular project at hand. There are two types of lessons learned: performance-based, and structure influencing behavior.

In the first, actual versus expected, performance is measured for a project manager, and the gap between the two becomes a candidate for a lesson learned.

In the second, and sometimes a more important branch of project lessons learned, the age-old question is “does structure influence organizational behavior?” Structure in this context is the processes, standards, procedures, and management objectives that guide a modern organization. Sometimes, management objectives create behavior on the part of individuals, or the organization itself, which is detrimental to the overall health of the organization.

Such structures might include:

- controlling the space occupied by a specific organizational entity, thus controlling cost;
- designing facilities so that they occupy the minimum space, but contain essential highly trained expertise, thereby reducing costs;

- Designing work structures that include very close work conditions;
- Identifying subject matter areas of the organization, such as security or cyber security which can be used to contract specific expertise during certain project time.

In corporations, I have encountered organizations where structure influences behaviour, most often in specialized security or Cyber groups, where expertise is required for a short time and can be contracted by the project manager so that the expertise is available when needed. Most often, when the expertise is needed by the project, the security individual is not available, thus requiring the project manager to add additional cost to find a replacement.

Project Management Lessons Learned from the COVID Pandemic Crisis in the United States 2020.

Project Management Performance—Actual versus Expected

THERE WAS NO PROJECT CHARTER FOR THIS PROJECT. Therefore, no stakeholders were named, and no sponsors were present to guide the invisible project team.

No assigned project manager was identified. No resources were allocated to the project, and no special expertise was identified.

The individual State Governors, such as Andrew Cuomo of New York, had to take the lead as soon as the virus started appearing in their states.

Any actual performance was by the individual who encountered a deviation from norm.

Performance management results were “ad hoc.”

These actions certainly caused the cost of the entire project to exceed that which might have been planned, to be spent on the project.

No plans for testing, drug discovery or planning was apparent.

Project Management Performance—Does Structure Influence Organizational Behavior

Here are some categories of Structural Issues in the 2020 Covid-19 Pandemic Crisis

- Prisons: Prisons are a case where many individuals are in close proximity due to incarceration. In the future, prisons could be relieved of their personnel count.
- Nursing homes: Nursing homes were one of the first hard-hit pandemic areas. In the future, relieving nursing homes of their patient load could reduce the counts.
- Military installations, including warships. The USS Theodore Roosevelt, for example, contained many individuals who could easily contract coronavirus because they were in close proximity. In the future, I would advise drydocking all ships and relieving all non-essential personnel.
- Food handling personnel: In many situations, food handling personnel are required to work in close proximity, as are manufacturing line workers. This created an internal crisis of how to handle workers infecting each other. This crisis often caused meat processors to shut down and manufacturing facilities to refine their assembly line processes.
- Hospitals: Highly skilled health care workers in hospitals continued their jobs day-to-day. This creates another identifiable group if another pandemic hits. These workers are on the front line every day, and return to their homes each evening, thus creating more opportunities for infection.

There is no doubt that the COVID Pandemic of 2020 cost The United States of America great financial loss, as well as the loss of over 170,000 lives at last count. The Lessons Learned are great in terms of the structure influencing organizational behavior. Since this pandemic is inevitably going to repeat itself, the United States must prepare or pay the price again.