

Why Bad Projects Are So Hard To Kill

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Abstract

Bad projects abound, and research by PMI and others has provided useful insight into the underlying causes of bad projects. This paper looks beyond why projects go bad into **why bad projects are so hard to kill**. It explains how sunk cost, groupthink, escalation of commitment, and conflicts of interest contribute to keeping death march projects needlessly alive.

Each of these behaviors is defined and illustrated using project stories from history (the sinking of the Titanic and the Concord jetliner), project stories from the author's own personal experience climbing some of the world's tallest mountains (McKinley, Aconcagua, and Kilimanjaro), and project stories from business (Abilene Paradox and industry-funded soda studies). Some recently published research about the neural science underlying these behaviors is referenced. The impact of these behaviors is described and then linked to the undercutting of ethics, trust, leadership, and project success.

A list of actions is provided that project managers can take to help avoid being victimized by bad projects.

Introduction

The Problem

Bad projects waste money and resources, divert attention from good projects, and undercut future projects by sewing seeds of doubt about organizational competence. And, since bad projects are all too common, there is a probability that many, if not most, project managers will be saddled with a bad project or two during their careers. That is too bad, because in today's project based organizations the careers of project managers rise and fall with the outcome of their projects; **a bad project can short-circuit the career of the project manager** with the misfortune of being responsible for its outcome. In extreme cases, such as the bad McKinley project described in Exhibit 1, the consequences of failing to kill a bad project can be life threatening.

Since McKinley is the tallest mountain in North America, it is considered to be one of the world's "seven summits." Its height of 20,320 feet and proximity to the Arctic Circle has earned it the reputation as being the coldest of the seven. The temperature on the upper portion of the mountain during the spring climbing season averages 40 degrees below zero. Ice axe, crampons, and ropes are required for the entire three-week climb.

Climbing McKinley is a project. My McKinley project was successful; I reached the summit, and I returned safely. I have done similar on two other of the world's seven summits: Aconcagua and Kilimanjaro. Helen, one of the members of our climbing team, was not so successful. Her project went bad, she did not kill it, and on summit day, it almost killed her. Even though Helen was a former Olympian, even though she was an experienced mountain climber, and even though she set a record for her solo trek to the South Pole, Helen succumbed to altitude sickness and hypoxia. She had to be carried down the upper portion of the mountain; she lost portions of several fingers and toes.

Helen's project started going bad days prior to summit day; it went from bad to worse during the days leading up to the summit attempt, yet she persisted. She did not kill the bad project.

Exhibit 1 – Bad McKinley Project

Statistics about the likelihood of a project going bad are, unfortunately, all too easy to come by. In PMI's 2010 *Pulse of the Profession Report* (PMI, 2010), we find that only 38% of the project outcomes met the original goals and business intent, met the original budget, and met the original schedule. The Standish Group has been tracking project success rates in the information technology industry for years, and their findings are equally bad. During the 2,000-2,015 period, they report project **success rates that hover between 29-31%** (Standish, 2015).

Estimates of the associated financial impact of bad projects vary widely, but they all point toward a huge financial waste. The PMI 2010 *Pulse of the Profession Report* (PMI, 2010) estimates that \$300,000 is wasted for every \$1,000,000 spent on bad projects; that's 30% of the project budget. Consider how many more good projects could be funded and consider the positive impact to organizational goals and corporate bottom lines if only a fraction of that wasted money could be redirected.

As for the careers of project managers, we are in a business where our own success or failure is determined largely by the outcome of our projects (Archibald, 2003; Kerzner, 2006). This statement is just as true now as it was several decades ago when Archibald and Kerzner first began writing about project management viewpoints (Archibald, 1976; Kerzner, 1984). It matters little who we are or what level of effort we apply to managing our projects, the equation is invariably the same: **project success equals project manager success**. When looked at from the executive viewpoint, project management is seen as a means to an end, and when the project succeeds, the project manager gets rewarded. When looked at through the eyes of the project manager, project success leads to bigger and better projects which, if successful, lead to career advancement.

A Definition

Bad projects can be defined by having a number of characteristics. They may fail to meet the original purpose, goal, or objective. They may fail to deliver the expected benefits. They may not satisfy the customer and/or other important stakeholders. They may fail to meet the schedule, scope, and cost targets. A personal definition of a bad project comes from the aptly named book *Death March* (Yourdon, 2003):

...a project that the participants feel is destined to fail, or that requires a stretch of unsustainable overwork. The general feel of the project reflects that of an actual death march because project members are forced to continue the project by their superiors against their better judgment. The knowledge of the doomed nature of the project weighs heavily on the psyche of its participants, as if they are helplessly watching themselves and their coworkers being forced to torture themselves and march toward death. Often, the death march will involve desperate attempts to right the course of the project by asking team members to work especially grueling hours or by attempting to "throw (enough) bodies at the problem", often causing burnout. Often, the discomfort is heightened by the knowledge that "it didn't have to be this way"; that is, that if the company wanted to achieve the goal of the project, it could have done so in a successful way.

Reasons

A Problem Well Understood

"A problem well understood is a problem half solved" is a statement attributed to the American inventor Charles Kettering from a century ago. This statement is applicable to many aspects of project management and has been embraced as "root cause analysis." Understanding the problem well and getting to the root cause of the problem are particularly beneficial in situations where the solution is not obvious, where a level of complexity is involved that may present symptoms and casual factors that obscure the true underlying problem. Understanding why bad projects are so hard to kill is precisely this type of situation.

Projects begin and end based on decisions commonly made by individual managers, management boards and committees, or a management hierarchy. Understanding individual and group behavior is at the root of understanding why bad projects are so hard to kill. Behaviors that come into play when working to understand why bad projects are so hard to kill include sunk cost, groupthink, escalation of commitment, and conflict of interest.

Sunk Cost

In economics, business decision-making, and project management, a sunk cost is a cost that has already been incurred and cannot be recovered. Unfortunately, history has shown that project decision makers frequently fall victim to the fallacy in reasoning in which the sunk costs of an activity, instead of the future costs and benefits, are

considered when deciding whether to continue the activity. This fallacy makes it more likely that a person or an organization continues with an activity in which they have already invested money, time, or effort, even if they would not start the activity had they not already invested in it. The greater the size of the sunk investment, the more people tend to invest further, even when the return on added investment appears not to be worthwhile. This fallacy is sometimes described as "**throwing good money after bad**," because the resources and effort are already lost, no matter what you do now. This sunk cost fallacy can undermine decision-making and contribute to making bad projects hard to kill.

Two researchers (Knox & Inkster, 1968), in what is perhaps the classic sunk cost experiment, approached 141 horse bettors: 72 of the people had just finished placing a \$2.00 bet, and 69 people were about to place a \$2.00 bet. Since the horse race had not yet begun, none of the bettors knew the outcome. They asked each of the bettors to rate their horse's chances of winning on a 7-point scale. What they found was that people who had just finished betting gave an average rating of their chances of winning a full point-an-a-half higher than the people who were about to place their bet. In other words, after making a \$2.00 commitment, people became significantly more confident their bet would pay off. They allowed the fallacy of sunk cost to erroneously influence their thinking.

Two other researchers have shown (Kahneman & Tversky, 1968) that a reason people fall prey to the sunk cost fallacy is loss aversion. People tend to have a **much stronger preference for avoiding losses than for acquiring gains**. Continuing an activity based on sunk costs enables us to avoid (at least for the short run) the pain of paying. Psychologists cite cognitive dissonance, plausible deniability, regret avoidance, and escalation of commitment as reasons for the sunk cost fallacy. Continuing one's past behavior, in this case extending and enlarging a prior commitment that otherwise does not make economic sense, is seen as justifying our past behavior, maintaining the appearance that we did not make a mistake, and avoiding the regret that we would experience by stopping the activity in which the investment was made.

The development and production of Concorde supersonic jets, as described in Exhibit 2, represents a classic example of sunk costs, so much so that some economists have taken to referring to sunk cost situations as the Concorde Effect. During the Concorde project, vast sums of money were spent over a protracted period of time with little to no hope of ever earning it back through sales. Peter Saxton, a former RAF pilot and British Airways Captain, chief pilot and senior manager, says the Concorde was "a project which cost the British and French tax-payers a staggering amount for development and construction, was not well managed if massive cost overruns are anything to go by, never made anything close to a financial return for its investors, and led the British aircraft industry into a cul-de-sac." He called it a "a stupendous example of a project that was kept alive for a whole raft of reasons, none of which seems to have included the serious intention of making a commercial return for investors." The Concorde was a bad project that, because of the sunk cost fallacy, was hard to kill.

Groupthink

Groupthink is a psychological phenomenon that occurs within a group of people, such as a project team, in which the desire for harmony or conformity in the group results in an irrational or dysfunctional decision-making outcome. Group members try to minimize conflict and reach a consensus decision without critical evaluation of alternative viewpoints by actively suppressing dissenting viewpoints and by isolating themselves from outside influences. Groupthink is about "tunnel vision" and "**not making waves**." This desire for harmony can undermine decision-making and contribute to groupthink, making bad projects hard to kill.

The Concorde was the first supersonic commercial airliner; a consortium of British and French companies backed by their governments built it.

The plane began commercial service in 1976 and flew for 27 years during which time a total of 16 planes were produced for commercial service. The costs to develop and produce the Concorde were well over \$2 billion, which was funded by the UK and French governments. Yet, less than a quarter of that amount was recovered through sales.

The plane was a big money loser throughout its entire life. Yet, the consortium did not kill the bad project.

Exhibit 2 – Bad Concorde Project

A fascinating example of groupthink (Harvey, 1974) was introduced in the article "The Abilene Paradox: The Management of Agreement." The name of the phenomenon comes from an anecdote in the article that Harvey uses to elucidate the paradox:

On a hot afternoon visiting in Coleman, Texas, the family is comfortably playing dominoes on a porch, until the father-in-law suggests that they take a trip to Abilene [53 miles north] for dinner. The wife says, "Sounds like a great idea." The husband, despite having reservations because the drive is long and hot, thinks that his preferences must be out-of-step with the group and says, "Sounds good to me. I just hope your mother wants to go." The mother-in-law then says, "Of course I want to go. I haven't been to Abilene in a long time."

The drive is hot, dusty, and long. When they arrive at the cafeteria, the food is as bad as the drive. They arrive back home four hours later, exhausted.

One of them dishonestly says, "It was a great trip, wasn't it?" The mother-in-law says that, actually, she would rather have stayed home, but went along since the other three were so enthusiastic. The husband says, "I wasn't delighted to be doing what we were doing. I only went to satisfy the rest of you." The wife says, "I just went along to keep you happy. I would have had to be crazy to want to go out in the heat like that." The father-in-law then says that he only suggested it because he thought the others might be bored.

The group sits back, perplexed that they together decided to take a trip which none of them wanted. They each would have preferred to sit comfortably, but did not admit to it when they still had time to enjoy the afternoon.

Escalation of Commitment

When a decision maker discovers that a previously selected course of action, such as a project, is failing, a dilemma arises. Should the remaining resources be pulled out and invested in a more promising alternative, or should the initial decision be supported with the hope that persistence will eventually pay off. Management scholars (Lunenburg, 2010) have documented a tendency of decision makers to escalate commitment to previously selected courses of action when objective evidence suggests that staying the course is unwise. In these situations, decision makers often feel they have invested too much to quit and make the errant decision to "**stick to their guns.**" While there are many situations where the best course of action is to commit further resources to a failing investment, the term "escalation of commitment" describes those situations where objective evidence indicates that continuing with an investment is unwise, and yet an individual chooses to invest further in spite of this. High costs of ending a project or changing its course, potential financial gain upon completion, and extensive structure can factor into escalation of commitment, making it difficult to walk away from the project.

Helen, in the bad McKinley project described in Exhibit 1, suffered from escalation of commitment. She was in an environment where the temperature was so cold that the metal shaft of an ice axe welded to the skin when it came in direct contact with an ungloved hand, and so cold that liquid dripped from a water bottle froze prior to reaching the ground. She was experienced enough to know that when her sleeping bag zipper failed two nights prior to the summit attempt, with temperatures far below freezing, that her project was starting to go bad. She was experienced enough to know that not routinely sharing information about her condition and health with other climbing team members violated one of the basic mountain climbing safety practices, yet she told no one. Helen's situation became so bad that the degradation of thermal performance of her sleeping bag caused her water bottle inside the sleeping bag to freeze; she was actually trying to sleep with a block of ice between her feet. During the night prior to the summit attempt, with a defective and cold sleeping bag, Helen became hypothermic; she experienced shivering, nausea, and dizziness. Yet, she told no one. During the summit attempt, Helen's hypothermic condition worsened to the point where it was recognizable by other members of our climbing team; she was confused, had trouble speaking, and lost coordination. What was a successful summit attempt for other climbing team members and for me quickly evolved into a lifesaving rescue of Helen. Her loss of coordination was so severe that she could not walk; we carried her down the upper portion of the mountain. As a result, Helen lost portions of several fingers and toes. In contrast, I went on to climb two of the world's other seven summits: Aconcagua and Kilimanjaro.

Helen's story demonstrates how an experienced individual can become so invested in the project that he/she repeatedly makes decisions to escalate commitment when, by all objective measures, the project should be killed.

Conflict of Interest

If you want to feel better about enjoying a sweet candy treat or a sugary drink, you could look to one of a handful of studies showing no connection between obesity and the consumption of foods laced with sugar. There's just one problem; those studies are likely to have been funded by food companies. In fact, a study recently released by the University of California (Schillinger & Tran, 2016), shows that studies with financial ties to sugary drinks are significantly less likely to find a link between those products and obesity than are independent studies. In other words, the food companies with an interest in downplaying the negative health consequences of sugary products were funding studies that showed sugary products to be okay to consume. This is a clear example of a self-serving action favoring one industry at the expense of the consumer. And, it appears that this type of situation also occurs in our project management industry.

The annual PMI Membership Survey for 2012 found that 29% of those responding reported witnessing **“self-serving actions at the expense of employer, client, peers, or the public;”** in other words, conflicts of interest. Additionally the PMI Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct (PMI, 2006) states that:

Research with practitioners indicated that the subject of conflicts of interest is one of the most challenging faced by our profession. One of the biggest problems practitioners report is not recognizing when we have conflicted loyalties and recognizing when we are inadvertently placing ourselves or others in a conflict of interest situation.

A widely used definition (Thompson, 1993) that has stood the test of time and been accepted by many industries states: "A conflict of interest is a set of circumstances that creates a risk that professional judgment or actions regarding a primary interest will be unduly influenced by a secondary interest."

During the voyage of the Titanic (Kozak-Holland, 2005), as described in Exhibit 3, we learn that the professional judgment of the mariners responsible for conducting seawater temperature measurements was compromised. These mariners had a conflict of interest. Instead of accurately reporting their test-taking issues to the ship management, they fabricated test results to disguise the fact that they were not actually measuring the seawater temperature to assess the likelihood of icebergs.

The industry funded soda studies and the *Titanic* ice bucket mariners illustrate how conflicts of interest can compromise judgment and make bad projects hard to kill.

The *Titanic* was a British passenger liner that sank in the North Atlantic Ocean on 15 April 1912 after colliding with an iceberg during her maiden voyage from Southampton, UK, to New York City, US. The sinking of *Titanic* caused the deaths of 1,500 people in one of the deadliest peacetime maritime disasters in modern history.

Just prior to the sinking, one of the *Titanic*'s passengers noticed a mariner filling a bucket with tap water and asked why he was doing that. The mariner explained that he was supposed to measure the seawater's temperature to assess the likelihood of it freezing into icebergs; since the rope was not long enough to reach the sea, he was filling the bucket with the only water to which he had access! The ice detection test was worthless. This mariner could communicate what he was doing and why to the passenger, yet he didn't think he could tell his senior officers.

The Titanic project started going bad during its design and construction phases, and it went from bad to worse during its maiden voyage. Many, including the ice bucket mariners, were aware of how bad the project was going; yet the bad project was not killed.

Exhibit 3 – Bad Titanic Project

Impact

Accountability

We have seen how sunk cost, groupthink, escalation of commitment, and conflicts of interest contribute to keeping death march projects needlessly alive. Research suggests that these behaviors are rooted deep within the neural science of our brains (Liang & Yen, 2016). This research reveals that it is **our underlying desire for self-responsibility and accountability** that drives us to exhibit these behaviors, even when we understand that excessive levels of these behaviors can sometimes have negative consequences. This “I got us into this mess and I can get us out of it” mentality reflects the high level of accountability that is prevalent in project management. Indeed, accountability in project management is widely regarded as a desirable characteristic.

And, therein lies the problem. The desire for the project manager to be accountable for the project outcome, for the well-being of the project team members, for customer and other stakeholder satisfaction, and for delivering the business benefits, can overshadow the reality of a bad project and make it hard to kill. At some level, in accountable project cultures, increasing project investments (sunk cost), building consensus (groupthink), doubling down (escalating of commitment), and narrowing one’s focus (conflicts of interest) are seen as highly desirable behaviors.

Nevertheless, as we have seen illustrated in project stories and supported by research, there is a point where these **behaviors have negative consequences**. This is the point where the drive to succeed actually can take us down the path to failure. This is the point where sound rational judgment becomes so impaired and distorted that our basic values are undermined.

Basic Values

We get our basic values from a number of sources including our upbringing as children, our parents, our faith, our workplace, our society, and our profession. Members of the Project Management Institute are required to adhere to a set of basic values contained in the PMI Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct (PMI, 2006). This document prescribes four basic values: responsibility, respect, fairness, and honesty.

- **Responsibility** is our duty to take ownership for our decisions, actions, and consequences. In groupthink, as in the Abilene Paradox story when all involved conceded to a course of action that no one wanted, ownership for decision-making and consequences is lacking. In groupthink, individuals in the group either remain inactive or take actions that do not directly advance the project or business goals.
- **Respect** is our duty to show a high regard for ourselves, others, and resources entrusted to us. In escalation of commitment, as in the McKinley story when Helen doubled down on her quest to reach the summit at the expense of safety, respect was lost for the well-being of all involved. In escalation of commitment, an individual or group can become so invested in a course of action that he/she loses sight of the important project or business goals.
- **Fairness** is our duty to make decisions and act impartially and objectively. In sunk cost, as in the horse betting story and Concord story where “good money was thrown after bad,” impartiality and objectivity were compromised. In sunk cost, continuing one's past behavior, even when it does not make economic sense, can be an attempt to avoid project and business regret by maintaining the appearance that we did not make a mistake.
- **Honesty** is our duty to understand the truth and act in a truthful manner. In conflicts of interest, as in the Titanic story when the mariners compromised the ice detection test and in the industry-funded sugary drink story when researchers produced biased results, the truth was compromised. In conflicts of interest, individuals and groups can take self-serving actions at the expense of project or business goals.

Undermine

Undermining any of these four basic values, as illustrated in Exhibit 4, whether it is by sunk cost, groupthink, escalation of commitment, or conflicts of interest, undermines ethics, which undermines trust, which undermines leadership, which undermines project success.



Exhibit 4 – Behavior Undermines Outcome

Project management is, for the most part, an activity undertaken with others. While we may refer to these others as team members, stakeholders, or coworkers, we, as project managers, depend on them for the success of our projects. Furthermore, the projects we are frequently trying to succeed at managing involve having these others do, or not do, just what is needed in an environment where we have far less authority than responsibility. This limitation of authority that characterizes the project manager's role propels the most successful project managers to demonstrate leadership (Juli, 2011). Consequently, leadership is a key to unlocking the solution to motivating with limited authority; it is the currency that is spent achieving project success. And, central to leadership is trust (Covey, 2006); without trust, there are no followers. Fortunately, the **speed of trust building in relationships can be accelerated through ethical behavior** (Hosmer, 1985).

The establishment of a **direct linkage between leadership and trust** is based on the extensive studies of the characteristics of admired leaders; the characteristic "honest" scored first in each study (Kouzes, 2008). Honesty and trust are considered synonymously shared characteristics by the author; over time, leaders and their followers tend to adopt similar and complementary characteristics. This trust-based view of leadership dovetails nicely with the four components of ethical leadership identified above (Johnson, 2003) as well as with the characterization "without trust, knowledge, and purpose, people are afraid to exercise their authority." In a

recent study conducted by the Vrije University Amsterdam, the authors explored the expectations of followers (Akker, Heres, Lasthuizen, and Six, 2009). They found that the **"more a leader acts in a way that followers feel is the appropriate ethical leader behavior, the more a leader will be trusted."**

Actions

There we have it, a direct linkage between certain behaviors and the project outcome. We have seen that bad projects can be the result of the sunk cost fallacy, groupthink, escalation of commitment, and conflicts of interest. Additionally, we have seen that these four behaviors can be counterproductive to the point of undermining ethics, trust, leadership, and project success. We have seen why bad projects are so hard to kill.

Exhibit 5 lists actions with descriptions that can be taken to help avoid being victimized by bad projects.

Action	Description
Be Aware	<p>Bad projects abound; 1/3 or more of projects are bad.</p> <p>Bad projects feel like a death march.</p> <p>Bad projects derail a project manager's career.</p>
Avoid the Four Behaviors	<p>Four excessive behaviors can have negative consequences.</p> <p>Sunk cost throws good money after bad.</p> <p>Groupthink results in a course of action no one wanted.</p> <p>Escalation of commitment doubles down on a failing course of action.</p> <p>Conflicts of interest promote self-serving action over rational acts.</p> <p>Our brains are wired for self-responsibility and accountability.</p>
Understand the Impact	<p>Four values are compromised by the four excessive behaviors.</p> <p>Responsibility: take ownership for our decisions, actions, and consequences.</p> <p>Respect: show a high regard for ourselves, others, and resources entrusted to us.</p> <p>Fairness: make decisions and act impartially and objectively.</p> <p>Honesty: understand the truth and act in a truthful manner.</p> <p>Undermining ethical values undermines, trust, leadership, and project success.</p>
Help Yourself	<p>The Project Management Institute has much useful ethical information.</p> <p>PMI has a Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct.</p> <p>PMI has an Ethical Decision-Making Framework.</p> <p>PMI has an Ethics Toolkit.</p> <p>PMI has a Chapter Ethics Policy Guide.</p> <p>PMI has Conflicts of Interest tools and resolution process.</p> <p>ProjectManagement.com has an active ethics practice area.</p>
Escape	<p>Escaping from a bad project can avoid short-circuiting a project manager's career.</p>

Exhibit 5 – Actions to Avoid Being Victimized By Bad Projects

Ethics

Ethics are at the center of the action listed to help yourself. Increasing your ethical awareness and ethical performance can build trust, which is essential for leadership, which leads to project success. Fortunately, much useful information about ethics is available.

- The Project Management Institute has recently increased the usability of its **ethics webpages** and increased the amount of useful content by a factor of ten. A visit there will provide the opportunity to watch an ethics video by Mark Langley, the President and CEO of PMI. It will also provide the opportunity to download copies of the PMI Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct and Ethical Decision-Making Framework in a dozen languages, learn about their formal ethics complaint process and view statistics from actual ethics cases, and browse many curated ethics webinars and documents. Visit for more information: www.pmi.org/ethics
- The Project Management Institute has recently released an **Ethics Toolkit** containing a half-dozen ethics tools for volunteer PMI leaders; one of these tools is a Chapter Ethics Policy Guide. PMI

also has a Conflict Resolution Program. This information is available on the internal PMI Community Leadership online site. Additional ethics tools, which are being built specifically for project management practitioners, will be made broadly available. Email for more information: ethics.mag@pmi.org

- The ProjectManagement.com website has an **active ethics practice** area with dozens of on-demand ethics webinars and hundreds of curated ethics articles. It also has an active discussion board that benefits from some of top project management influencers. Visit for more information: www.projectmanagement.com/Practices/Ethics

Summary

Bad projects are hard to kill. They waste money and resources, and they short-circuit project management careers. Behaviors that can be useful in moderation, which play to a project manager's natural tendency toward self-responsibility and accountability, can undermine success. Sunk cost, groupthink, escalation of commitment, and conflicts of interest can contribute to keeping death march projects needlessly alive. And, they can contribute to undermining our basic values of responsibility, respect, fairness, and honesty. Once those basic values are compromised, so too are ethics, trust, leadership, and project success.

Actions are available to project managers to help avoid being victimized by bad projects. Be aware of the probability and impact of being on a bad project; avoid the tendency toward excessive self-responsibility and accountability that can lead to sunk cost, groupthink, escalation of commitment, and conflicts of interest; understand that undermining the four basic values of responsibility, respect, fairness, and conflicts of interest can undermine ethics, trust, leadership, and project success; help yourself by using some of the large number of high quality ethics-related information; and, when necessary, escape from a bad project.

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The author would like to acknowledge that he researched and wrote this paper while suffering terribly on a bad project. An extended trip to northern Tanzania to do pro bono work for a charitable organization quickly took on the attributes of a death march because of the oppressive equatorial summer heat and sun, the low end living conditions, and being targeted as a rich outsider. The conflict of interest dynamic between staying longer to do good and leaving the bad project early came into play. The escalation of commitment dynamic to double down, tough it out, and endure the bad project for the greater good also came into play. Fortunately, the author followed the actions identified in this paper to understand the impact, help yourself, and escape. The author killed his involvement in the bad project and left Tanzania months earlier than planned.

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