



Managing EU projects: Stories from a grumpy old guy

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First things first....

I have done intensive research and checked reliable sources (HuffPost, formerly The Huffington Post until 2017) which allowed me to conclude that I qualify as a grumpy old guy.

Grumpy old guy check list	YES/NO	Observations
He has begun to age.	YES	April 15 th I made 51.
He is into the lean and " <i>slipperd pantaloons</i> , with spectacles on nose".	YES	More than ever now due to teleworking and glasses for presbyopia.
Fathers children.	YES	2 teenager boys.
Has a house, a mortgage, and a car.	YES	All can be resumed in the mortgage. My wife has a car because I don't even have a driving license.
He peers in the mirror and realises he is no longer young.	NO	I don't dare! I am learning to shave with the bathroom lights off.
He worries that he is running out of time to fulfil his dreams and ambitions.	YES	Young at heart...specially since I have the privilege to deal with lots of MSc Students at IdeaSquare.
He has no sense of ridiculous neither modesty.	YES	I talk too much, too often and don't care too much to say what I think (my wife confirms) ...a totally different story is whether I am right (my wife confirms that too!)

6 Yes

1 NO
(for good reasons)

Conclusion: I qualify!

First things first....

The same scientific sources, also offered some advice about how to avoid becoming a grumpy old guy. Let's see how I did.

Avoiding to become a grumpy old guy check list	YES/NO	Observations
Be patient.	NO	I am less and less patient everyday, specially during purposeless meetings.
Understand what is happening with acceptance.	NO	I understand it but I don't want to accept it.
Ensure you and your partner exercise...	NO	My wife, if she wanted to, could climb Mt. Everest, but she cannot manage dragging me to walk 50 m.
...eat well...	NO	I destroy systematically my wife's efforts almost everyday between 1 and 4 am and my family does not believe anymore that our house is haunted by hungry ghosts.
...are occupied with hobbies and interests.	YES	My hobby is doing Math and Physics from 1 to 4 am. I have also ~ 3k books of Physics, Philosophy, Math, Sociology, etc.
Make sure you both laugh.	YES	Definitely! Specially about me.

2 Yes

4 NO

Conclusion: No hope.

First things first....

Now that I justified part of this talk title:

[...] from a grumpy old guy.

I will **TRY** to justify the second:

Managing EU Projects: Stories [...]

First things first....

During great part of my life, I have been either working for companies and/or consulting for academic and industrial organizations.

The reason always was that they either wanted EU funding for their R&D&I strategic project portfolios and/or be influential in Brussels.

In many occasions I managed a portfolio (per organization) of more than 50-70 Large Projects of around 40-70 millions Euros each and sometimes with even 38 partners involved per project (e.g. Airbus, Solvay, Dow Chemicals, Atos Origin, IBM, Oxford University, Imperial College, etc) .

In other occasions, the goal was a challenging as managing 50k Euros for an SME that wanted to bring a product to the market.

And in other occasions it was about lobbying and building a billion Euros size programme (½ EC/ ½ Industry) or writing and managing a really large partially EU funded project (e.g. Belgian North Sea Offshore Wind Platform (BOP), producing today an average 8 TWh annually).

First things first....

This type of job had:

PROS

- Knowing the s*it going on inside organizations pretty well and in many cases, grabbing a shovel and cleaning it. That was what I was paid for also!
- Knowing people deeply (from C level to below) and that means characters, egos, motivations, hidden agendas, etc.
- Being honest with my client. I always told them: "I am here to tell you things you might not want to hear, and if I can, solving them. This is your chance of hiring somebody else".

CONS

- I lost many good moments going on in my family, specially those ones happening only once (e.g. the first day at school of my kids).
- Stress? Not really beyond the expected level 😊.

First things first....

I have many stories but today I would like sharing with you the three things I learnt which are a common denominator underneath them for large and small organizations.

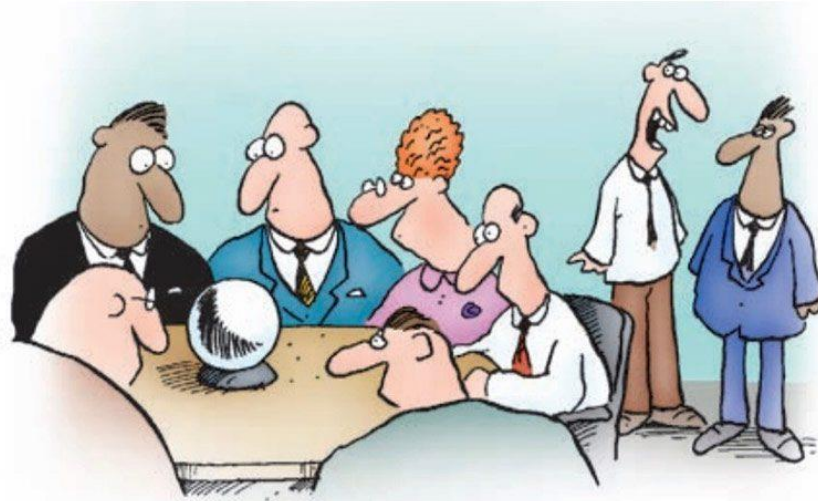
The 3 learnings come as questions 😊.

Now I think I justified the title:

Managing EU projects: Stories from a grumpy old guy

First question

What is an organization?



WAISGLASS/COULTHART

"...And this is our corporate planning group."

First question

What is an organization?



Has he delivered any package to you personally?



Has he offered you a drink during a plane trip personally?



Has he rebooted your PC when Windows hungs?

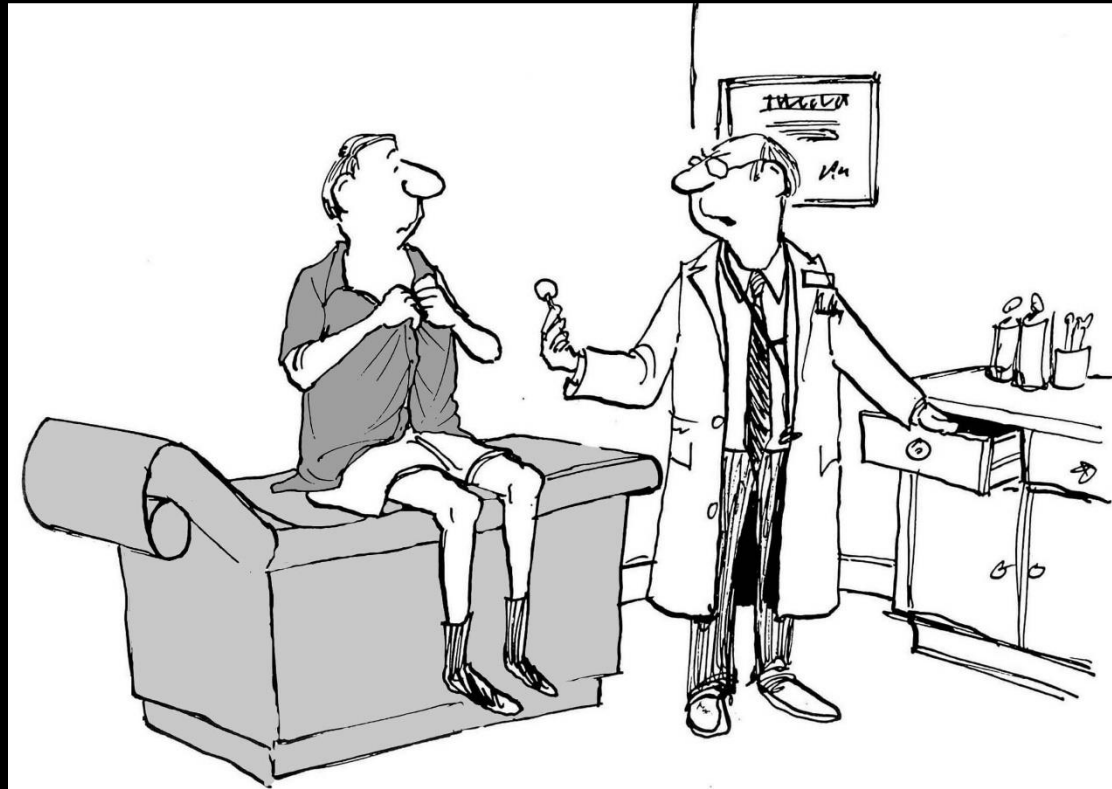
First question

What is an organization?

Every single person behind it.

Second question

When an organization is getting ill?



“Just shup up and take the lollipop.”

Second question

When an organization is getting ill?

When after looking around, you see that the 80-20 rule is the pattern.

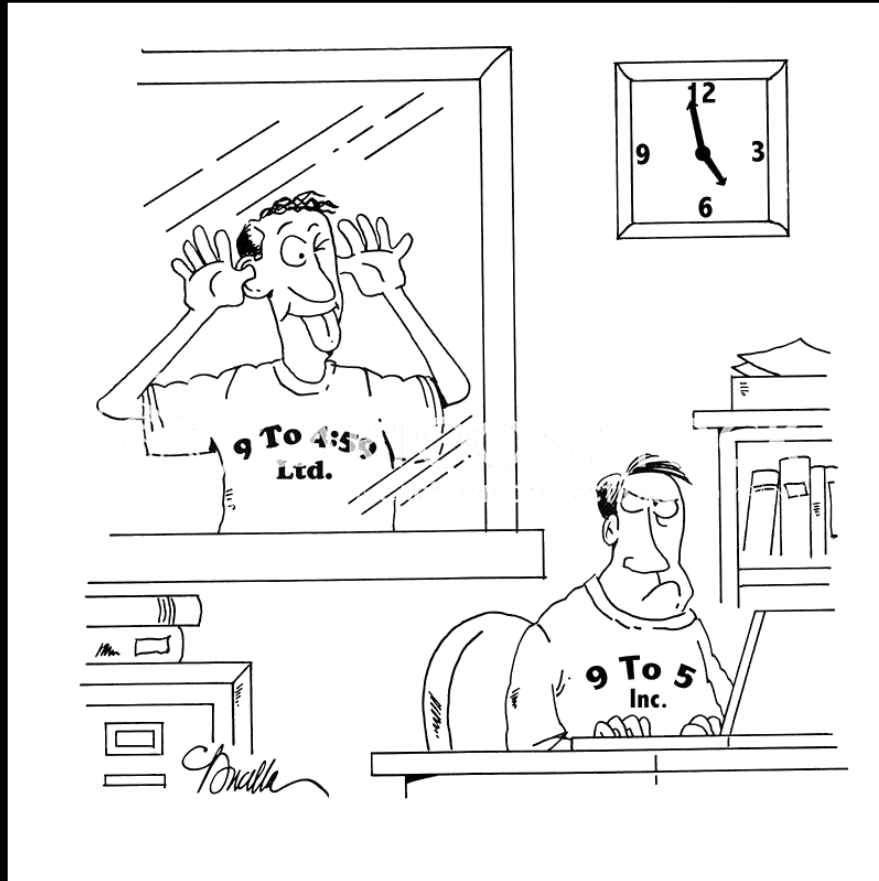
Third question

How the starting symptoms look like?
Ten alarming ones



How the starting symptoms look like

Symptom 1: The “*pen-dropping*” effect*



* It is necessary to clarify here that this effect refers to when the end of the working journey is the only objective of a working day. In no way, this is meant to support unregulated working hours being those allowed or forbidden by the Geneva Convention.

How the starting symptoms look like

Symptom 2: The “*nice idea but..., you know,...it is complicated*” effect*



* This symptom also manifests in other ways such as “*nice idea but..., you know,...it was tried before and it didn't work*” or, “*nice idea but..., you know,...the outcome is not clear*”, or “*nice idea but..., you know,... it is risky*”, etc. The common denominator is a starting polite and positive feedback (trained soft skill) followed by a discouragement to try something (from the side of the speaker).

How the starting symptoms look like

Symptom 3: The “*THE SYSTEM doesn't allow it*” effect *



* *THE SYSTEM*, seems to be an entity very similar to Dark Energy. It occupies ca 73% of a sick organization but it is apparently undetectable.

How the starting symptoms look like

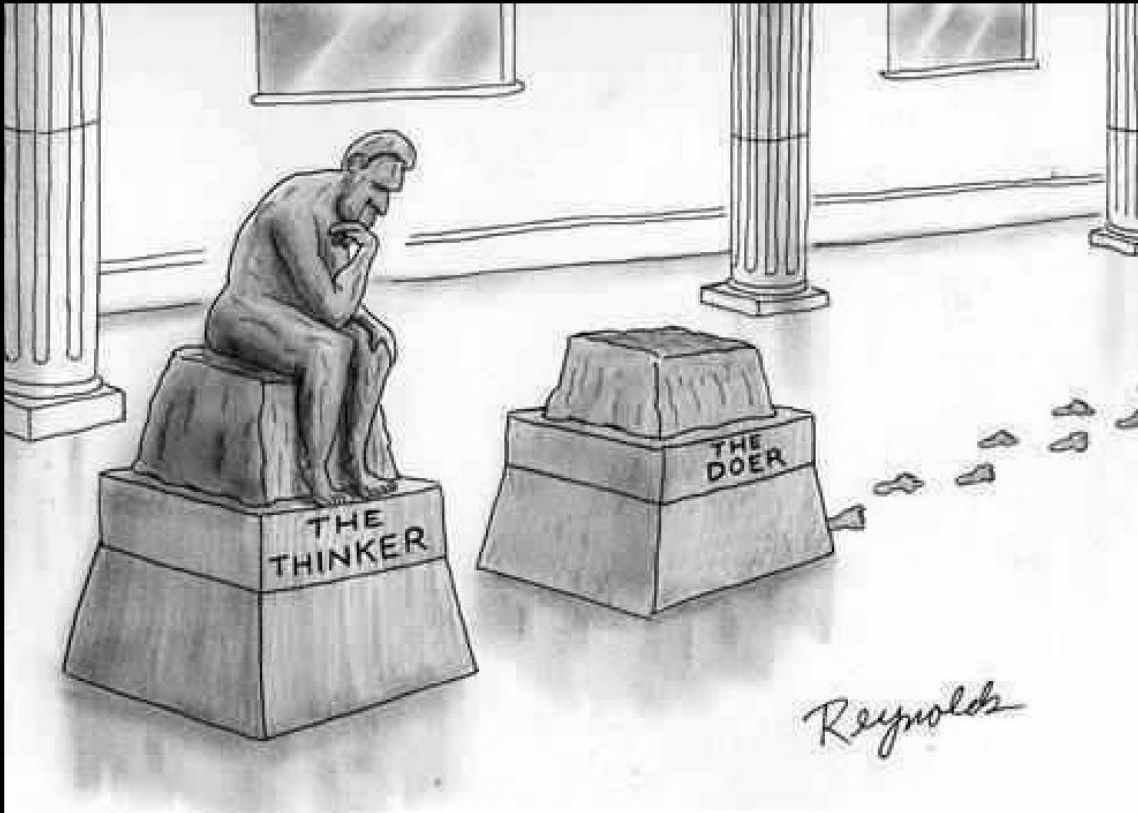
Symptom 4: The “*don't you know that this is how THE SYSTEM works?*” effect *



* Despite that this entity called THE SYSTEM is undetectable, many individuals within a sick organization seem to be very aware of how it operates. They are known as the “protectors of THE SYSTEM” and would not allow any modification to it even if logically and pragmatically beneficial. In return, it seems that THE SYSTEM protects them.

How the starting symptoms look like

Symptom 5: The “*invisible doer*” effect*



* Particularly detectable in meetings when sentences like “this would need to be done...” or “that would require...” are uttered. Sometimes, the pronoun, “we”, may substitute “this” or “that”.

How the starting symptoms look like

Symptom 6: The “*it's not my problem*” effect *



* This symptom is very related to the number 4 previously contemplated. Especially detected at the end of meetings after formulating the question *Who is doing what guys?*

How the starting symptoms look like

Symptom 7: The “*meeting about the meeting*” effect *



* This symptom is easily quantifiable within an organization. The statistical approach suggested is counting.

How the starting symptoms look like

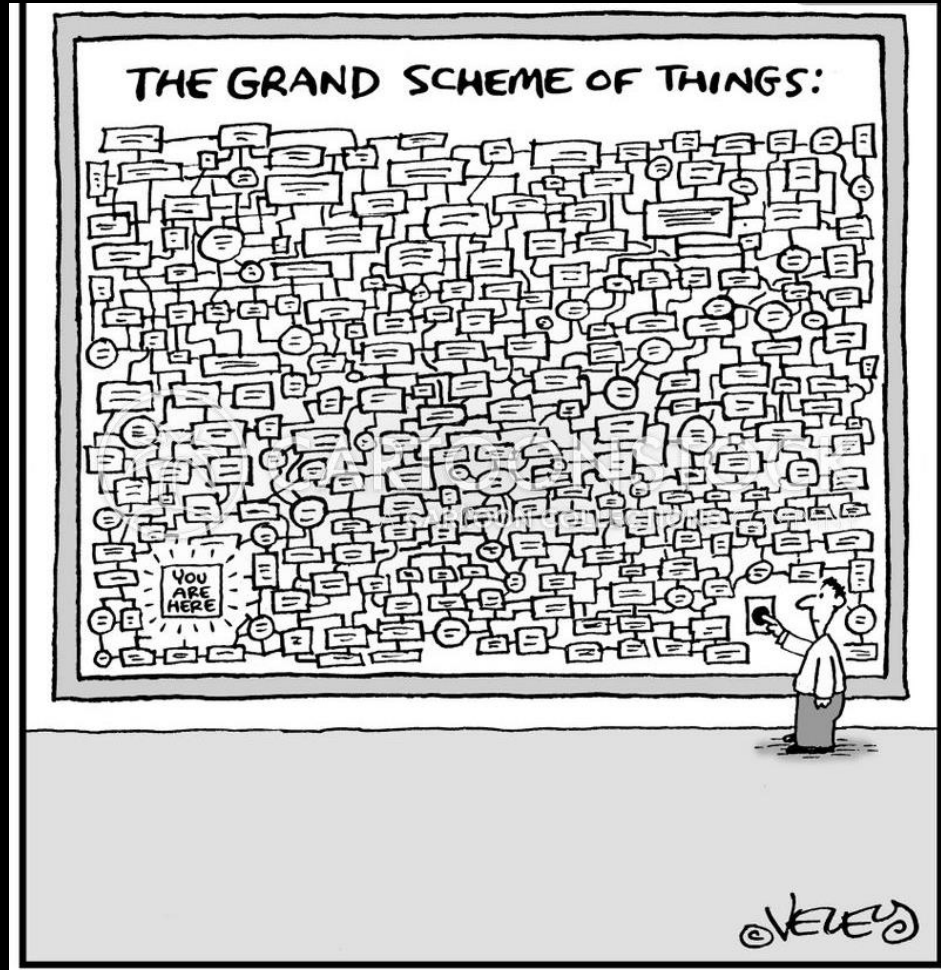
Symptom 8: The “*sub-committee of the committee*” effect*



* This symptom is also manifested as the “sub-working group of the working group”, “the sub-task force of the task force”, etc. In any manifestation though, the Russian Doll (матрёшка) construction is the common denominator. This symptom is also easily quantifiable within an organization. Again, the statistical approach suggested is counting.

How the starting symptoms look like

Symptom 9: The “*box multiplication*” effect*



* This symptom is curiously manifested in two different realms:

- a) Organizational charts
- b) Processes


Some research points towards a potential correlation between a) and b) but statistical data is only confirmed at the 3 sigma level.

How the starting symptoms look like

Symptom 10: The “*the not invented here and by me*” effect*



* Recent research has shown that the acuteness of this symptom is inversely proportional to the capacity of making fun out of one-self.



If you are experiencing one or more of these symptoms please get tested!

And don't forget that what you heard today is just no more than stories of a grumpy old guy.

See you soon!!

