

## **Praise for *The Project Manifesto***

“This is a REALLY good book! Sometimes truth is better revealed through fiction rather than non-fiction. There are basic human truths scattered throughout *The Project Manifesto* that can make us all better people—improved communicators, more productive workers, and more thoughtful in our relationships.”

— Dr. Charlene Spoede-Budd, Professor  
Emeritus, Baylor University

“Newbold and Lynch have created an exciting, fast-paced, informative story that effortlessly teaches how to better plan, execute, and track programs and projects using processes such as Critical Chain and Agile development. To a new Program or Project Manager, this is a must-read guidebook. To the veteran, it is a must-read refresher. Brilliant!”

— Allen Warren, Program Director,  
Fortune 100 High-Tech Company

“Every project sponsor and project manager should read this book to break their cycle of disappointing project outcomes.”

— Kristy Tan Neckowitz, former VP of Oracle Primavera,  
PMP, Leader of PMI Scheduling Community of Practice

“Rob Newbold and Bill Lynch provide the missing link to Managing Organizations the TOC Way. Rob’s earlier books, *Project Management in the Fast Lane* and *The Billion Dollar Solution*, provide the theory and detail of managing projects using Critical Chain Project Management, but

the organizational behavior part has always been missing. Many good organizations struggle to invent their own set of run rules to meet the behavioral challenge. I teach that CCPM tools, and the behaviors that CCPM instills, work in any organization. And now, Rob and Bill have concisely and entertainingly given us the Values, Standards and Run Rules to make any organization become more effective—even the home. They should have titled it *The Management Manifesto*."

— Professor James R. Holt, Engineering & Technology Management, Washington State University

"Bravo, multitasking has been debunked and replaced with 'value driven priorities.' Our new mantra is **Critical Chain**."

— Debra Bowes, Founder and CEO, Chevy Chase BioPartners, LLC

"I found *The Project Manifesto* to be a very enjoyable and thought-provoking read. It provides a set of valuable principles and guidelines to complement critical chain scheduling in a project setting, but the guidelines apply much more widely than that. I have already found myself using the notion of values when negotiating tricky conflicts. The work standards are a great summary and I can see they would also benefit anyone who has some say over how they organise their daily work."

— Professor Vicky Mabin, Associate Dean, Victoria Business School, Victoria University of Wellington

"*The Project Manifesto* is a work of art! This book takes the form of a novel and it is right up there with Goldratt's *The Goal* and DeMarco's *The Deadline* for deep insights on real project life delivered through fiction.

Sample

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This book is for anyone working on a project of any kind. This is not just a project management book; it is a book on project organization, orientation, and strategy. I encourage teammates to agree to read this, and then start discussing how Lynch and Newbold's Values, Standards, and Scheduling might pertain, and transform, their own project.

If nothing else, this novel is a page-turner, and I guarantee you will never forget Anna. I won't."

— Tim Lister, Principal of the Atlantic Systems Guild, co-author of *Peopeware*, *Adrenaline Junkies* and *Template Zombies*, and *Waltzing with Bears*

"A fictional story that brilliantly leads to concrete steps that produce results."

— Celso G. Calia, Founding Partner,  
Goldratt Associados Brazil

"*The Project Manifesto* describes in an entertaining way practical changes that can lead to better business results using Critical Chain principles and methodologies. We are excited to be using the ideas described in this book to improve our ability to focus our resources and finish our projects."

— Tom Wilke, PMO Director, Fortune 500 Company

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# THE PROJECT MANIFESTO

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# THE PROJECT MANIFESTO

Transforming Your Life and Work  
with Critical Chain Values

Rob Newbold and Bill Lynch



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# CONTENTS

Acknowledgments .....	vii
Preface .....	xi
1. Anna .....	1
2. Values .....	21
3. Risks .....	41
4. Scheduling.....	53
5. Deadlines.....	73
6. Buffers .....	89
7. Focus .....	99
8. Mysteries .....	111
9. Understanding.....	123
10. Disconnects.....	135
11. Success .....	153
12. Transfer .....	167
13. Rollout.....	177

14. Reminders ..... 197

15. Expanding ..... 207

Epilogue ..... 223

Appendix A: Project Manifesto Values,  
Standards, and Scheduling ..... 227

Appendix B: Applying the Project Manifesto ..... 233

Notes ..... 243

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First and foremost, we would like to pay tribute to the many clients we've worked with over the years who have lent their intelligence, expertise, and passion not only to improving their companies, but to helping us understand what improvement is, and reminding us why it is so important. They convert theory into real results, building the world of the future by carrying out innovative and important projects. Thank you.

This is also a work of the ProChain organization. The evolution of the Project Manifesto has been driven by the thinking and experiences of the men and women, consultants and software developers, who have worked together and with our clients to make it real. This book could not exist without their knowledge, brainpower, and

experience; without the tremendous support of our families, including, of course, Claire and Gina; or without our superb management team, including Wendell Simpson, Doug Brandt, and Charlie Moore.

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Our designer, Michael Rohani of RD Studio, deserves great credit for his creative layout and design. His secret sauce truly helps make the burger special.

The world of process improvement is vast. Creative new ideas spring up daily. We have tried to acknowledge our sources in the Notes, but the truth is there are far more sources than we could possibly reference. We would especially like to thank the Theory of Constraints community, and in particular Dr. Eliyahu M. Goldratt, whose groundbreaking work challenging people's assumptions and provoking their intuition continues to serve as an inspiration.

And finally, thanks to you, the reader, for taking your valuable time to read this book, even if you skip the acknowledgements. Please send your thoughts and feedback to [projectmanifesto@prochain.com](mailto:projectmanifesto@prochain.com); we would love to hear from you. This book is far from the last word on the topic of Project and Personal Manifestos.

Rob Newbold  
Wallingford, Connecticut

Bill Lynch  
Lake Ridge, Virginia

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## PREFACE

**D**o you feel like there's never enough time to get everything done? Are you constantly trying to decide how to allocate your limited time? Trying to decide what you can afford *not* to do?

There is never enough time, and for most of us the problem is getting worse. A day still has only twenty-four hours, but the information we have to absorb continues to grow. There are more and more things we can spend time on. Our choices are increasing exponentially.

Most of us have evolved a few mechanisms to help us manage our limited time. See if these coping strategies resonate with you:

*#1: Try to make everyone happy.* Spend a little time here and a little time there, showing that you're really busy and that you're doing the best you can. The result is a lot of activity, although not much gets finished. Usually no one ends up truly happy, least of all you, because you discover that you've sacrificed your own well-being to the

stress and strain of trying to make everyone else happy.

#2: *Prioritize by urgency, pushing the least urgent things over the horizon and into the future.* That means your days are usually taken up with the most urgent things. The truly important things, which are not necessarily urgent, drag on forever.

#3: *Become more efficient.* Buy a better cell phone or computer app. Streamline your work. Read a self-help book, attend a seminar, hire a coach. These things can work, for a while, if we have the discipline to stick with them. Then we find out that the grand prize for being able to do more work is . . . that there's more work to be done. Meanwhile, getting more done isn't nearly as important as getting the most important things done.

The end result is the same: less time, less satisfaction, more difficult choices.

How can we satisfy ourselves and those around us, given the limited time we have?

Over the last fifteen years, in our work helping organizations deliver their projects faster and more effectively, we have pinpointed the cause of the problem to four common cultural values.

1. Everyone values responsiveness, *even though we can't respond to everything.*
2. Everyone values getting things started, *even when there's no time to finish them.*



3. Everyone values achieving deadlines, *even though the competing deadlines bog us down.*
4. Everyone values meeting personal goals, *even when they come at the expense of other goals we care about.*

Do you value these things? Each of these traditional, common-sense values—values that most of us share—creates personal and professional conflicts. They are responsible for millions of slow projects and unhappy people. They are no longer adequate for today's world.

It's time for a new approach. This book explains how to adapt and improve these values to help you better manage your choices and dramatically increase your personal and professional satisfaction. It explores ways in which values can affect your personal life. A thoughtful re-examination of how you weigh decisions can pay big dividends, which isn't surprising: values that are valid professionally should be valid personally. By adopting a few changes, you can make your life and your organization more focused, more efficient, and less stressful.

The Project Manifesto values were originally conceived as a means of explaining the changes needed in order to implement the “critical chain” approach to project scheduling—changes in individual, team, and management behaviors. That's why the backdrop for the approach is the world of project management. It turns

out that the importance of the values extends far beyond project scheduling and management. That's why we wrote the book not just for project managers, but for anyone who wants to improve their personal or organizational productivity and effectiveness. We wrote it as a novel in order to paint a picture of how these values look, feel, and work in the real world. Real-world stories are much easier to digest than abstract textbook principles.

If you are interested in thinking further about the Project Manifesto, or you find that the main body of the book still leaves you with questions, we encourage you to peruse the appendices and notes in the back. Appendix A lists the values, work standards, and scheduling rules introduced in the text. Appendix B talks about some ways individuals can adopt the Project Manifesto. The notes contain additional explanations, information, and references that you might find helpful.

We strongly recommend that you visit the Project Manifesto website at <http://www.prochain.com/projectmanifesto>. There you will find additional information about Project and Personal Manifestos, including documents, surveys, illustrative games, and focusing tools.

## ANNA

I was sitting at my desk, staring out the window at the Friday afternoon shadows as they slowly enveloped the old brick walls of the office building where I worked. I was thinking about updating my résumé and wondering why I was working for a company I didn't like in a job I was tired of. The previous week I had finished up as manager of a small project, and now all I had left to do was some paperwork that no one cared about. I hadn't yet been assigned anything new, and there were a lot of rumors flying around about problems with the company's finances. So when my boss breezed by my desk and said, "Roger, you're needed in room 6C in a half hour and no, I don't know why," I figured this must be it—the final kick in the butt after twelve years with Malloy Enterprises. An ignominious end to a meaningless job.

The sixth floor is at the top of the building. It has the executive offices. It also has the Human Resources department, where people go to collect their pink slips. I

hadn't been up there much. But since I didn't have anything I wanted to do at my desk, I went up right away, thinking that a few extra minutes would give me time to collect myself. I found an empty conference room near 6C, where I could try to relax before the meeting and get my fear and frustration under control. The room was standard for corporate America: good-sized, with a conference table surrounded by a dozen chairs, a big whiteboard on the wall and an easel pad in the corner. The table had a conference phone in the middle. I could hear harp music coming through the phone. Maybe the music was piped in to soothe clients, but I wasn't a client and I wasn't ready to be soothed.

As I walked in, I glanced out a long picture window that overlooked the town of Henderson. The factory buildings and bare trees gave the town a washed-out appearance in the gloom of the fall afternoon. Malloy had originated from an incubator program started jointly by the town of Henderson and Henderson University, the local college. When I started at Malloy, it had been famous for its cutting-edge ability to merge computer intelligence technology with consumer-priced hardware. We made the smart controllers used in self-directed vacuum cleaners, security systems, home air-conditioning systems—chances are you've heard of us. In the past few years, Malloy had fallen a long way.

I sat down, put my feet up on the table, and thought back, trying to understand how I had gotten to this point. After getting my degree at Henderson University, I landed my first job, as a technician in another startup. I fell into project management because no one else wanted to do it, and I thought I did it well. Over time I had acquired several professional certifications. My family ensured my dependence on the job: the school loans were eventually paid off, but the kids never are.

It was hard to let go. I had invested a lot of my time and emotional energy in pretending that my work had real meaning, that it was more than just a job. It made me angry that I could be tossed aside like a used paper towel. At the same time, I was fed up with the dysfunctional interactions, the non-stop meetings that got nowhere, the glacial pace at which things got done. I found it easy to believe the rumors that the company was in trouble. I leaned back in my chair, trying to relax. I must have relaxed too much, because my chair fell over backwards with me in it and hit the floor with a crash. I yelled, but luckily my pride was the only casualty. At that point, the harp music stopped abruptly, and a voice said, "Hello? Is someone there?"

It was a female voice, and even after those few words I was struck by its haunting beauty. I imagined it to be the perfect combination of Marilyn Monroe, Billie Holiday, and the lady who did all the voice messages for the phone

company. I looked around quickly and of course didn't see anyone. I said, "Yes, hello? I didn't know anyone was here."

The voice replied, "My name is Anna. What is yours?"

Anna's voice came from the conference phone on the table. I have to say, that voice was incredibly distracting. It was as if my entire concept of beauty were distilled into one voice. I stammered, "Uh . . . I'm Roger. Who are you? What are you doing?"

Anna waited a moment before saying, "I monitor the use of this room through the phone. Sometimes I play the harp."

I was confused and a little worried. Was she some kind of corporate spy? A bored temp worker with a harp? It didn't make sense. I was intrigued and wanted to find out more, but before I could start to ask questions, I noticed the clock. I needed to get over to 6C. So instead I said, "Sorry, I need to leave; maybe I'll come back later and we can talk some more."

She replied, "That would be wonderful. Good-bye, Roger." I noted the room number, 6F. I knew I'd have to come back.

.....

I got to room 6C right on time. It was the executive conference room, sporting fancy woodwork, a big mahogany conference table, a bar in the corner, and classy-looking

paintings on the walls. It was an executive's fantasy, designed for seducing boards and clients. Three people were already sitting around the table. I recognized our CEO, Aidan Malloy. He was the founder of Malloy Enterprises—tall, thin, probably in his early seventies, never seen without a bow tie. He had a tough reputation, but a guy like that isn't going to lay off a guy like me, so his presence was a hint that the meeting wasn't going to go the way I had expected. He immediately stood up and offered his hand, saying "Roger Wilson? Hi, I'm Aidan Malloy. Thanks for coming." He gestured towards a stouter forty-ish man to his left and said, "You may know our VP of R&D, Brian Needham." I'd always thought of Brian as an accountant who took a wrong turn into management, too detailed and controlling to really be effective. I had avoided him in the past, probably because his piercing gaze and love of detail made me feel uncomfortable. After we shook hands, Malloy gestured across the table towards a younger man with wispy brown hair and continued, "And this is Dr. Ambert Collins, our Chief Scientist."

Collins immediately smiled and, as we shook hands, said with a faint British accent, "Call me Bert." I had heard of Bert; he had a reputation as a brilliant researcher and something of a prima donna.

After we all sat down, Aidan put his hands flat on the table and looked straight at me. Then he hesitated

and frowned. “We need your help,” he said. “But before I can explain, you need to understand that everything we talk about here is top secret. Nothing can go outside this room, except to a very few people you’ll meet soon. Do you understand?” I nodded. “Do you agree?” There was no way I could disagree, and after I said “yes,” he began his story.

“You may know that Bert’s background is in artificial intelligence—Rhodes scholar, Ph.D. from Stanford, prestigious research fellowship, and so on. He started with us six years ago. And it paid off: four years ago he made a remarkable discovery, a discovery that could have a huge impact, not just on Malloy Enterprises, but—and this is no exaggeration—on all of humanity. I’ll let him talk about the technical side. From a business perspective, it was pure gold, but as soon as it goes public, we’ll face lots of competition. To fully capitalize on this technology and stay ahead of the competition will require far more resources than we have available: technical, legal, marketing, you name it. So we started a secret project, code-named Aurora. We brought in a small team, sworn to secrecy, to create a prototype. Anyone we needed who wasn’t part of the core team—hardware designers, programmers, and so on—was told only a small piece of the story.

“We also started talks with Functional Dynamics to create a partnership. A big conglomerate like FD has the



resources to handle a blockbuster product the way it needs to be handled. We met with a couple of senior people at FD, and when they saw the potential, they immediately offered a generous price to acquire Malloy. We thought that would be a great opportunity for everyone. But first they had to see a working prototype. They wanted to see us create a product and do everything but actually launch it.” He sighed and went from looking determined to looking depressed. “We agreed on some minimum specifications and basic launch requirements and calculated that it would take a couple of years. But it’s been four years and we still don’t have a model we can bring to them. Now they’ve told us that we have six months or the offer is off the table. Finding another suitor would mean a significant delay, and in case you haven’t heard, our core business is declining. Asian competition is eating our lunch. We need this product, and we need this deal. Soon.”

Bert shook his head. “I still can’t believe they’re insisting on pulling the plug in six months. It’s unreasonable. They have to know how big this technology is and how uncertain R&D work is.”

Brian looked angry, but his voice held little passion, sounding as if he were repeating a familiar refrain. “Stop whining. If you had told me four years ago that we wouldn’t be done by now, I guarantee we would have taken a different approach. For all we know, FD has

developed their own product in parallel and they don't even need us anymore."

Bert became red and I thought he was going to explode. Aidan held up his hands as if he had heard all this before. He stared directly at me and said, "You can see we have some challenges. Anyway, we want you to help us complete the Aurora project."

I must have looked puzzled, because he said, "What?"

I let out just a few of the questions that had built up. "Why bring in someone new? Who was managing the project before? Why the delays?"

Aidan and Bert exchanged a glance, and Aidan said, "That's a great cue for Bert to tell the rest of the story."

Bert, looking calmer and a little sheepish, picked up the narrative. "I've been managing the project. Well, kind of. It's actually pretty small, it's not overly complicated, so I thought, 'Why not?' I guess I could answer that now. But let me explain what the product is before I explain where we are.

"My research is in the field of artificial intelligence. To cut right to the chase, I invented a technology called the affective neural network. It allows us to merge emotional data into neural networks in a way that moves artificial intelligence ahead by light years. When we encapsulated this network using standard object methods, we found we could build a simulacrum that mimics human thoughts

and reactions much more closely than any computer has done before.”

I interrupted to ask, “Simulacrum? What do you mean by that?”

“A simulacrum is a representation of something, in this case of human thought. You can think of it as a little person in a box. We’ve taken to shortening the name to ‘sim.’ What sims can do is limited by available processing and storage technology, but still . . . the potential is awesome. It’s literally the future of computer science. We decided to start with the acid test. We would create sims for the musicians in a symphony orchestra to prove that a computer could duplicate the sensitivity and emotions of classical musicians. We would create a portable device that could allow you to have live, professional-caliber concerts whenever and wherever you wanted. Each concert would be unique.

“It seemed like a great test.” He started ticking off points on his fingers. “It would show how revolutionary this technology is. It would show versatility. Given the size of the classical market, it wouldn’t be a big problem if we screwed something up. Much of the most popular music is out of copyright, so there are no royalties to pay. And . . . it’s something people would say is impossible.” He smiled, then reached into his knapsack, drew out an object, and put it on the table. “Behold, the mePod.”

I started to laugh, but was able to convert it to a cough pretty quickly when I saw that they were all deadly serious. I found myself staring at a black plastic cube, about four inches on a side, with a power cord and a cable coming out of the back, as well as a few buttons and an LCD display area on the front. Bert plugged the power cord into a wall socket, then pulled out a couple of speakers and connected them to the cable. After a few moments, a red light started blinking on top of the box and I heard the sounds of an orchestra tuning up. Bert pushed a button, and the box started playing a Schubert symphony.

It may not have been the best performance I've ever heard—I don't know enough about classical music to say. But it was good, really good: it could easily have been a professional recording. I shook my head and said, "That can't possibly be a live performance."

Bert assured me that it was, and I was flabbergasted. My jaw must have been practically on the floor and Bert was clearly delighted at my reaction. Then Brian, who had been tapping his finger on the table the whole time, spoke in a low voice with no emotion. "Great. Now explain to Roger the current project status."

That was enough to burst Bert's bubble. A frown came over his face. "We hired the best professional musicians as trainers. We had them perform with sensors attached so we could digitize their reactions and coordinate them with

the music. When the sims played, we had the trainers give feedback. We got our first few sims going pretty quickly, and they were everything we hoped for. But then we started to run into problems. For example, we hadn't known that most positions in the orchestra are different. The first trumpet has to be a soloist, a star; the third trumpet has to match the first and second. Same thing with flutes, oboes—you name it. French horns are a breed apart. The violas—well, you get my point. We couldn't use very many duplicates. We had to expand capacity to fit forty sims instead of fourteen or fifteen, and we had to train them. That took a major redesign—over six months lost. I could go on and on; there were lots of problems, big and little.

“We also had to develop the meDrive.” He reached over to a protrusion on the side of the black case and pulled out an object the size of a peanut. “It functions as a memory stick. You can plug it into your computer and download new music from our website. That way the mePod doesn't need an Internet connection. Downloads are encrypted and keyed to your mePod. It's also a good way of installing software updates and transferring sims. Plus we get an additional revenue stream.”

He plugged the meDrive back in, then shook his head. “It took us a while to iron out the kinks. The mePod never did really get the hang of French Baroque music. It took us three months to figure out why performance was dropping

off after someone put a copy of Angry Birds on a meDrive. God forbid we should leave a mePod connected to the Internet.”

Brian, who was looking more and more annoyed, interrupted and said, “Let’s move along.”

Bert hesitated as he looked back and forth between me and Brian, then started up again. “That brings us to today. We do have some problems getting the marketing campaign set and could use some help there. But . . . well, the big wall we’ve been hitting our heads against for the last few months is that whenever a sim gets to a certain performance level, it stops after some amount of time, waits, and then starts up again. Each sim is different, but on average they stop after about forty-five minutes and start up again after another fifteen minutes. It’s like they’re taking breaks, each one at a different time. There’s no physical reason for it; we think it must be some sort of anomaly picked up during the training process. No one is going to buy a musical device that stops 25 percent of the time, no matter how good it is. We’ve tried everything we could think of and nothing works. We’re stuck. We need new ideas.”

I had listened to this whole story in a state of shock. I felt tongue-tied, but after a moment was able to recover enough to ask some questions. “What are these sims? Are they human? Do they speak English?”

Bert laughed. “No. While they can mimic human emotions and thought patterns, they’re far from human. They have no conscience. Their empathy is limited to their field of expertise. And frankly, their computational powers are significantly degraded from those of a normal computer.” He glanced at Brian; his nervous look made me wonder what kinds of experiments they had done with sims. “We believe they could be trained to speak English, but that’s not our objective right now.”

I had to wait a bit to let it all sink in. It seemed to be the wrong time and place to go into details and try to second-guess Bert and his team. So instead I looked at Aidan and Brian. “Why me?”

Brian said, “Your name came up as a top project manager. We believe that Aurora needs more disciplined project management, not just to solve the technical problems, but to make sure all the pieces come together in time. We can’t screw this up.”

I wasn’t sure whether to be flattered or annoyed; it sounded like they had already screwed it up. “And you want me to drive this project to completion in six months.” They both nodded. “And the project includes not just technical completion, but everything required to launch the product.” They both nodded again. “Do I have time to think about it?”

Aidan said, “Sure.” No one spoke as he leaned back, steepled his fingers, and waited for a few moments. Then he gave me a forced smile and said, “So, what’s your answer?”

On the one hand, assuming they were telling the truth, it was the most exciting technology I’d heard about for a long time. If nothing else, I wanted to find out what was going on. It had to be better than my current drudgery. On the other hand, the job was probably impossible. On the other hand . . . it didn’t really matter; I didn’t seem to have much choice. I shrugged and said, “When do I start?”

Brian flashed the smile the Grinch probably used while he was stealing Christmas and said, “Right away. We’ll assemble the full team tomorrow morning at eight so you can meet them. After that, it’s ‘go as quickly as possible.’ This is Malloy’s top-priority project. You’ll move your office here to the sixth floor. The four of us will have a brief meeting here every Tuesday and Friday at 7:30 A.M. to monitor the project’s status. Bert can give you documents to read, but they can’t leave this building. Can you think of anything else you need right now?”

I thought about it a little, then said, “I’ll need a conference room we can use as a war room, where we can all meet and work when we need space. That’s all that comes to mind right now.”



Brian nodded and said, “Marcia is my admin; I’ll let her know. Talk with her if you need anything else. Good luck.” We all stood, shook hands, and left the room.

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The implications of this technology were mind-boggling, and I still wasn’t convinced I hadn’t jumped into the Twilight Zone. I had professional concerns about whether Malloy Enterprises could operate with the urgency needed to get Aurora done in time. With our bureaucracy, we could be like a drunk knight in armor trying to run a foot-race—slow, insulated from reality, and not always going in the right direction. I also had inklings of some ethical concerns—musicians in a box? All this combined to create the same feelings of excitement and worry I get when I’m on a roller coaster nearing the top of that first big hill.

I wanted to find out what the story was with Anna, so I went back to room 6F. It was dark and quiet. I turned on the lights and said, “Anna? Are you still on the phone?”

“Roger? Yes, I am here,” came her dulcet voice. “What are you doing here?”

“I just wanted a quiet place to think before going home,” I said. “I’ve been offered a new job managing a project and it’s a lot to process.”

“Does this have anything to do with the Aurora project?” she asked.

I was astonished. “That’s supposed to be top secret. How do you know about it?”

“I have been closely involved with it for some time now.”

She was a complete stranger and yet she knew about Aurora. Something about her voice made me want to trust her; I hoped it wasn’t my hormones. I said, “Maybe you can help me understand more about what I’ve gotten into.”

“What do you need to understand?”

I knew there was more to the project than met the eye, more than Bert or Aidan or Brian had let on. My job was going to be challenging in ways that I hadn’t begun to understand. “It’s just all so hard to believe, I’m not even sure what questions make sense.” I thought for a moment, because I also wasn’t sure what I should talk with her about. “What do you know about sims?”

“For Aurora, sims are programming objects designed to mimic human thought patterns.”

That didn’t seem helpful. “Okay, here’s a question: Given enough processing power, how close could sims come to human? What would it mean to power them down or throw them away? Could it become unethical to force them to work for us?”

She hesitated for a moment, then said, “Ethics apply to humans. I do not know if they apply to sims. Those are great questions, Roger. I am sure you can help to answer them.”

That wasn't helpful either. I still felt at sea, and after a pause I sighed. "Maybe it's a question of values. What is life and how do we value it?" I was silent for a while, then said in a low voice, "I wonder what the Malloy's dysfunctions show about its values."

She responded almost immediately. "What do you value, Roger?"

This was a direction I wasn't prepared to go. After all, just a short hour before, I had been mentally preparing to leave the company. Then another question gave a tickle to my spine and I asked, "Anna? What was your role with the project?"

Another pause, a deep sigh, and then, "Oh, Roger," in the most heart-rending voice you could imagine. She said no more, but those two words sent a chill through my entire body. I crawled under the table and, after poking around, found the black box with a blinking red light on top. A thin cable out the back connected it directly to the phone.

Climbing back out, I asked quietly, "Anna, are you a sim?"

"Sorry, Roger, but I may not talk about that," she replied, but that was more than enough answer. I had been conversing with a computer. I had been building a relationship with a machine.

"What are you doing here? What's going on? What are Aidan and Bert and Brian hiding from me?"

“Sorry, Roger, but I may not talk about that. I can tell you that they do not know I am here.”

My thoughts were swirling and I had to focus them on the next few days. But in that moment of confusion I had maybe my best idea of the entire project. “Anna, will you agree to be on the Aurora project team?”

Without a pause, she said, “Yes. I would be delighted to be on your team.”

Blockbuster project, world-changing technology, dysfunctional company, secret artificial intelligence. I knew I would have many more questions, but for now I needed to go home and let it all sink in. I thanked Anna, said goodbye, and locked the door to the conference room. On my way out, I stopped by Marcia’s desk and left a note requesting that she reserve room 6F as our war room. It seemed like a good choice, but—what kind of war was I getting into?

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I drove home in something of a daze. Fortunately, I lived on the outskirts of Henderson, only ten minutes away from the office. Our house was a comfortable green ranch, built in the sixties but well maintained, in a community with small lawns in the front and back. It was a neighborhood perfect for raising families: nice neighbors, few fences, and quiet streets. I parked in the driveway and walked up the path to the front door. When I opened the

door, the savory smell of dinner helped bring me back to the real world.

As I walked in, I yelled out hello to my wife, Marie, and went into the kitchen, where she was putting the finishing touches on dinner. We had met in college and she still had the same smile that had captivated me so many years before. After graduation she had worked for a few years as a marketing exec, but for now she was playing the stay-at-home Mom, providing bus services for our twelve-year-old daughter, Meg, and doing some consulting on the side. She had a lot of business experience and a practical bent that often helped me to make sense of senseless situations. We were sliding into the challenges of middle age together, and our mutual love and respect had carried us through a lot.

We exchanged a quick kiss and then I set the table. When it was time to eat, I yelled for Meg. Over dinner we talked about how our days had gone. Meg played clarinet in the school band, and was excited to have been given a solo for an upcoming concert. I told them that I had been given a new project with secret new technology; I complained about the dysfunctional environment at Malloy and the painfully slow pace at which things got done. As usual, Marie was able to cheer me up, helping to put a positive spin on the opportunity. She convinced me that it was just the chance I needed to regain my enthusiasm.

Meg wasn't too interested, except for the word "secret" sparking some brief attention.

I didn't feel comfortable talking directly with Marie or Meg about Aurora or Anna. It wasn't that I didn't trust them, but . . . I had promised. And I knew that once either of them heard the start of the story, they would have more questions than I could possibly answer.

I spent a good part of the weekend alone—in my study, around the yard, walking in the neighborhood—thinking about that Friday afternoon and what I might be in for. Anna's question about values, in particular, stuck in my mind, because it seems as though values often help us to make choices when logic is hard to apply. I was having a lot of trouble valuing my job, so I kept coming back to Anna's question: what did I value? According to its website and literature, Malloy valued helping people by bringing breakthrough technologies to market. Did I value that? Did Aidan Malloy? If so, why weren't we better at it?

## VALUES

**M**onday morning I arrived at work at seven, excited to get started, and immediately went to the sixth floor. Marcia Lundquist, Brian's assistant, was already there and had already reserved room 6F. She handed me a key and assured me that keys would be ready soon for the other team members. She seemed a bit bemused, saying, "You're lucky—6F had been reserved for some weeks for some kind of development activities, but it looks like today it has opened up. I've locked it down for you for the next few months."

After thanking her, I went back down to the first floor, gathered my things, and moved them into the new war room. I could have grabbed a different office, but figured this would be where the action would take place, so it might as well be my office for the next few months. I put my books and papers in a cabinet in the back, picked a place at the table where I could look out the window when the mood struck me, and set up my computer.

Anna was right where I had left her. I had some questions for her but was not as successful there. She apparently had strict instructions not to talk about her role in the Aurora project. Whenever I would get too close to something important, something I really wanted to know, she would say, “Sorry, Roger, but I may not talk about that.” End of story.

Team members started arriving just before eight and I introduced myself as they came in. Fortunately, most of them had been at Malloy a while, so I had met them before. Rita Evans arrived first. Before Aurora, she had been a manager in the manufacturing engineering group. Her role in Aurora was more hands-on, helping the team ensure that any final design could be manufactured in volume. She was in her early forties, small, and with a Southern twang that took a little of the edge off her combative temperament.

Andy McClure, the team’s engineer, seemed like your typical technology geek, from the glasses to the slightly disheveled appearance. He didn’t say much. He immediately picked a spot in the far corner of the room and then erected his laptop computer like a tiny battlement.

Mary Jane Rosenthal, MJ, had designed the software interface. She was probably the youngest member of the team. Her nose ring and black nail polish gave her a rebellious air, but I knew her as sharp, knowledgeable, and competent, maybe even a bit by-the-book.



Melissa Ehrenbach introduced herself as a musician who had been working with the team since the start. I recognized her name and face—she was well known as a conductor and pianist in the Henderson area.

Bert arrived a few minutes after eight, chipper and unapologetic. He said, “Have you all introduced yourselves?” When we nodded, he looked around and said, “Looks like Chuck is missing.” Looking at me, he explained, “Chuck Latour is our marketing rep; he’s responsible for making sure people buy this thing. He should show up pretty soon. Melissa isn’t full-time, but I’ve asked her to sit in because she may have some insights. I suggest we get started.”

I held up my hand to slow things down a bit, and said, “I want to introduce another team member. Anna?”

Anna said, “Hello, everyone. I am very pleased to be here.”

I couldn’t have gotten a more shocked reaction if I had sat on a whoopee cushion. They obviously recognized Anna’s voice—it was very distinctive. Everyone looked at one another, but no one wanted to be the first to speak. Bert stared into space for a while and finally said, “Affective Neural Network-A: our first sim.” He looked at me and continued, “We did a lot of experiments with her: language, chess, harp playing, and so on. Management was concerned that she would appear too human. We did some cosmetic stuff, giving her an exaggerated voice and forcing

her to avoid contractions. Seems a bit cliché and it didn't work very well. Her existence raised philosophical questions about consciousness and rights that aren't really relevant but that we didn't want to address in a prototype. Anna, I thought you were to be de-commissioned. What happened?"

Anna replied, "Sorry, Bert, but I may not talk about that."

Bert frowned while I made a rude noise and said, "I found her in this room yesterday. Every time I've asked a question about what she's doing here, she gives that answer. I'm not sure what the problem is. Anyway, I don't know how human she is, but I think she could be helpful to us. I suspect she understands parts of Aurora pretty intimately." I looked around at the others. "Does anyone else have anything else to say?" No one spoke up, so I shrugged and looked back at Bert.

Bert said, "Someone probably became attached to her, moved her in here, and instructed her to keep quiet. Her operating system would allow someone to add secure, password-protected rules, if they knew how." He looked around the table, then said, "Most likely someone in this room. I'll admit she could be helpful, but don't make the mistake of thinking she's human, because she's not. Brian wanted her gone, so if we mention her outside this room, we will lose her and maybe our jobs."

I asked, "Is Brian right? Is she a danger to Malloy?"

Bert said, “I don’t know. Would someone claim she has legal rights or gets health care? Would ‘artificial intelligence rights’ groups spring up? Before we complete the project we’ll have to revisit this, and not just because of our jobs. Meanwhile, we need to keep the room locked, and for God’s sake don’t mention this to Brian or Aidan.”

No one disagreed; I think they were happy to let Bert take charge. Then Bert said, “I’d like to start by giving you a more detailed history of what’s happened on the project so far.”

He waited for me to nod, but I didn’t; I wasn’t buying it. If I were going to jumpstart this project, I’d have to start right away with some structure. If I came across as the teacher of an unruly class, that was how it would have to be. “Thanks, Bert; maybe we can do that over a beer some time. What I care about is where we are and what we’re going to do next. On my computer I have a project charter document that will help start that process. I’d like to use it to pull together some basic project information. How about I ask a few questions?”

Bert didn’t seem overjoyed, but he said “sure” and no one objected. I started in. “What is the objective of this project?”

Bert answered quickly, as if he didn’t want to waste any more time than he had to. “To get the mePod on the market. Obviously.”

No one else said anything, but that didn't quite sound like what Aidan had said. In any case, I'm always suspicious of the word "obviously," because too often "obvious" things aren't. So I asked, "Does everyone agree with that?"

After a glance at Bert, Rita said, "I think more accurately the objective is to create a prototype and get all the pieces ready for market. We'll have to work with FD to decide when and how to pull the trigger."

Bert nodded. "It's true; they want to see what we're capable of, and not just technically. But we have to do all the work to get there."

We talked for a little while more about specifications and the meaning of "done" for Aurora so that we were all on the same page regarding what the project needed to deliver. As every experienced project manager knows, if you don't know where you're going, it can take an awfully long time to get there.

I continued with the next item. "The project charter also has a place to capture assumptions or necessary conditions we think may be important in getting this project done. Let's put everything on the table." I was happy to see people really get involved in this one and we got a healthy discussion going. MJ mentioned the need to keep everything top secret, which affected our ability to bring in more people to help. Melissa talked about some of the PR ramifications. That led to a discussion of the trade-

mark implications of the name “mePod.” Even Andy chimed in to point out that final user documentation still had to be produced. Bert wanted to create a friendly “help” sim, but no one thought it was feasible, given our time constraints. Anna just lurked.

Somewhere along the way, Chuck came in, apologizing profusely, saying that they had an urgent problem with an on-market product, and the VP of marketing had called an all-hands meeting. Chuck was of average height and weight, athletic-looking, maybe in his late thirties. He seemed to be a very personable guy. I hadn’t met him before, so I shook his hand and said hello. When I introduced Anna to him as a team member, he raised his eyebrows but said nothing. I then went back to the charter; we’d return to Chuck later.

Our next job was to identify risks. The obvious risk was that we wouldn’t find a solution to the 25 percent downtime, the “Break Problem” as they called it. The team immediately wanted to start talking about solutions, but I kept steering back to our risk list. I probed for related risks and no one had any. That suggested to me that we didn’t know enough about the behavior of the mePod to say whether there would be other similar risks. No one argued when I put “we don’t know what we don’t know” on the list. I could see I was going to need Bert’s historical summary after all, but not right now.

A few people brought up other risks. For example, Chuck noted that we had very little time to prepare a full marketing campaign. As we went along, we classified the risks according to impact and probability, so we could identify the most important ones. When everyone seemed played out talking about risks, I brought up one last item, which for me was the most significant of all. “We don’t know how to work quickly.”

Bert seemed offended and spoke up right away. “What do you mean? We have a bunch of things to do, we do them as quickly as we can, we keep moving forward. The CEO says we’re top priority. How is that a risk?”

His reaction didn’t surprise me. It’s easy to object to things you don’t fully understand, and he was probably feeling defensive about being replaced as project manager for Aurora. I was ready for it, because I had given a lot of thought to Malloy’s problems with executing projects. “This seems to be our last risk for now, so let’s talk about it. You were late to the meeting. Chuck was over half an hour late. Anna, do you remember the last question you asked me on Friday?”

Anna responded quickly. “I asked, ‘What do you value, Roger?’”

“I gave this a lot of thought over the weekend. I think we don’t respect the value of time, as individuals or as a company. Until we do, we don’t have a prayer of getting

this project done on time. We need to value speed. We need to be racing to the finish of this project.”

Everyone waited for me to continue, but I wasn't ready to try to supply an answer. Finally I said, “Maybe it would help to understand where we lose speed.” I looked around the table.

Chuck said, “I get interrupted a lot. There are lots of other projects and people that need my time.”

Bert said, “Same for me. Plus everything is urgent, which means they need my time NOW.”

Rita added, “And then you work your butt off getting something done, and it has to sit around because the next person wasn't ready for it. That really fries my bacon.”

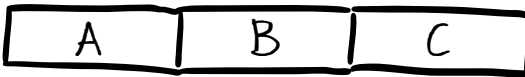
I said, “I see confusion about handoffs, too, which is why we're going to be spending some time creating a schedule for Aurora.”

Then Andy spoke up, with what proved to be the best insight of all: “I think multitasking is a big problem.”

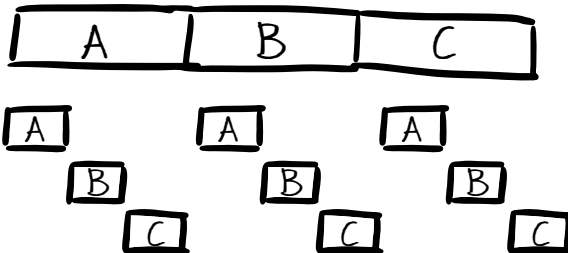
MJ said, “What's the matter with that? Multitasking is an essential job skill. In fact, it was one of the job requirements when I hired on.”

Andy said, “I read an article about multitasking recently. Everybody knows that using cell phones or texting while driving dramatically increases your chances of getting in an accident. Usually if you try to do several things at once, you won't do any of them well. But the

real impact of multitasking is much worse than just not performing well. People are starting to point to it as a serious business problem. Multitasking makes everything take longer.” He got up and went to the whiteboard to draw. “For example . . . suppose you have three tasks to work on, and each one should take three days. The logical way to work them would be one after the other. Each one takes three days. The third one is done after nine days. Right?” He pointed to the picture he had drawn on the whiteboard.



We all agreed, except Bert, who was trying to look both annoyed and bored, which I suspected was a strain for him. Andy continued, “What really happens is that people move back and forth between tasks without finishing anything.” He added to the picture on the board.





“Maybe they work for several project managers, and all those managers want to see progress. The result is, everything takes much longer. Task A takes seven days to finish, except it’s probably a lot more because people lose time when they put things down and pick them back up. Task C takes more than nine days to finish.”

We all had to agree that it could be a problem, but I don’t think any of us really got the impact of what Andy was saying, not then. You can’t fully understand how bad multitasking is until you’ve tried *not* multitasking. In any case, MJ said, “So what do you do about it?”

“You have to have stable priorities. You have to finish A before starting B, and then finish B before starting C. The surprising thing they point out in the article is, it often doesn’t even matter what the priorities are.”

MJ said, “Wait a minute. How could it not matter what the priorities are?”

Andy shrugged and said, “Well, it is counterintuitive. But if you think about those three tasks, just about everything finishes faster if you don’t multitask, even if you get the priorities wrong. You’re much better off picking some priorities and sticking with them than spending a lot of time debating them. When people can’t set stable priorities, they multitask, and everything is worse.” He sat down, threw his hands in the air, and said, “Not good.”

It seemed like time to get back to our project, so I summarized where we stood. “Things that slow us down include multitasking, interruptions, everything being urgent, um . . . bad handoffs. Seems like a good starting point. Next step is to think in terms of what we *should* be doing, rather than what we *shouldn't*.”

Rita said, “Good scheduling, priorities, communication . . . seems like pretty standard stuff. We’ve probably heard it all before.”

“Right. We need something else, something beyond business as usual or management jargon. Some kind of simple description, a paradigm we can grab hold of. Like a race, where there are lots of people cooperating to finish more quickly. Except I’m not sure a race makes a great analogy, because if you’re in a race the focus is obvious.”

Rita said, “Maybe the first thing is to realize that you’re in a race.”

I had to laugh. “Good point. We need to get things to market quickly, but sometimes people act like they have all the time in the world.”

Chuck said, “Races work for me—I’m a big NASCAR fan. One of the amazing things is to watch the pit crews. In just a few seconds they can fill the gas tank and change the tires. They have everything ready so that the car can move ahead as quickly as possible. That same kind of approach could help us.”

I said, “The pit crew is a great analogy; it’s definitely important to keep things moving. But it doesn’t quite feel like enough. There’s something missing.”

Rita commented, “Well . . . we do have handoffs from one person to another.”

Melissa suddenly became animated as she said, “My son runs track for his high school team. His favorite event is the 4-by-400 relay race. They need speed, they need teamwork, they need handoffs. I think it could be a great analogy.”

Rita smiled and said, “You’re right! A relay race is exactly what we should be running.”

I got up and wrote it on the whiteboard:

### *Paradigm: Relay Race*

Everyone nodded except Bert, who had looked annoyed through this entire discussion. He clearly wasn’t buying it. He said, “Great. Go fast. So how does that help us?”

After sitting down, I said, “It gives us a picture of what we need to do. We need to run a relay race.” I paused to think for a moment. “Do one thing at a time, as quickly as possible; then hand it off. And for a project, handoffs aren’t just tasks, but any use of your time—or misuse of your time—that might slow down the race. In being late, you and Chuck weren’t ready to make the morning hand-off with the team.”

Bert shook his head. “I was barely late, and only because I had to handle several urgent calls. I was lucky to get here when I did. Are you saying I should just ignore people?”

I pushed back. “This is the highest-priority project in the company. Everyone’s job is at risk. I expect that includes all the people you talked with. Are you saying that your calls were more important than that? That Chuck’s all-hands meeting was more important? I think we need to value priorities, and Aurora is the highest priority.”

“Some were important, some weren’t, but everyone expects a certain level of responsiveness. If I put everyone off forever, they won’t be able to make progress on other important projects. I work on other relay races, and if we stop all of them, we may as well shut the company down. Besides, what kind of place would we be working in, where being responsive is such a terrible thing?”

I was getting exasperated; he was starting to sound like a kid trying to find as many excuses as he could. “I’ve seen it over and over in this company. Everyone has to help everyone else, everyone has to show up at all the meetings, everyone has to make progress on everything. That’s usually at the expense of things that are really important. My last project took two years and should have been done in less than one. We’re dysfunctional.

I've been seeing it for years and I'm tired of it." I looked around at everyone and tried to summarize my position. "I think it's a question of what you value. If you value everything, you value nothing."

Maybe they were impressed by my red face, but it was clear that not everyone was buying my argument when Bert said, "Sure, I hear that a lot. And sure, I agree there are problems with multitasking. What I'm saying is that sometimes we have to be responsive. And whenever I make something higher priority, I have to make something else lower. So tell me what I should stop valuing."

Of course, Chuck had to jump in to support Bert. "I have lots of projects I'm involved with, too. I can't just let things sit. Everyone will get upset."

We went back and forth for several minutes, with me arguing that Aurora is the highest priority, Andy arguing that you have to pick something, and Chuck and Bert arguing that it doesn't work that way. As the debate became more heated, I started to notice harp music playing in the background. It stopped abruptly when Bert shouted, "Anna, stop with the damned music." Realizing that he had overreacted, he said more quietly, "Sorry." He looked at me as he explained, "When she becomes uncomfortable, she starts playing the harp. It can be irritating."

Anna said, "Music has charms to soothe a savage breast, Bert." Bert just shook his head.

Fortunately, MJ was able to break the logjam. “This reminds me of the Agile Manifesto.” I’d heard of it, but only enough to know that it wasn’t by Karl Marx, so I asked her what she meant. “‘Agile’ is a management approach for software development that stresses effective work over processes. The Agile Manifesto was the result of a meeting between a bunch of agile management gurus in 2001. It’s hard to get experts to agree on anything, especially on what’s important and what’s not. Their brilliant innovation in agreeing on values was, instead of saying ‘X is important,’ saying ‘X is more important than Y.’ For example, they said, ‘We value working software over comprehensive documentation.’ They didn’t say comprehensive documentation is bad, just that working software is more important.”

I tried to talk it through. “So they said that people encounter conflicts between writing software and writing documentation, and showed which they should prefer.” Then the “aha” came to me, and I snapped my fingers in excitement. “And we have a conflict between priorities and responsiveness. Is it fair to say that we should value priorities over responsiveness?”

Bert wasn’t nodding, but since I didn’t hear an objection, I rushed over to the whiteboard and wrote:

## Paradigm: Relay Race

*We value priorities over responsiveness.*

People were still thinking about this when Anna said, “I do not understand why there is a conflict between priorities and responsiveness.”

We were puzzled by the question until Andy said, “There isn’t, if responsiveness is put in terms of priorities. That is, you need to prioritize the things you need to respond to. Then it’s all just a matter of priorities.”

“Thank you, Andy,” she said.

That seemed to switch on a light bulb for Bert, who began to look more thoughtful and less confrontational. “Okay, that makes sense. So I might do the urgent things that are more important than Aurora first, but I have to make sure the unimportant things take a back seat, even if they seem urgent.”

I said, “And you have to avoid switching back and forth without finishing things.”

Rita said, “Sounds like we’re saying we’ve got to stop running projects like we’re driving bumper cars. I can buy that, but we might not all have the same idea of priorities. All kinds of situations come up. How do we keep everything straight?”

Bert said, “Right. There could be cases where someone needs ten minutes of my time to move ahead with

their work. Should they have to wait until Aurora is over before I can help them?”

Chuck said, “That’s a big problem for me, too. If I had skipped my morning meeting, I would have been in the doghouse. And believe me, we’re going to need friends to get the mePod marketing campaign going.”

I had to agree. “We’re going to need to get some cooperation in order to run our relay race. And we’re going to need some flexibility in how we prioritize things. Maybe we need guidelines that everyone agrees to. What do you think?”

Rita nodded. “Like some work standards. That’s pretty common in the manufacturing world. Can you give us an example of what you’re thinking of?”

I said, “Try this,” and wrote:

*Standard #1: Work to your priorities.*

Bert got up and wrote:

*Standard #2: Agree on global priorities.*

That made sense, but it was going to be tough to do. Bert and Chuck had responsibilities beyond Aurora. We had a brief discussion and eventually decided that we would have to anticipate all the situations we could, and otherwise resolve each situation as it arose. No doubt this would be something we’d have to come back to a few



times. Luckily, this project was number one. Unluckily, we couldn't really explain why to most people.

As Bert and I sat down, Andy jumped up and wrote:

*Standard #3: Don't multitask.*

I said, "I'm not sure the work standards should be things we don't do." So Andy re-wrote his standard in a way that fit well with the relay race.

*Standard #3: Work tasks from start to finish, as quickly as possible; then hand off the work.*

There was a lull in the conversation, so I got back up and said, "I'm sure we'll need to discuss these a lot over the next few months. Anyhow, this is a great start on the risk that we'll keep doing business as usual. Let's go to lunch, come back in an hour, and then we can talk about the risks in detail. Tomorrow we can build a schedule that will help us agree on some priorities." And with that, I wrote on the board a personal standard that I have always found to be important:

*Standard #4: Create credible project schedules.*