

HalMacomber

The Project Reformer's e-Tip of the Week

021: When in Doubt, Trust the Terrain

This might come from the Swiss Army Survival Guide. "When lost in the woods, if the map doesn't agree with the terrain, in all cases believe the terrain."

A project plan, an executive's vision, and the team members' perspective all tend to be based on how things ought to be or were supposed to be. That's the map. The terrain is what is important to the success of the project. You can't manage from the map. You have to get grounded and manage from the terrain. That means deeply understanding:

- | the project's objectives and obstacles,
- | what has really been accomplished and what needs to be done (whether the project plan reflects it or not),
- | the project members' motivations,
- | the organization's values, and
- | what we personally are capable of and interested in achieving.

Why spend a lot of energy pretending that a map is valid when we know that it isn't? As innovators in project management we need to look for the realities of the people, the organization, the project, and ourselves to be successful. When the map becomes more important than the terrain, we aren't helping anyone.

Dennis Stevens, [Knowledge in Process](#), is on a roll. Another Project e-Tip is in the works!

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