

0:00:00.0 Kendall Lott: PMs, as I listened to this episode in post-production, I was reminded of a quote from a great book I'm reading right now that I recommend, *The Control Heuristic* by Luca Dellanna. He connects neurology with human behavior with behavioral economics. And he noted at the personal level, "Either you desire the actions that would bring change or you won't change. Desiring the outcomes of change doesn't count." And that's what we're talking about today, change management. But not the whole resistance to change discussion you're used to. Rather, the question is, how will we take action? Worse, are we actually taking actions that get in our own way? Listen in.

0:00:48.6 Announcer: From the Washington DC chapter of the Project Management Institute, this is PM Point of View, the podcast that looks at project management from all the angles. Here's your host, Kendall Lott.

0:00:58.8 KL: Hello PMs. And it's Change Again. But this time we're asking the question, why are we having such a problem executing it? Or rather how come we're not getting the outcomes that change is supposed to be giving us? I am back with co-host Mike Hannan, whose idea this was, and change guru April Mills, author of two books you've already heard about. Everyone is a Change Agent and Change Tactics. She's back with us for the third episode to shed some light on change, how organizations missed the point and get in their own way. Welcome Mike. Where are you calling in from, buddy?

0:01:30.1 Mike Hannan: Salt Lake City, that's your great long weekend in Rocky Mountain National Park.

0:01:34.6 KL: I think I've heard that tale before. [laughter]

0:01:36.4 MH: If I'm going back to the well.

0:01:37.6 KL: Never gets old.

0:01:39.4 MH: So sometimes you don't wanna change, right?

0:01:41.7 KL: Well, we actually hadn't been to Rocky Mountain National Park in 12 years, so the hikes are harder though as we age.

0:01:47.6 MH: I remember a friend of mine had gone to the Grand Canyon when she was 18, ran away from home or something and went and hung out there in the late '60s and went back after retiring. She said, "What was funny was I was different, but the waterfall looked the same." Nothing...

[laughter]

0:02:02.3 MH: For mine's I was still accurate. Welcome April. How are you and where you calling in from?

0:02:09.4 April Mills: I'm doing great and I am in South Dakota visiting my in-laws here. I was just in Rocky Mountain National Park a week and a half ago.

0:02:19.3 KL: All this ties to the change topic today because we're talking about how we change but things stay the same. And maybe we have the power to change some of the things in ourselves. But the topic today, and I wanna just frame this a bit because I'm a huge fan of April Mills and I've had the great privilege to work more closely with her over the past year and a lot of the change management stuff I've used sometimes successfully, April always kind of peels another layer or two and helps get beneath some of the problems behind the problems. And that's why I thought, she's such an expert on these things where, we just get in our own way, whether things haven't changed and we should change something in ourselves or we've changed and don't realize it and we gotta bring something different to the game. Whatever the case, I've seen it, I've seen the pattern now a bunch of times and I think April's onto something.

0:03:09.6 MH: I wanna throw one thing in there. I think when I was hearing what in our pre-brief and also is a talk with April is, this episode is not another set of techniques about change. This is our problem of observing that sometimes people are trying to do it and yet. Right?

0:03:24.2 AM: Yeah.

0:03:24.7 MH: So, this is a little bit different for you PMs listening in here. This is not another tale about what to do about it, it's more contemplating. So where are we and what's going on with this space? And we observe it in the organizations that we all work with and work for. So, I'm sorry, with that though, April, cue us up then. Go ahead.

0:03:39.1 AM: If we think about the modern state of program management and change management, we've become much more professional. People lead or follow their name with the PMP or the change management certifications. So what we're dealing with is we've professionalized a lot of the disciplines to help organizations change. The problem is as you professionalize, oftentimes process goes up and some situational awareness maybe goes down. We rely on our tool more than the situation we're in. Some might say that the science part of the job takes over and the art part falls off. So rather than designing a house to fit its conditions, we build the house we're used to building and that's the example I think that we're dealing with in a lot of organizations. We will set up a large IT change and we'll say, "It'll take five years." Well, how do you know it's gonna take five years? It's because it's supposed to take five years and that is the worst possible answer for why it's gonna take five years. Because work expands to fit the time allowed, we will follow our process and five years will pass. And what do we know about results these days? We're usually not the place we wanted to be after five years, but we've spent five years.

0:05:02.3 KL: Actually, I wanna ask you something right there just on an interim, is that the worst possible answer? Just thinking of my many years with Mike, I wonder, it will take five years. What is, I don't know, how does that stack up against putting out, the boss says it's five years, the benchmark is five years, my best of my knowledge it's five years as an expert relying on expertise, expert knowledge. What if the answer is, I don't know?

0:05:27.7 AM: I think the answer is that we're often wanting instead to say this is what I recommend in my books, is that we want this change to be done as soon as possible. Because oftentimes I'm planning ahead for where I need to be in five years and this change meets me where I'm gonna be. It's usually I need it now, but I think I'm supposed to wait five years. And we treat a lot of changes like gestation times for babies. So, you guys can't relate to this like I can but I've had

four children, you don't wanna rush a baby. It takes nine months. Billions of babies have taken nine months. We know the right answer is about nine months. Too short to assure you get some issues too long, you get some issues. Nine months, great. Why should an IT project take five years? It's because five seems like a good number. Five won't get you in trouble.

0:06:20.4 AM: But if the answer is my organization needs to achieve parity with my peer competitor and they already have, let's pick on IT, a technology in place which is helping them achieve value for their customers, I can't afford five years to wait to get to where they're at now because they'll be five years ahead and I'll be constantly playing catch up. So it's these things that I see as patterns out there, but the professional might want the certainty of I want a contract which says, I'm being contracted to come in and help this organization for five years.

0:06:57.6 KL: Yeah, that's a whole different ballgame I think. That's the incentives problem but yeah, Mike, you had your hand up. Go for it.

0:07:02.4 MH: I'd even say the five year thing has more to do with the age old problem of sandbagging. We wanna convey that these things can take time, which is true. We shouldn't expect immediate transformation overnight. It takes a little while for the caterpillar to turn into a butterfly this sort of a gestational analog to your a nine-month window, April.

0:07:24.1 AM: Year.

0:07:24.6 MH: But I don't want it to give it something so short. So, even a year, that's a while. Maybe longer than the organization has before something bad will happen to it. But that just sounds so aggressive that there's no way I could achieve success. So maybe two years. Oops, no I've tried two years the last couple times and I never made it. So we're almost negotiating with ourselves like the whole deal sandbagging thing. And I'm using sandbagging in a good way. Like we're not deliberately trying to mislead anyone, we're trying to be responsible. How can I give some timeframe that's better than, I don't know that conveys that it could take a while, but then something maybe I could still be held accountable to?

0:08:02.9 AM: Well, right, but I think what we're getting at is what am I being held accountable to? And typically these days I'm being held accountable to a schedule that was pretty agreed on. Not I'm being held accountable to the outcome.

0:08:17.0 KL: Well, no is to that point in a much more kind of baby fight way for me, one of the things I have trouble getting people to see is, you should have a meeting as long as you need the meeting to last for the outcome you're after. And you should have as many meetings as you need. Your meeting should not go one minute longer than is needed and not one minute shorter. And you should not have one more meeting than you need or one too few. 'Cause I have so many that say we're going to do this in an hour, we're gonna have our weekly whatever. And I'm like, and then you get client, well, in my case it's client service. They'd be like, "I'm very frustrated that we didn't get this done in the three weekly meetings we had." I'm like, "Because your people are still arguing about what needs to happen."

0:08:55.2 KL: And I don't mean arguing like because they're snipping each each other. They're still working the process. And so you, and then you get into these weirder things like we're officially doing brainstorming on Tuesday. We're gonna do innovation at noon on Wednesday and then

everyone's gonna have a trust exercise and we'll trust each other Friday at 4:00. And I'm like, "You know that's not how this works, right?" So that's like an example of the outcomes that they put a label on. So, I'm picking us off a little bit there, but my point is I think we're suggesting that change takes as long as it needs to gestate. But to me the underlying thing I'm gonna throw back out in front of you, I liked your accountability point and one other thing with the comparison to the butterfly comparison to maternal health, that has data.

0:09:30.4 KL: The biggest problem I see, you're right about the accountability and also we have some data. And so the question is do our professionals learn activities and methodologies or do we have any data in our field? We have billions of babies born, it's about nine months and we have data about what happens when it's longer or shorter than that. Do we have data on anything? And this is where we get into the problems, I think of accountability, execution and knowing something. So, anyway, that's what I wanna put out there. I think we have all these three areas to get at what is execution, what are we talking about in accountability? And I think the other question is, is there data? Should there be data? How do we get data? Maybe that's what we should focus on is how we get data on larger organizations.

0:10:09.9 AM: Well, and maybe it's just the activator in me. I'm quite content if somebody's a passionate data waltz for them to go get the data and try to normalize or make the assumptions around in environments of this industry at this size with this complexity, here's how long it should take. And honestly, my brain doesn't enjoy that. I'm happy to be a consumer of that. I don't enjoy building that. But where I see the big challenge is because we're not focusing on realization, we're focusing often on process, opportunity is for unity to improve realization of the value and make it go exponentially faster are not considered. Because once you set the timeline, that becomes the cadence. I'll give you an example. I've been listening to this book, American Prometheus, the Oppenheimer movie's coming out soon and it was talking about the different decisions that Oppenheimer and the team were making about how to pursue building the nuclear bomb.

0:11:16.1 AM: And some of the suggestions that the scientists were making were valid ways of testing for different theories and different processes, but they would take too long. It was like, I could approve you to do that line of experimentation, but it's a five-year experimentation cycle and we don't have five years. So, they were constantly trying to innovate on what's the more practical way of learning that as fast as possible. I don't hear conversations like that. What's the most practical way to get trust as fast as possible? What's the most practical way to get the first increment of value as soon as possible? Not where we have to steamroll or break. And maybe we say, we require you to maintain trust with the IT, finance and legal orgs while getting that done. And you have to be able to achieve this certain level of compliance or usability. But how fast can you get there? We don't have those conversations because it becomes the next step in my process is to set the timeline. Now it's our job to execute the timeline, not excel... Even acceleration conversations become an agreement to break and go faster than the timeline becomes the paramount conversation seems to me like professional servicing, not outcome servicing.

0:12:34.0 KL: Well, we've also got the problem of incentives there. We're back to incentives with a piece of that. But Mike, I just heard, I mean she just gave us a great quote in a different field in a way the Devo golden triangle we, realization versus process, it was we missed the opportunity to actually provide the value by accelerating. So that's like right out of some of the project management technique that we need to be thinking about.

0:12:55.8 MH: But not commonly accepted project management technique.

0:13:00.7 KL: Exactly. It's considered on the outer edge, isn't it?

0:13:03.0 MH: What Kendall's basically talking about is why we have a triple constraint, which for years I never questioned it. It's just like, okay, we have to trade off scope, schedule and costs to come up with some outcome. Great. We don't have unlimited schedule, we don't have an unlimited budget. We can't accomplish unlimited scope, so let's neck it all down and figure out how to trade them off and go get started. Then we do, good PMs do trade-offs all the time in their heads without even realizing what they're optimizing on, and what we're optimizing on is value. We're actually trying to enter the maximum, net present value of whatever the investment is of the project. That's where...

0:13:35.4 KL: And that's what we should be optimizing on.

0:13:37.8 MH: Should be.

[chuckle]

0:13:38.7 MH: Yeah. And so that's the whole reason the triple constraint exists. It's a thing to optimize so that we can maximize value and that's where the Steven Devo ideas on how to apply critical path scheduling methods but tied to scope and cost, to actually give us something optimal. And by the way, if you're not familiar with that and you don't have time to go research at all, I'll give you one quick rule of thumb, everyone, and maybe this ties back to our topic here, April. If you just ask a question, what would it be worth to be a month earlier than whatever the current schedule has us? Okay, if that's \$1 million, should we spend an additional 50K to accelerate by a month? Usually the answer would be yes.

[chuckle]

0:14:18.7 MH: There may be external trade offs that we're not considering, but that seems pretty straightforward, like 50K to get a million. Great. Well, like April said, we don't really ask these questions.

0:14:26.5 KL: I like the point about the Oppenheimer book, to put that in there is what would you do to end this war? I mean they felt that was their mission was to end the war at some cost and presumably other people's cost. So what would we do to do that, to accelerate that? And so I think that's really interesting in that context. But as we go get ready to go down that path though, I wanna go back to what you're mentioning about the professionalism too 'cause I think you just hit on it. Because to me we have an industry problem in here underneath it that I would alert our PMs to. And we know it's true for a lot of us anyway. I think to the extent that we learned how to do these things, then it becomes easy to teach these things, which makes it easier to certify in these things, which makes it easier to show that I'm doing these things.

0:15:08.4 KL: And so back to the worst possible thing you can do and as a person, as an owner of a company, I'm out, I have to be outcomes focused and when I'm not, I lose, which happens a lot, right? But that's the goal, is to be around this value. What we end up doing is measuring inputs or activity and particularly in my government space, we spend a lot of time measuring activity. Did

you do these things? And I think the professionalism argument makes that even more naturally compelling to say, what do you mean? I've learned all these things. I'm certified, I know there are 93 steps in five phases and I'm doing those things and they take this long and we should take this long, et cetera, et cetera. And so I think one of our downsides is that our professionalism, we end up professionalizing on the method and not the outcome. We certainly don't get certified on have you ever delivered a project that had more value than when you started? That is never a requirement in your PMP audit.

0:16:10.1 MH: But it ties right to what we're here to ask April about today, in fact...

0:16:13.8 KL: Yeah, take me back.

0:16:14.9 MH: As we are preparing for this session, April, you said something that I found really insightful and I wonder if you could expound on it and that is, we might have outsourced too much to the PM and change management professionals, and we as leaders might have actually allowed some of those muscles to atrophy or maybe we never developed them.

0:16:31.1 AM: Yeah. And so we joke about it's a danger for what you outsource. Some things you can easily outsource. Around your home, you can outsource mowing the lawn or cleaning the toilet. The lawn doesn't say I missed you on Saturday morning and the toilet doesn't say that was our quality time together on Thursday evenings. So you can outsource those and get that done. That's great. There are certain things you shouldn't outsource, like hugging your children maybe, they'll get the hug but not from you and they won't grow the relationship. Same thing with leaders. If you outsource having somebody come in and rally your organization to the change, you've missed an opportunity to lead them and you can't get that back. And we see that sometimes as leaders try and outsource to the consultant or the junior leader or whatever else, the leadership of a change, they become personified with that relationship. They build that relationship with the organization and not the leader. And there's certain things you just can't outsource, like focusing your organization on making the trade-offs to get the results of a major project or leading change.

0:17:40.5 KL: I wanna clarify what you meant by outsource. You guys are using as a label or I hope you are, because we don't actually mean outsourcing entirely. We mean as a manager of multiple projects, I have assigned, I've hired or I have internally two change managers and five project managers and I've said, go do those skills that you're also good at. Let me know how it's going and I'll measure the wrong dashboard. I think that's what you mean. We've outsourced it from my brain to the...

0:18:03.8 AM: From my brain, from my body, from my presence.

0:18:06.0 KL: From my experience.

0:18:08.6 AM: Yeah. Not just of paying somebody else but a transference. If you had your trainer do sit ups, you won't get better abs. And the danger when you in... We wouldn't think of that with a personal trainer. We know if we don't show up at the gym, we don't get stronger. But we treat change managers and program managers and project managers more like they can do the sit-ups for us and we'll get the benefit.

0:18:36.0 KL: Really like about this, Mike, from our perspective, from our years together, we've

been focused on how getting the PMs associated to the bigger question of value, and program managers, and product managers and we're going through all that, which I don't think is wrong. This is almost like reverse lens, which is the managers who actually own the question of value have outsourced the mechanics of getting there, had relied on the skill sets of others to get them there, but they've forgotten how to get there, so they've atrophied in their skill set about what to observe that causes change. It's a dependency question to me. What causes the outcome? What do you observe the manager? So one is they don't have the right conversations, it sounds like you said, trade-off conversation?

0:19:15.3 AM: Yeah, the trade-off conversation, there's also this distance. I can sense it immediately by the distance between the leader and their organization. So if somebody says, "My leader came out last quarter and talked to us," I'm automatically suspicious. Now, that doesn't mean that the leader has to be down in the details with the organization all the time, but it is this sort of sense of how far away are they from what I'm trying to do, and how disconnected or mediated am I from them. So it's all right, and this is very typical to say like, "The senior executive is off handling client meetings focused on the strategy, and they're relying on me to get these tactics done." That's a good way of talking about it. But if it's, "Well, I saw the executive a quarter ago and they mentioned it's still important, so I'm working over here," you can already even hear in the language, a distance. And in that distance is a disconnect. I call it delamination oftentimes. If we assume the layers are together, what I tend to hear is this widening of that gap.

0:20:24.9 AM: And the danger is, is if it gets wide, and I'll admit, I don't have a scale for this, maybe that's a tactic I need to build, an exact scale for how far is the distance, you get problems. Because the assumption is, "Well, I hired the PM to do it." And the worst part is, is that the wider that gap gets, the more the change managers and program managers and project managers turn on themselves and their tools to compensate for the gap. But those tools don't solve the gap, and that's what I think Mike and I are talking about, is what has been that room that you have to heal, close back up between a leaders' aspirations and their actual day-to-day behaviors? And that's what we call this aspiration ability gap. And so you can see that in organizations where they've got a lofty strategy, and you go, "Great. What are the three you are doing every day to make that happen?" And they say, "I hired somebody, I said, and I reminded." And you're like, "Oh, danger, danger, danger, danger," and they're not doing.

0:21:25.7 MH: Oh, and as part of that, I bought that tool.

0:21:28.4 AM: Yeah.

0:21:28.9 MH: So it's like because I expended money, which is scarce and I don't have unlimited budget, so if I'm gonna make a choice on where to spend money, that proves I'm serious, right?

0:21:37.4 AM: Right.

0:21:38.7 KL: You said something nice to me earlier, April, but I'm gonna morph it. You said people confuse wanting change with actually doing the change. The difference between wanting it and accomplishing it, I think we can actually take this bigger than change management conversation, 'cause ultimately, all of it's change. We're trying to cause something to be better in the future than it is now so we can stay in business and we can stay on mission, so we can cause things to happen. I think people confuse wanting to have performed value with actually doing the work of

executing things to create value. And your point I'm hearing in there is the management role is to not be delaminated from that, is not to have been peeled off from it. Am I reading that part right?

0:22:15.7 AM: Yeah, potentially. I think there is always that risk of confronting your future self. You can talk about this with like weight loss. Everybody's gone through this, and we can each admit to our different issues with it. I would like to be this weight, but at night when the ice cream is beckoning, I make accommodations. We all have those aspects. But when you see... If we go back to organizations, when you see the really successful leaders, the ones who've broken the status quo, who've achieved remarkable value and seem to be able to navigate through uncertainty and come out better, you find people who stayed connected in ways which didn't rob agency from the levels below them, but also never allowed themselves to be delaminated. And my two go-to examples that I always talk about are Admiral H. G. Rickover from the Nuclear Navy, and Andy Grove from Intel, who could write about how they were taking actions to maintain connection and discipline both to the work and also to the middle layers of people achieving that work. So they could trust you and rely on you and allow you to go after that outcome, but there was never a question that it was their outcome still too.

0:23:35.8 AM: And Rickover talks about this. There's a great documentary, I think it was on Amazon Prime for a while, about Rickover. And there's a vignette in there where he talks about responsibility. And he was making an argument that you could share responsibility. Let's say I'm responsible for valves in the nuclear reactor and you're responsible for safety, we could share responsibility, but we could never reduce our share by sharing it, and that was a key thing he brought. He was ultimately 100% responsible, and each of the people who worked for him were 100% responsible, and that allowed for that glue to stay stuck, which allowed for unbelievable results. They got from idea for nuclear power to the Nautilus underway in five years.

0:24:23.9 KL: Wow.

0:24:24.0 AM: Who could do that that fast? Even Elon can't even move as fast as Rickover moved in the 1950s.

0:24:30.0 KL: We can't find things on SharePoint in five years. One of the things from one of the areas that I've studied some in this requisite organization area, which has some flaws, no doubt. But part of it is interesting is it helps tease that apart. You can share responsibility, but you can't share accountability. And accountability is the part that is owned by you for outcomes. So Rickover owned an outcome and has ways of getting there and you can share those, and I think that's it. Now, you said something interesting in there that sounded like parenting, actually. And I don't wanna infantilize organizations with the professionals in it, but this idea of engagement but allowing agency, isn't that... All three of us happen to have children, I know. Isn't that part of what we struggle with as those who are raising others to help them achieve in the case of, again, I don't really mean to make this a family, but it is still just to a different goal, which is how can I work with an organization to get it engaged enough and yet still have agency? And as it changes, that requirement may shift.

0:25:29.6 AM: Yeah, and we can take off the infantilization piece by just saying, in respecting each person's dignity and their capability and their potential, you set boundaries and you set supports, and then you iterate, and designed in real time. I would love it if I could set these boundaries, but you violated them, or a situation has changed and I have to reduce those or expand those, and it's a

dynamic interaction. And go back to this professional notion of PM and change management, it seems like there's an assumption that the professional hasn't done their job if it's dynamic. Like, you haven't controlled the knots, if it's too dynamic. Instead of saying, "Okay, the ship is right, but the sea is unruly," how do we right the ship within the unruly sea instead of saying, "Everything on the ship is also unruly." There's a balance and a metaphor there, and I'm probably mixing it up a little bit, but that's how it comes to my mind.

0:26:30.0 MH: Well, I think you nailed it, actually, because you're talking about the environment, the environment's tumultuous. And yes, we have to design things, like in this case a ship, to handle that tumultuous environment. The ship needs to be stable in that tumultuous environment. But the fact that sometimes environments get more tumultuous than we planned also happens, and now we have to figure out how to make do. So I'd love it if you could comment a little bit on that, April, where you've seen tumult be a bit more than we might have thought and now we have to maybe take bigger, bolder actions to try and keep things stable.

0:27:04.5 AM: Well, my classic one from my experience was when I started my career, I started as a nuclear engineer for the US Navy, a civilian, and I started six weeks before September 11. So I came into a shipyard which was designed around a stable post-Cold War workload, and six weeks later, the world was upside down. And especially for the Navy, the demands on the fleet went up. The number of ships stayed the same. You can't react with ship numbers that quickly. And so we had to take that tumult within the shipyard. And it was fascinating to see who stretched and who broke, what processes stretched and what broke, and what behaviors maintained their stability throughout that. And that's where I really loved and fell in love with the lessons from Admiral Rickover in the Nuclear Navy, which is, you've had a Nuclear Navy since the early '50s, running nuclear power plants around the world, often with 18 and 19-year-old operators, young sailors. And we lost the Thresher... What? Was it 60 years ago in April and one other after that? But otherwise, we haven't. How amazing? Because the system is resilient in teaching that accountability and responsibility and individual behaviors that don't allow the delamination to occur. But that's a rare organization.

0:28:40.5 AM: The topple rate of organizations on the top of the Fortune 500 is going faster and faster. They're falling at a faster rate and staying on top a shorter amount of time. And I'd argue that's because we don't have the... Let's go back to the workout metaphor. We don't know the core strength that we used to, maybe, when people couldn't outsource or contract in for or rely on others to do the strategy thinking for them, the execution of projects for them, the change management for them. And we should be better if we can differentiate and bring our super powers together, but we have to be careful what it weakens.

0:29:20.5 KL: You think they're toppling because they're sclerotic and are not adapting, and therefore they're toppling? To me, I was gonna read that algebra in the opposite direction, which is, to me, that's indicative of faster external... More external forces that actually are more vibrant in the market now. You can't get away with being the best practices. You have to be better than the best practices. And those change rapidly as those become inculcated into the system, incorporated into the system.

0:29:49.2 AM: I think you need to be able to understand who you are enough to be able to adapt yourself to the changing conditions and still thrive. I mean, isn't that the story of... Forgive me off the top of my head, but I thought that was the story of like where... Was it Nintendo that started out

as like a card company, a playing card company?

0:30:08.3 KL: Mm-hmm.

0:30:09.0 AM: Right? And is constantly adapting and transforming. And the Mario movie just came out and was a huge hit. That's a bit about understanding who you are at the core and then adapting to conditions. As technology changes, what can we do to leverage that and be more of ourselves in this next stage? That's not the typical behavior I see. I see more of the, "How can we make the world stop changing and the things that I care about?"

0:30:36.7 KL: So what we're catching here is, is that we're not seeing enough of the change that people know they actually want. And so it's not about a discussion about people resisting change or whatever is, that we know we need to change, and we may have professionalized it, or an extreme version of just professionalize it, and therefore, we outsource. We put it in a box and we move it away from us. And so as a manager responsible for value, I've lost control of the mechanism. And I'm trusting the mechanism, but don't know how it works anymore. And so the argument would be, I should know how my... I remember my dad talking, "I used to be able to fix my car, son," because I understood how it worked. I might not have all the tools or whatever, but at least I had it. Now, we don't even get it. You open it up, there's a computer inside. Right?

0:31:15.5 MH: Yep.

0:31:16.2 KL: And it's beyond some of my mechanics, too, I've noticed. [chuckle] And so we moved to different places with that. So there's something about having outsourced it and allowing the atrophy of skill, the atrophy of knowledge, the atrophy, I'm gonna argue one step farther, you tell me if you agree, of attention, which is another way to speak to your delamination problem or novice that you saw. So to me, to kinda get us back on this track with this, is we're losing the execution properly. Part of it's to this professionalism and outsourcing, but part of is we're not executing, or is it? Are we seeing executing and just measuring the wrong thing, or... How can you speak to your own experience with the execution of change?

0:31:55.9 AM: I would say that we're often measuring against what I call the status quo rubric. And what that is, is it's a lot of these activity markers and prestige markers that we've used that stand in for results. So for example, an executive team decides they want an initiative. Step one is to give it a glorious name, some code name. The cooler the code name, the better the project, is the assumption. Step two is to build a program team. What executive will be in charge of it? How many people will report to them? How many business analysts? How many PMs? How many change managers? And the size determines how valuable it is to the organization, which is, oddly, inverted. It should be probably small and mighty, but it's not, it's the bigger, the better. The bigger the budget, the bigger the program team, the better it must be.

0:32:50.4 KL: An organization should be no bigger or no smaller than it needs to be to produce value. Not one person bigger or smaller.

0:32:57.2 AM: Right. But the incentive structure is to build an effect, an initiative empire, because we measure initiative, importance and longevity by how big they are. So then you get the bigness, so then you get the meetings, right? And the meeting structure begets the meeting structure. If you've ever seen somebody come in with a, "Oh, we're happy to help you with that program. It'll

take you 40 swim lanes." "Oh, like, really?" "Here's the first 200 meetings we need to hold." And I've seen this go up exponentially, because there's an assumption of the more activity, the more value. That's the status quo rubric. And so people then are measured by, "Did you come up with an elaborate project plan? Is it a 100 slides?" If your program is run on a PowerPoint of 100 slides, it must be important. And all of that is just activity, 'cause none of that is results. Now, contrast that with an acceleration rubric, which would say more about what is the goal? How can we make a measured increment of value towards that which preserves our optionality?

0:34:03.2 AM: This is the design thinking in the future. So I make a step forward, but I don't foreclose a pass by that step. That's a lot of active thinking. In a higher order of performance, how do I get volunteers so excited? So I run it on this internal power versus just budget poured in. That's where Kotter talks about with Accelerate! And that's where the supercharger is. And that's what you see organizations just destroying their competition in terms of how fast they can innovate, how fast they could bring things to market, how fast they can do A/B testing, how much more mature they are with their infrastructure, which allows them to do that. I think it's always funny when you find organizations that wanna do leading edge stuff on antiquated infrastructure. "I wanna get to Mars too." "Here's a bicycle." Like, SpaceX is gonna beat you, 'cause they have the Dragon rockets. And now they've got the new stuff, and I'd get a bicycle. They're gonna beat me. But we have an elaborate program called Exodus 7 or something, but it's bicycle-powered space travel.

0:35:13.8 MH: So you got me thinking a couple of different levels here, April. One is, we have a, can't outsource our push-ups and expect to get stronger. And there are certain things we as leaders, we might have thought that that's a good thing to hand to someone else, and I've got people for that, and I'm a good delegator, and I... Don't worry, I check in with them, but there is this delamination. I love that word. That should be a standard word, 'cause you really kinda have this picture of just... In fact, there's a word in Spanish, Tejado. Like, completely just slammed up against each other, un-removable, we can call it laminated here, I guess.

0:35:46.2 MH: But I also wonder, given what you just said about, we'd throw size at it because then that shows some level of importance. If we're spending this much of the company's resources on it, it must be important. If we're not spending a lot of money on it, well, maybe it's not as important as the things that are getting all the money. There actually is sort of a weird logic to it, but I wonder if the logic is more like a medieval knight that's going to battle with just too much armor. So now, they're protected against all sorts of things that might happen, all sorts of eventualities and tumult, but they're so big and heavy and slow, and then the suit is so hot, they're not gonna be effective at actually fighting.

0:36:26.9 AM: I would love that if we were actually getting some protection from all of this stuff. But in effect, I see it as just making us weaker. So it isn't that it even protects, it might actually make us weaker in battle, all of this. So what you find oftentimes is while an organization spending a year to do their planning on their five-year program, because the first year is planning, their competitors have tried 10 things and are nibbling away at their market share is not devouring it. And an organization run by the status quo will never even notice until it's too late, because they're focused on process, not results. And when the process fails to pay off, they'll blame the professionals. They won't learn, so they'll do it again, with a new crop of professionals, who are happy to come in and bid for the five-year plan, and that's where the topple rate comes in.

0:37:27.2 MH: Okay, let me challenge you on something you just said there. So often we hear this

dichotomy is presented as, are you a results-oriented or process-oriented, and of course, the right answer, like if you're in a job interview is results-oriented, because I care about results, but of course, like delivering a massive project on time is an effect of how well the work flows to completion, which can't really be done well, unless there's a good process. So...

0:37:54.3 AM: Right. Minimum viable bureaucracy though, not process for prestige. Not process for...

0:38:02.7 MH: For process sake. [laughter]

0:38:04.0 AM: High compliance to the old status quo. I mean, how many times have you seen, and this was always classic with like Lean implementations, the Lean office that would run Lean implementations was often the most bureaucratic of any organization in the organization, you had to do the spaghetti diagram, then you had to do 5S, then you had to do... Before you could get to the part of actually delivering value, it's an infection which corrupts in all disciplines, where you become more obsessed with your discipline than why you exist. And that's the humility mixed with professionalism that I've always cherished when you find it, that practitioner that master practitioner who knows when to comply and when to break the rules, but that requires a height of professionalism which goes past the process level to the mastery level. And because we have the certification the framework is often its compliance is the pinnacle instead of mastery, and I think...

0:39:07.9 MH: That makes sense and I think the SpaceX example, maybe is a good one to return to here, because we don't even know what we're doing, we don't have the infrastructure, we're not equipped, and I give you a bicycle, I'm not gonna get to Mars, so even there, I could say, "Well, I'm results oriented. I don't worry about all the infrastructure." Well, no, you need to figure it out. And in fact, what SpaceX did is it said, not only are we gonna build a rocket, but in order to make this routine, we have to drive down the cost per pound to low earth orbit, and the only way to do that, that I can tell is to make the Rockets reusable. So everything was, how might we make this big and powerful, but also reusable?

0:39:46.5 MH: And everything was around that, and that outcome was... You could ask the janitor in the hallway, they will tell you exactly, that we're trying to reduce the cost per pound to low earth orbit, and of course that won't get us to Mars, that's just step one, right? Once we can make this something that we don't only have NASA and some Russian space agencies do, and everyone else is sort of chipping in some money to help, this can become routine and we can build on it at scale, and we can really achieve great things. So even if you're not a big believer in the whole Elon Musk, we're all destined to be a multi-planetary species, or we should aspire to become that, everyone at SpaceX has to buy into it. And if they don't, you kinda wonder why they're there, right?

0:40:25.2 KL: Well, you're hitting on something when we talked about execution in this space, I recently listened to a podcast around that and got to hear an author speaking, Jennifer Pahlka, she wrote a book called Recoding America: Why Government Is Failing in the Digital Age and How We Can Do Better, and it's specific to... She gives examples, she was working in, originally in the Obama administration around the Health Care Portal and other digital efforts that we've started and continue on through the last administrations, all of them. And her point is the government fails in execution is her book, so much of it was stuff that had considered years before, but she got to see it from a senior level and put it in there so I can't say I'm positive enough about it. Issue one is, we don't execute properly, but something that hits here is she's talking about the government as a

fundamentally compliance bureaucracy, so where I'm going to make it broader is it's a question of What culture do you have as a manager, it gets to the delamination sense.

0:41:21.9 KL: Am I going to stay close enough to get the value out of these expertise by making sure though that we're not checking boxes that I'm told I should allow to be checked, that we did hire someone to do the process, which is okay, but the question becomes compliance. And what she highlights in the book is every idea, starting from congressional staff level, by the time it gets to where an actual employee of the government works with an actual citizen, my experiences with people like in the Forest Service or the VA, when they're actually interacting with someone in a forest somewhere, right? They are so burdened by every possible idea that was put on the checklist or the activities or the outputs, because of a compliance culture that says I never got in trouble for doing all of the parts, even if X disaster happened or X problem for a citizen happened, but I could get in trouble for rationally choosing the trade off which is where I think you started at the top, April, is like even at the individual level, as an individual PM or a manager of PMs, I need to be having a conversation that keeps us focused on getting something of meaning, of value, we might say, of what I'm supposed to do, which I think incorporates the process, but it becomes...

0:42:34.1 KL: So what I took from her book besides yes, it's everything I ever thought about the government in a lot of ways, but more broadly is it's a question of culture. Do you have a culture of, Show me that you did it, and that's something we can all choose to take away from this, I think, as project managers and as managers. And I urge everyone to go and read the book or read the extract or hear her talk about it, 'cause she tells some great stories that I also experienced the exact same ones, I mean it's very true. I observed all of those things. And it's about a culture of compliance that I think makes us say I wanted to do better, but what gets punished around here, what gets promoted around here, and that's a manager's decision, which I wanna take to what I wanted to hold back and consider when we talked about that, as well as this delamination at the outsourcing of some of our skills, which I think we needed to do. I'm gonna argue that a lot of managers actually didn't know what was valuable anyway, what we've done... I wanna flip your argument around a little bit, now, this is cynical of me, but it sounds like we used to have managers that understood it all, but then it got overwhelming in the outsource and they have given away their brain and now they've at your feet on or how it really works.

0:43:40.7 KL: So they can't connect it to the value they have, I'm gonna argue that a lot of middle managers actually never understood the value question to begin with, and what happened is the tide just ran out and they're standing there shivering. And so now we're wanting to... Mike, you and I have gone another path that the PMs had better learn what the value is, or the product manager of the program manager, as we wrestle with all those terms and definitions, I see this all as a challenge to managers. Don't delaminate, actually know what's going on and do your job, 'cause that's where I get frustrated. It's not the benighted PM, It's the managers that we're saying should know better. Yeah, that may be unfair, but I'm wondering if the tide went out and they got caught going, "Well, I don't really know what causation is around here, what causes something to be better."

0:44:25.8 AM: There's a great Martin Luther King Jr quote that I love to use, and he talks about the tide does not remain at flood it ebbs, and over the bleached bones and jumbled residues of failed... I'm getting it slightly wrong, failed efforts is written the words too late. And so you can look that one up, I got it slightly wrong there, but it's a great quote about that tide in the affairs of man does not remain at flooded ebbs, and that's what we are confronting, is if you don't learn how to do things with little you won't succeed with plenty. If you don't learn how to do things with a week, you won't

succeed when they give you years. And unfortunately, so many folks never got practice at what can you do with nothing in a week, to what can you do with this huge budget in a year. And that's I think our opportunity in training program managers and change managers is to train them with little so they can succeed when they're trusted with more. That's actually a better training pipeline than to teach them all these things as though all the resources and all the time and all the cooperation is there, and then they can confront the real world where that isn't true.

0:45:44.3 KL: Then I think, and I'm thinking a lot about Mike here, who's helped me, and I want our listeners to think about this. I just ran across this in a bid. So let me go with what you have said. The manager, the client owns, saying, "Keep your eye on the ball, the outcome, the value I need," but then I want to ask them, then don't give me a target, give me a direction, 'cause if you're only gonna give me a week, you're not gonna get a year's worth of effort, you're not gonna get 52 weeks of effort, you're only gonna get a week. The key is to make it value. So I had one that freaked me out, they asked for change, you're gonna do a lot of good things, build the strategy, do all the wonderful things. You have six months. All that's legit. Super cool. Give us your technique. All that's great, but then they said, we expect... We want the answer that gives minimal meetings with us. Not... Hold it, I feel their pain. I feel their pain, but then I was like, "Yeah, but you set the marker at..." They have this thing that they think in their mind is the strategy, well, back to accountability. I can own the responsibility, I can take that on 'cause you've contracted me for it, but I don't own the outcome you want.

0:46:50.9 KL: So I can just imagine these folks having a kick-off meeting and saying, "You get two quarterly meetings, good luck with that, give us what we want, or we're gonna make you bad," so what I'm after I wanna extend what you're... And that's not what they were saying necessarily, but... We wanted to sort this out 'cause I feel their pain, but on the other hand, I'm like, "Well, if you don't give me the information about what you view as valuable, I don't know how to hit the target," we're back to how big is a fish. Right? And is this the right rock? Fetch the rock.

0:47:19.2 MH: Or I would Go further and say, it violates April's lamination rules. It's basically saying, I don't want to engage.

0:47:27.5 KL: Yeah, there you go it was the lamination thing. So let's tie this together then on that, it seems like the manager should set... Mike might help me see clearly, and I use this, by the way, Mike, this is painful for people. I have been stunned to find us out in various environments, you set targets or structures to learn how to think through the problem, and then people get nervous when you're showing them missing targets, and I've actually signaled, it's not about the target or the gap, it's about what you did or what you got. What happened in each of these steps. I think that's a hard management tool, and I... Back to, I think the problem is with the managers, not with the experts they hire, although the experts will default to their processes no doubt. And so to your thing, what can you do within a week, but I would like to know... I think what Mike told me is watch the signals. What direction are we going and how much did we get? Not, you have to not do this, and I'm only giving you a week...

0:48:24.0 AM: Yep.

0:48:26.0 KL: I think is a better way to approach the management side of it, I remember I'm certainly finding that it motivates people more to the following head and point the day and ask to go back and actually not do a performance review, but our variation on it, let's check in and not

because I need a performance review and no one's ever told me, but it's like I wanna orient myself towards the goals that we laid out at the beginning of the year, and I'd gotten overwhelmed with the process of it. He asked me to pull up his performance structure to have that as a conversation for how we will re-orient it both of us for next week, and I felt very happy by that. I don't know if that's right, but it felt right that I have an employee inviting review, because we're on the same page about our need and we don't even have really targets, it's about are we accomplishing that did we hit the goal.

0:49:16.9 MH: And you're sending each other signals, and April taught me some really cool... I forget what the model was called, April, was some sort of dynamic change model, where if you do a bunch of the wrong things early, you kinda see the gap widen and your probability of success get lower, but if you pay attention to the right signals that actually can kinda kick in some of the accelerators, then you're off to the races. Could you comment further on that 'cause I thought that was brilliant.

0:49:38.8 KL: Yeah let's talk about those accelerators. Give us some instructions for our listeners to take away.

0:49:41.0 MH: And the signals. What signal should we be paying attention to?

0:49:46.2 AM: Well, and I think we're wrapping up here in a few minutes, so...

0:49:49.2 MH: But give it to us.

0:49:50.7 AM: I think the key thing's to watch for or how are people showing up and who is showing up, that's one of the key things to watch for. So many people start out their initiatives with who they invite, instead of who fights to get in the room. So that's a good indication of immediately, do you have the energy on your side or not. If by the third meeting you're having to remind people to attend, you're off to a poor start and you should re-orient. The next one is when people are offering ideas, are they offering ideas based on what they're willing to do or what other people should do, that gives you an idea of are people coming willing to do the work or excited to boss others around.

0:50:30.1 KL: 90% of all people surveyed believe somebody else ought to do something about this.

0:50:34.8 AM: Yeah. And then when you do go out and take your own actions, I went out and tried this, how did the environment respond and what did you do when it responded? When you find folks who go out and try something and the immediate response is negative, they have a tendency to revert and go back to bossing people around, which drives learned helplessness, which drives disconnect, which drives broken trust. But if you go out and you say, well, here's what I'm choosing to do, and people are curious, do you amplify that? Do you get them involved, do you invite them to join you and feed that energy? And so at each of these points, you can see this wave of the next opportunity and how it opens up more opportunity for you. First in that personal energizing, then in Where am I targeting my energy to get myself engaged, and then as I interact with others, does my energy pull people in or push people away?

0:51:31.9 KL: How does it feel when it works? Have you seen it working?

0:51:33.9 AM: It's outstanding. It's a natural high. What you get is a belief ripple that spreads. The example I had given everyone was a change agent is the story of the playground. We went from few people, if anyone, noticing that the playgrounds in our community were not accessible for children or adults with special needs, to first winning over the Parks Department and the Parks Board, and then winning over the community and at each iteration as we showed up and said, here's what I'm willing to do, will you join me? It fed itself. And so by the end, we'd present to over 100 groups, we'd gotten amazing grants, first out of 42 in our category, and we got the playground done in three years, not five. Everybody told us it would take five. It didn't. We said as soon as possible. And so that's the story I tell everyone was a change agent, and it's the best public example I can use to share with folks about that, and it felt outstanding.

0:52:35.9 KL: Mike, your thoughts?

0:52:37.5 MH: I just echo, I'm gonna join, I'm gonna be a cheerleader here and say, yeah, that natural high is real. I felt it in my own examples in life, which we don't have to go into now, but in my professional world as well as personal, like April mentioned. And that belief ripple is something that really does spread, and I'd like to think my belief ripples have spread to others, certainly yours are contagious, April. Kendall, I would say yours are too. Hopefully, this podcast that we as professional project managers can engineer a better world, I'd like to believe that's a belief ripple we've started here.

0:53:13.0 KL: And we continue.

0:53:16.0 MH: So I just wanna end on that high note. Be the one that generates belief ripples, you'd be amazed at the power.

0:53:20.2 KL: Well, I will close up with what I heard for people to take away with, and that was, I really like this word with Mike, I agree, the delamination, we have to be careful with delaminating. Managers that have allowed mediation, we gotta be careful with that, with the professionalism that they hire, outsourcing part of the process and not keeping it tied to what we're trying to achieve, and I would argue, making sure we know what we're trying to achieve. And part of this you talked about is solved by the human interaction of being connected without robbing agency. It was a certain level of dignity. Mike gave me the words on this, project managers that I use in both of the environments that I work in mostly, which is honor the work, is this idea that you're honoring the needs that people have and what they've performed. I found that to be helpful. Second thing I heard from you is the status quo rubric versus the acceleration rubric. It's basically how you frame this and go forward, the acceleration rubric drives to thinking about active thinking, so you don't close off future actions.

0:54:18.3 KL: And then signals, we talked about signals, and a lot of that, the three big ones you hit is attendance, yeah, who's showing up and why are they there? And I loved your book about talking about meetings, I'm thinking about all the change meetings I have, they are the people that accepted the invite or worried that something will happen that they didn't know about, not who's driving my change for me, who's helping me figure out the new ideas. Which is the second signal, accountability of new ideas. Who's coming up with activities for themselves versus others, where does that lay? And then the environmental response, how did the environment around you respond and can you amplify those responses that were positive? Who wanted to be there. And when you get that, you get your belief ripple. So that's one I got here at the end, how are you guys feeling

about that seem right?

0:55:00.2 AM: Love it. Yep. Love it.

0:55:00.6 KL: Yeah, we should publish a book. Oh, wait, you already did. That's right.

[laughter]

0:55:06.4 KL: I opened today's episode with a book that I'm reading now. Right now I consider a play that I read long ago, Hamlet. At the end of the famous, "To be or not to be," soliloquy, Shakespeare reminds us, "Thus conscious does make cowards of us all," because what he is saying is, we overthink things, getting in the way of our own flow. And he says, "And enterprises of great pith and moment, with this regard, their currents turn awry, and lose the name of action." PMPs, if you've listened to this whole episode, you have not lost action, nor will you lose a PDU if you go to PMI's PDU Reporting Center, swiping online or digital media and manually enter provider code number 4634 and select Empowered Strategies. And the name of this episode, PMPOV0111, getting out of our own way, and select Ways of Working in the New Talent Triangle. I am Kendall Lott getting out of your way and reminding you to keep it in scope, take action and get it done.

0:56:12.8 Announcer: This has been a Final Milestone Production sponsored by Empowered Strategies. Final Milestone.