



## Surfing the Waves

### *Managing Expectations in Evaluations*

By: Waldo Rochow, CEO, Capra International Inc.

---

*Prepared for the workshop entitled "Managing Expectations: Avoiding Conflict during the Full Project Lifecycle" facilitated by Capra International Inc. during the Seventh International Conference of the African Evaluation Association (AfrEA) in Yaoundé, Cameroon. The participants are Evaluation Managers and Evaluation Practitioners from across Africa.*

*The characters and organizations depicted in this Case Study are fictitious. Any resemblance to any real person or organization is purely coincidental. The scenarios presented are loosely based on Capra's experiences over 25 years.*

©2014 Capra International Inc. All Rights Reserved.

Reproduction in whole or in part is forbidden without the express written consent of Capra International Inc.

---

## 1. The Inception Phase

It was the 15th of April, 2010 and a commotion was underway in the headquarters of *Wise Guys Consulting* (see Appendix A). Olivia burst into Stephen's office and announced "Remember that proposal for *Better Planet People* (see Appendix B)? Well, it would appear we're still in the running. I just got off the phone with them. They told me that a choice of consulting firm was close to being made." "That's good to hear" replied Stephen, "We better review the RFP (see Appendix C) and proposal (see Appendix D) to make sure we remember what we proposed." On Monday morning of the 26th of April, Stephen and Olivia were meeting to discuss the company finances. Olivia wanted to undertake a marketing campaign to drum up some more business. Stephen didn't like the idea of spending more money at this time. The phone rang and Olivia answered it. "This is Paul Smith from *Better Planet People*, how are you today?" said the voice on the phone. "Mr. Smith, it's nice to hear from you. I am doing well." Olivia scribbled "BPP" on her note pad and showed it to Stephen. Mr. Smith continued, "Our review committee has completed its work, and I am pleased to tell you that they have recommended that we hire *Wise Guys Consulting* to conduct the evaluation of the *Water for All* programme." "That's wonderful news" beamed Olivia. Mr. Smith continued, "I will be sending the contract out by courier today." "If I remember correctly", Olivia said, looking at Stephen, "the first thing we need to do is visit you in London to meet your team. Let me look at my calendar." Stephen got the attention of Olivia and mouthed the words 'NEXT WEEK'. Olivia continued, "since we are already past the expected start date for this project, we could shuffle our schedule and be there next Tuesday." Mr. Smith cleared his throat, "unfortunately, we have our annual corporate retreat, and will not be able to receive your team until the 11th of May." Olivia rolled her eyes. Mr. Smith continued, "the good news is that when you get here all our other business will have been taken care of, and you will have our undivided attention. We should be able to really 'hit the ground running', as they say."

The meetings in London were for the most part uneventful. Mr. Smith introduced the WGC team to several BPP team members who have a familiarity with the programme. Then, on the third day, when the WGC team was ready to leave, Mr. Smith thanked them for their visit and said "there's one more little detail. The final report must be delivered by August 16th so that the management team can include its conclusions in a presentation they are planning for the 25th of August." This change in delivery dates, along with the late start concerned Olivia. However, their flight was going to leave in three hours, so she said, "this is an extremely compressed time line since we are already late getting started. I can't promise anything, but I will try to find a way to make it work, and I'll touch base when I'm back in the office." The whole flight back home, Olivia and Stephen debated how the evaluation could be completed in such a compressed schedule.

After a restless night, Olivia skipped breakfast opting for a coffee on the way to the office instead. When she arrived at work it was 5am, and Stephen was hard at work. Olivia joked with him, "did you even go home?" Stephen looked up, and before he could answer, Olivia saw his suitcase in the corner of the office and realised that he hadn't. Stephen leaned back in his chair and said, "I think I know how we can make this work. It will be tight, but if BPP reviews our inception report and approves it within a week, AND, if we only go to 16 sites in Joyland and 24 sites in The Republic of Happiness, we should be able to finish just in time." "I'm glad to hear it", said Olivia. "I don't have to tell you how important this client is to us. If we can make them happy, we'll likely get much more work. Now, go home and hug your wife. I'll start writing the Inception Report." Stephen sighed, picked up his suitcase and headed for the door. "Drive carefully", Olivia said, "I can't do this without you." Stephen laughed, "I'll see you this afternoon."

Olivia and Stephen worked through the Inception Report for the following week, each contributing parts such as the discussion of the challenges and the MS Project Gantt chart. Olivia was surprised to find out that Joyland was 2,500 Km away from The Republic of Happiness. "I thought they were closer together," she commented to Stephen. Stephen replied, "they are quite similar in most other respects. They are both among the least developed countries. Their capital cities are moderately developed, but some of the rural communities which we are expected to visit are so remote that access may be limited to four-wheel-drive vehicles, and even with them, some places just might not be accessible, other than on foot. Where our real challenge lies is with access to intended contacts in The Republic of Happiness during their annual *Summer Happyfest*." "Why is that a problem?" Olivia asked. "It's an informal national holiday that runs the entire month of July. During this time, virtually no work gets done. In theory, businesses and government offices are open during the morning, but in practice, after a night of celebrating, mornings get shorter as the month wears on." "Oh my goodness, no wonder the RFP requested that the evaluation begin in March," Olivia said. She continued, "Stephen, we also have to consider something else. If we arbitrarily reduce the number of villages we visit, will we still have the representative coverage required by the Statement of Work? What if we tell them we need to hire more consultants so that we can hit more villages at the same time?" "That's definitely an option," replied Stephen, "but our proposal was already at the top of their budget. Maybe we have to tell BPP that their target date is not attainable." Olivia nodded her head in agreement. "I think we have to recognize that our Inception Report will require at least a couple of drafts. We better present the client with all three options and get them to choose."

After working through the weekend, Olivia and Stephen sent the first draft of the Inception Report to BPP with a cover note explaining the reason for the three options and stressing the

importance of a speedy turn around. Olivia wrote: "With the late start to this evaluation and the changed completion date we must have your sign-off this week. We cannot do any work until then." Two days later, Mr. Smith phoned Olivia. "Thank you for your report. It looks good to me. Which option do you suggest?" Olivia replied "the end date is really not attainable. I suggest you tell your management team now that they will have to make their presentation without our report." Mr. Smith replied "that's not an option that we can accept. This programme is highly visible and there is significant political pressure. If I just accept the report as it stands, can you start working and we all do our best to make up lost time?" Olivia felt a headache starting.

## Group Discussion

1. How could WGC have handled the late start and early finish to manage expectations?
2. Is there anything that BPP could have offered that would have reduced the impact of the compressed timelines?
3. How should Olivia respond to Mr. Smith's final question?

## 2. The Implementation Phase

Olivia took a deep breath. "Mr. Smith, I'm afraid I need you to choose one of the three options. Each one will require a different team composition, each one also has different planning considerations, and the different composition of interviewees presented in options one and two will have an impact on the data collection instruments employed." Mr. Smith replied, "I understand. The budget is fixed, and my management team will not accept any delays. Send me a revised draft that includes the reduced number of village visits. Just promise me you will do your best, and who knows, maybe we can squeeze in a few more if we find the time." Olivia agreed. Her headache was now a full blown migraine. She called Stephen and shared the news. Stephen sighed, "the client is always right; let's get him that revision."

Mr. Smith sent his approval of the Inception Report at 4:55pm on the following Friday. Olivia called Stephen, "We got it." she said, "Do you want to start developing the data collection instruments now, or shall we start on Monday?" Stephen replied, "let's take the weekend off, I suspect that it will be our last break for some time to come."

Monday, Olivia spent the whole day back and forth with the travel agents trying to arrange for flights, rental cars and hotel accommodations. The team would have to travel on Monday, June 21, if they had any hope of getting the data collected before July. On Friday, June 18, Mr. Smith called Stephen, saying, "I showed your Inception Report to some external experts. They expressed some concern over the scientific rigor of our sample. They suggested that you also visit, in each country, at least one group of non-beneficiaries, who could not be served by the project for whatever reason, perhaps the distance or trouble with local approvals. This group will serve the purpose of providing some comparison data regarding the value of the programme." Stephen was shocked. He sat quietly, trying to avoid saying something he'd regret later. "Stephen, are you there?" Mr. Smith asked. "Uhm, yes," said Stephen, still trying to formulate his thoughts. "Mr. Smith, it's... uhm... a little late to be bringing us that request now." "Sure, but not impossible, right?" Mr. Smith pressed. "Well no, I suppose nothing is impossible. The only way that this becomes possible is if you extend the deadline. We have already developed all of our data collection instruments, and booked all of our travel. What you are proposing is to turn this evaluation into something resembling a quasi-experimental study. There is no budget or time for that." Mr. Smith sighed, "I

realise it will mean some shuffling, please see if you can't make it work." Stephen replied, "I can't imagine this being possible. Maybe if you send us an email with this request, Olivia and I will discuss it." "Great, have a good day, Stephen." Stephen walked into Olivia's office and slumped in the guest chair. As all the air escaped him, he said "I give up." "What's wrong Stephen?" Olivia asked. Stephen proceeded to recount the telephone exchange with the client. "Why did he call YOU instead of me?" Olivia asked. "I don't know," Stephen said, "Were you here all day?" Olivia nodded. Stephen continued, "well, we're gonna have to do something." Olivia took a deep breath, leaned back in her chair, and after a pause she said: "I think he was just fishing. BPP has guidelines about communications. If he sends us the request in writing, we will reply in writing. Until then, nothing changes. Let's not allow ourselves to get distracted. By the way, our visas came by courier today, here's yours."

The WGC teams arrived in both countries as planned. They proceeded to execute the work plans as designed. Since Stephen and Olivia were each overseeing the work in different countries they agreed to communicate by Skype at least twice per week. During one of these calls Olivia commented: "I just got another set of documents from BPP by email. This is really becoming unmanageable. Can we be expected to read an entire encyclopedia?" In frustration, Stephen replied: "There's no way of knowing WHAT they expect! Obviously, we'll have to make a list of the documents and prioritize them. If you don't have time, send them to our research assistant, Bill. I think he has some free time."

As Stephen finished his travels ten days later than Olivia, he went straight to the office from the airport to catch up. Walking into her office, Stephen commented "I've been up and down so much I feel like a Yo-Yo." Olivia started to laugh, then said, "if they had made Yo-Yos that looked like you, they would have never sold a single one." They both laughed. Olivia said, "do me a favour and get some rest with your wife. You've been on the road for over three weeks, and I don't want your wife to hate me." "Don't worry Olivia, she doesn't hate you, she just hates *Wise Guys*."

### **Group Discussion**

4. Did Olivia handle the discussion of scope correctly? If not, what might she have done differently to better manage expectations?
5. Stephen and Olivia handled the increase in scope by leaving it up to the client to put it in writing. Do you feel that both parties have the same expectations? How could this have been better managed by either party?
6. Is Stephen's comment that "*there is no way of knowing WHAT they expect*" accurate? What ways of knowing this might exist?

### **3. The Reporting Phase**

While Stephen was finishing up work in The Republic of Happiness, Olivia was back at the office reviewing the documents that came in during the site visits. When she and Stephen were back in the office together she handed Stephen one of the reports, saying "you need to read this report about the attacks of the 'Stand Against Development' (SAD) rebel group. They've been blowing up infrastructure projects across the country." Stephen read the abstract quietly then said "I wish I would have had this report before I started writing the data collection instruments, there's a whole area of risk identified here that I wasn't even aware of." "Nothing you can do about it now," replied Olivia. "We'll just have to make sure that we list this as a limitation introduced by the staggered

delivery of documents. On another subject, has Mr. Smith answered your questions about the format of the report?" Stephen replied, "no, not yet. I left him another voicemail message yesterday. We may have to just go ahead with our standard template and hope for the best."

At 11am August 2nd, Stephen walked into Olivia's office, saying, "I just sent the draft report to Mr. Smith. That gives us five days for him to review it and another five days for us to make changes." Olivia smiled, "that might be the best thing I've heard today. Why don't you call your wife and see if she can join us at *Chez Henri* for lunch; I feel like celebrating."

On the morning of the tenth, Olivia and Stephen just about knocked each other down as they were storming to one-another's office. "I see you read his email too," said Olivia, her hands shaking the printed email.

```
From: P.Smith@bpp.org
To: Olivia.Jones@wgc.com; Stephen.Bishop@wgc.com
Subject: Re: Submission of draft report
Date: 10 Aug, 2010 09:43am

Dear Ms. Jones,

Upon reviewing your draft report for the evaluation of the Water for All programme in Joyland and The Republic of Happiness, Better Planet People has found it to be lacking in the following areas:

1. The report structure is incorrect. The report should have followed the standard BPP template presented at www.bpp.org/standards/reporting.
2. The report fails to discuss the risks to progress associated with the rebel group SAD in The Republic of Happiness.
3. The number of villages visited did not provide adequate coverage.
4. Not having comparison villages hampers the scientific rigour of the study.

Please process the required changes as quickly as possible. As you know, the final report must be delivered by the sixteenth.

Kind Regards,
Paul Smith
...
```

"I told him we would consider the comparison villages, if he sent us the request in writing, which we had not received! Of course, there is no mention of them in the report," Stephen exclaimed. "Do you want to call him or should I?" Stephen asked. Olivia shook her head. "No, it is obvious that we can't leave this to a spoken exchange. I think we better reply in writing. I'll have to point out to Mr. Smith that the evaluation and the report have to be judged against the approved Inception Report and any written amendments, not against spoken exchanges." Stephen nodded his agreement, "I'll let cooler heads prevail. If you need it for reference, I have the BPP *Guidelines for Evaluations* printed out in my office. There's a section in there discussing the importance of the Inception Report and that it defines the marching orders for the parties." "Thanks," said Olivia, "I'll come by and get it in a few minutes; "I'm going to go out for some fresh air and to calm down."

## Group Discussion

Put yourselves in Olivia's and Stephen's place and identify in point form how they should reply to Mr. Smith's email.

# Appendices

## Appendix A: Highlight of the Consultants

Wise Guys Consulting Inc. (WGC) is a small consulting firm with four senior consultants that has been in business for 15 years. The founders Olivia and Stephen started the business after respected careers in The World Bank and UNICEF, respectively.

## Appendix B: Highlight of the Client Organization

Better Planet People (BPP) is a multi-national Non-Governmental Organization with an operating budget of US\$1.5 billion. The focus of BPP is to provide development support in some of the least developed countries.

## Appendix C: Highlights of the RFP

1. The programme being evaluated, *Water for All*, funds clean water development in 40 villages in Joyland and in 60 villages in the Republic of Happiness.
2. The average cost of installation of a water system in those countries is US\$20,000 per village.
3. The total budget of the programme is US\$ 2,000,000.
4. The maximum budget for the evaluation is US\$130,000, of which US\$ 40,000 is set aside for expenses.
5. This will be a summative evaluation
6. The evaluation will start on 31 March, 2010
7. The final report must be received by 1 September, 2010.
8. The programme is funded 75% by BPP, and 25% by each host country.
9. A random sample of 50% of the villages should be visited, i.e. 20 in Joyland and 30 in the Republic of Happiness.
10. The successful candidate will plan for a three day scoping mission to London, UK, to meet with BPP.
11. The work in each country will require:
  - a. a unique country-specific file, document and database review;
  - b. 5 Key Informant Interviews (KII) in the Capital City (2 government departments, the donor representative, the engineering firm managing the water installation/service in the country and 1 other stakeholder), 3 KII in each village (village government, local BPP representative, local water authority); and
  - c. 2 focus groups (FG) in each village (employer beneficiaries, household beneficiaries).
12. The work in the two countries must be similarly structured, which requires similar orientation/training for each group of local consultants.
13. The evaluator is expected to deliver the following:
  - a. Inception Report detailing the steps that will be undertaken;
  - b. Draft Evaluation Report;
  - c. Final Evaluation Report.
14. The draft evaluation report will be reviewed by a panel of external experts assembled by BPP.

## **Appendix D: Highlights of the Proposal**

1. WGC has assembled a team comprising of two senior evaluators and three local evaluators in Joyland and eleven in The Republic of Happiness.
2. WGC will evaluate both countries in parallel with site visits being distributed between the local evaluators, with the participation of one senior WGC in each.
3. The key informant interviews (KII) last up to one hour for the interview and 1.5 times to twice that for recording the evaluation results. This results in only 2-3 interviews per day.
4. The focus groups generally run for 1.5 hours and require 2.5 hours to write up. This results in 2 focus groups per day.



[www.capra.net](http://www.capra.net)

**Competence ♦ Credibility ♦ Community**