

On the Subject of Black Elephants ¹

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

10 June 2020

Ref: Pells, D. (2020). [Black Elephants and... maybe Project Management](#), PM World Journal, Vol IX, Issue VI, June

Dear David:

I just read your great editorial. Very timely, and well expressed!

Although not addressing their **root** causes, FYI I did work in the past -- *albeit after the fact* -- on a couple of notable efforts to help the government establish contingency plans for dealing with the aftermath of 'Black Elephant' events.

After the Great 9.2 Alaskan Earthquake & Tsunami in March 1964, I spent a few days with the President's Office of Emergency Planning (OEP) applying the **Critical Path networking methodology** to improve emergency response preparation. We developed a generic response plan that identified key activities, milestones, sequence constraints, and resources typically required to mobilize and respond to a disaster, then estimated lead times to acquire and/or pre-position them in various places for timely response. [*That was pre-FEMA – i.e. the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which wasn't established until 1978.*]

Subsequently -- in 1994/95 – based on their after-action experience with the 1989 Exxon accident in Valdez (also in Alaska) -- I conducted a similar pre-planning exercise with US Coastguard HQ officers and some oil industry executives to facilitate responding to future Oil Spills.

Now, twenty-five years later, I'm no longer involved, but -- *if the lessons have been learned and disseminated* -- contingency planning with CPM methodology should be standard operating procedure (SOP) for such Black Elephant eventualities. ***If not, it's time for others to retread the critical path!***

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¹ How to cite this work: Smith, K. (2020). On the Subject of Black Elephants, Letter to the Editor, *PM World Journal*, Vol. IX, Issue VII, July.