
DMITRII SELKOV

YOUR DASHBOARD *IS LYING*

RESTORING PROGRAM VISIBILITY
BEFORE THE DECISIONS YOU CAN'T UNDO



Even when nobody lies

A FIELD MANUAL FOR COMPLEX PROGRAMS

PROLOGUE—Every Workstream Was Green

The dashboard said the program was at ninety percent.

I want you to picture it the way the executives saw it, because the way the executives saw it is the whole point. A large company—I will call it Arden—deep into a technology transformation: something on the order of ten applications being implemented at once—some company-wide, some regional or departmental—integrated with each other, scheduled to go live in coordinated waves. Most of the workstreams were run by vendors and service providers, each under its own contract, each with its own team. The client had a program manager coordinating all of it. And the program manager had a dashboard.

The dashboard was well maintained. Every project on it was green—or, to be precise, the honest version of green you see on real programs: a few were “green-ish yellow,” one or two were a managed, explained, unworrying yellow. Nothing critical anywhere. A row of projects, a row of statuses, an overall readiness figure creeping toward ninety percent. If you sat on that steering committee, you saw a program that was nearly done.

Then the launch window approached, and someone asked the only question that ever matters at a launch window: are we ready?

And every single workstream said yes.

I am ready, said the first vendor. I am ready, said the second. Ready, ready, ready—down the whole line. Each of them was telling the truth. Each had done the work they were contracted to do, and could show it.

Everyone was ready. And nothing was ready.

The applications were supposed to launch as one coordinated system. What existed was a set of individually finished pieces that did not add up to a working whole. The failures were not inside any project—that is why no dashboard showed them. They lived in the spaces between the projects: in the integrations, the handoffs, the cross-system scenarios that every vendor could reasonably say were not in their scope. The arithmetic, once it finally surfaced, was brutal: for roughly ten green projects, there were roughly as many red statuses—none of which had ever appeared on any status report, because they lived between the columns, in seams that nobody owned.

The program went into crisis management. That is the point where I enter this story: my team was brought in to run the crisis. This book opens here not because of what we did next, but because of what we found when we arrived and started asking where things stood.

Every workstream was green. The program was failing in the space between them.

When we asked, in the wreckage, *who owns the space between these projects?*—the question had no answer. Not an evasive answer, not a bad answer. No answer. Why a well-run program could reach its launch window with that question unanswerable—and what it costs when it does—is a story this book will earn properly in chapter 5. For now, hold the fact itself, because the first part of this book is, in a real sense, the search for everything that was quietly wrong inside all that honest green.

I have spent more than twenty years inside large programs—as a program manager, as a crisis manager, as the consultant called in after the surprise. I have been the person maintaining the dashboard, and the person being reassured by one. That verdict—every workstream green, the program failing between them—is the most expensive sentence I know, and I have watched organizations pay for it again and again, in different industries, on different continents, with different software on the screen.

You are probably expecting me to tell you how the rescue went. I am not going to—and I want to be straight with you about why, because it sets the contract for the whole book. This story, as far as this book is concerned, ends at the diagnosis. Not every reality gap gets closed in time, and a book about honest pictures should not open with a tidy rescue arc it cannot generalize. What this story is for is the diagnosis itself, because the diagnosis is repeatable, and you can run it on your own program this week.

If your dashboard is green tonight, I am not telling you your program is failing. I am telling you that a green dashboard and a failing program can coexist—and that most of the management tooling you own cannot tell you which situation you are in.

This book is about learning to tell the difference. It cannot promise the difference will always show itself before the launch window; it can teach you where to look, and how to ask while asking is still cheap.

*The prologue ends where every failed program begins:
with a green dashboard and a decision that could not be
undone.*

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The four ways an honest picture goes wrong. The four
ways a room fails a decision even after the picture is
fixed. Three one-page instruments that run inside the
meetings you already hold. And the rule underneath it all:
Unknown is not Green.

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The three instruments, print-ready and free: pmeconsultingco.com/book
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