Speaking Truth to Power

BY: DR. ALEXIA NALEWAIK

About the Speaker

- Dr. Alexia Nalewaik is President of AACE International, Immediate Past Chair and Research Chair of the International Cost Engineering Council (ICEC), and a former Governing Board Member of RICS Americas.

- She lives in Washington DC, where she is a sole practitioner focusing on project analytics, cost management, governance, audit, and systemic risk.

- Alexia has recently published her first book, "Project Performance Review: Capturing the Value of Audit, Oversight, and Compliance for Project Success".

Definition

▶ **Parrhesia (Greek literature, 407 BC)**

▶ Describes the practice of speaking the truth, with connotations of candor, frankness, and boldness.

▶ Etymologically, it means "to say everything".

▶ Implies danger and risk, an act of courage, and a difference of status between the speaker and the audience.

▶ Serves a function of criticism and moral law.

▶ Practiced through critical preaching and provocative dialogue.

Professional Behaviour - Prescriptive

▶ Acting in public interest

▶ Protection of client moneys

▶ Avoiding deception and fraud

▶ Obeying the law

▶ Not accepting bribes

▶ Disclosing conflicts of interests

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Questionable Practices

Schedule

- Preferential sequencing
- Duration padding & compression
- Abusing project logic
- Frequent re-baselining
- Forced end date
- Misrepresenting status
- Delayed reporting of change
- Inappropriate use of constraints
- Multiple schedules

Cost

- Understating cost
- Overstating return on investment
- Underreporting forecasts
- Overstating percentage complete
- Shifting funds between cost codes
- Skewed plot of cash flow
- Delayed reporting of change
- Failure to document assumptions
- Underreporting risk

Professional Behaviour – Aspirational

- Truthfulness
- Independence, impartiality
- Due diligence
- Confidentiality
- Duty of care
- Sound judgement

- Critical questioning
- Protect the truth
- Report corruption
- Report misconduct
- Support whistleblowers

- Be courteous and polite
- Good conduct, both professional and personal
- Respect others
- Anti-discrimination
- Professionalism, dignity
- Do no harm

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Key Concept – Do No Harm

One of the oldest concepts in QS and engineering codes of conduct :

Do not cause injury to others (1887, 1909, 1922)

- Reputation damage
- Withholding resources or information
- Cutthroat competition and sabotage
- Mobbing, bullying, cliques, mean girls, and gaslighting
- Blacklisting, ostracism
- Lack of respect
- Unprofessional conduct

What Prevents Speaking Up?

- Expectations of obedience

- Lack of incentive

- No appropriate channel for conveying issues

- No psychological safety net

- Loss of income, livelihood, career

- Lack of independence

- Level of experience and confidence, courage

- Shooting the messenger

- Punishment for errors

- Lack of privilege

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What Enables Speaking Up

- Willingness to question authority

- Subjugation of individual needs

- Doing what is best for the project or organisation

- Open dialogue

- Strength in numbers

- Stakeholder champion

- Professional institutions' willingness to penalize members

- Company support for identifying ethics and behaviour issues

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Q&A