

The Vasa workshop – Solve the puzzle of the Vasa!

by Mattia Bianchi

On August 10, 1628, the Vasa, the most magnificent warship in the fleet of Gustav II Adolphus King of Sweden, sank down in the waters of the Stockholm harbor. It was during her maiden voyage! 53 of the 150 passengers died while the ship went to the bottom of the sea.

Immediately after the wreckage, a formal inquiry began with the goal of finding the persons responsible for this tragedy. However, after some weeks of investigation and hearings, the inquiry ended with no conclusive result as to the cause of the disaster and to the guilty parties. No one was punished!

Such ending did not please anyone in Sweden, and still doesn't! The equivalent of 3 trillion SEK today was burned out in few hours without anyone charged for that. Truth must come to the surface! This is what the Kingdom of the Sweden believes. For this reason, high representatives for the Kingdom have decided to re-open the case and, in search for experts, have charged you with solving the puzzle of the Vasa.

In the Vasa workshop, you will play the role of detectives. Thanks to the information that you will read in the reconstruction of the facts made by Harvard historians ("The Fate of the Vasa", Harvard Business School) and to your detective work performed by the side of the actual warship at the Museum, you will gather clues and evidence about what happened nearly 400 years ago.

Next, you will join a hearing to debate who shall be held responsible for the Vasa disaster: who is to blame? Presiding over the hearing as superior judge is a senior expert from the Vasa Museum, who will give the final verdict in the form of the Museum's view of the case, based on the latest research findings about the Vasa.

Finally, you will wear your manager's hat and reflect about how the Vasa's fate could have been avoided. What could have been done differently to turn the project into a success? Although the case is 400 years old, yet the lessons it generates are as relevant today as they were in the 17th century. In what can appear to be a historical curiosity you can discover typical modern issues and challenges posed by the management of innovation projects. We all work with projects and with demanding clients. What can you learn from the Vasa venture for the management of your own projects?