



Knowledge and Meaning through Visualization

The soul never thinks without a picture

—Aristotle

THIS ISSUE FEATURES A VISUAL DEPICTION OF THE ACADEMY of Program and Project Leadership (APPL). I imagine a variety of initial reactions to the drawing. One might be, “What is a cartoon doing in a magazine about project management?” Or perhaps, “Wow, nice colors—and fun.” Another may be to closely search the image for signs, symbols and meaning. Still another, to read a new level of innovation and creativity into the picture. Undoubtedly, some readers will raise questions about the cost.

Of course, any reaction is a sign of engagement. The stronger, the more energized the emotional and cognitive processing, the better. It is a sign of attention and interaction. For I’ve heard it said, “You only need to worry if they don’t care one way or the other.” So what is the point of the picture?

To stimulate interest, raise questions, promote discussion, and maybe raise a smile...That, at least, was my initial reaction when I was introduced to the work of Nancy Hegedus, who helps to create these drawings for Root Learning Inc. At the NASA PM Conference, I was first shown the work Nancy had been doing with the help of Goddard’s Knowledge Management Architect, Dr. Ed Rogers. I was immediately drawn into the power of visualization as a tool for more effective learning, communicating, and conveying complex knowledge concepts.

We need new tools in today’s world, where information and data overwhelms by sheer volume. There are articles, pamphlets, communications, and white papers—all aiming to convince and influence. Reactions to these tend to be either avoidance or mind-numbing, heavy-eyed consent; the message never registers or enters the soul. That’s one of the reasons that APPL’s Knowledge Sharing Initiative (KSI) has

turned to storytelling as a memorable way of transferring knowledge, inspiring imitation of best practices, and spurring reflection. *ASK Magazine’s* recent fourth birthday marks an important milestone in APPL’s continuing quest to provide ongoing support to project managers and to promote mission success.

And similar to storytelling, the power of visualization is receiving increasing attention in recent years as a way to stimulate engagement. Pictures and visual graphs are viewed as one of the most effective ways for displaying, describing, and generating discussion about quantitative and technically complex information.¹ Prototypes, models, and simulations are considered essential for stimulating innovation through open and engaging discussions.² There has also been extensive writing on the use of visual graphics, pictures, and cartoons to facilitate memory, creativity, openness, attention—and even well-being.

For many of these reasons, I am excited to have a colorful visual depiction of the APPL world included in *ASK*. Without the addition of text or slides, the intent is to invite people into the world of the APPL mission—as well as its products, services, customers, and partners—in a fun and engaging manner. As project leaders strive to find ways to encourage engagement, learning, and transmission of knowledge, traditional technologies are proving to be as valuable as modern technologies. (But for those who want more information in the form of texts and slide presentations, we certainly have an abundance of those as well.)

¹ Tufte, Edward R. 1997, *Visual Explanations*, Graphics Press.

² Schrage, Michael. 2000, *Serious Play: How the World’s Best Companies Simulate to Innovate*, Harvard Business School Press.