



No Time Like the Present: A Team Defies the Odds and a Plant Revives

A capital project team delivers dramatically ahead of schedule with new safety culture.



The Challenge

When a large-scale manufacturing complex shut down unexpectedly due to an incoming hurricane, the owner-operator faced a daunting series of challenges. Chief among them, a key facility that had to be upgraded before the plant could re-open. Originally the improvement project had been planned on a 27-month timeline, but the closure of the site and potential business repercussions made that time frame unacceptable. There were public and political pressures to get the entire operation up and running again with millions of dollars in losses stacking up every week.

A compounding factor was mechanical integrity, as the facility being upgraded had been damaged in an industrial accident. In addition to the mandate to get the work done as quickly as possible, it also had to be done in concert with the rollout of new work processes, safety standards, and contractor management guidelines.

The owner-operator turned over the \$250 million challenge to an Engineering Procurement Construction (EPC) contractor. The EPC firm agreed to take on a lump-sum contract with incentives tied to an extremely aggressive schedule with a comprehensive and highly ambitious scope of work. The project team was working against many odds, including stiff competition in the marketplace for craftspeople and managers. Many of the individuals and teams assigned to the effort were relatively inexperienced, especially for a project of this magnitude. In addition, there were legitimate concerns about cost overruns considering a high level of safety scrutiny that was likely to result in an expanded work scope.

The Work

The people involved were being called on to do something differently and at a pace that was unparalleled in the industry—with new levels of safety and budgetary vigilance. For months on end there were two intense, correlated onsite efforts: (1) ongoing sessions and communications to ensure everyone on the project was aligned on the prize as well as safety and budget imperatives; and (2) the heroic front-line work required 24 x 7 to put the facility back together again.

JMW was asked to support this high-risk, high-reward breakthrough endeavor. There was a mix of stakeholders coming together with many different perspectives and priorities—from the owner-operator to the various teams responsible for engineering, procurement, and construction. The work with JMW began with the leaders and key players from each stakeholder group. The goal was to align their thinking, behaviors, and actions around the unprecedented goal of rebuilding the facility in record time.

“We created a team stand behind our vision of getting things up and running again and doing it the right way. Right down to the foreman level and even rank and file, people learned to ‘speak to move the ball forward.’ They changed old habits and began to work proactively with one another, making sure that every day the project advanced, even—especially—when we encountered setbacks.”

Once there was sufficient alignment and cohesion amongst leadership of the integrated team, the work continued with people working on all aspects of the massive effort. This included leadership training that reached down to the supervisor level, as well as weekend sessions with the welders and pipe fitters who were putting in long hours on the front lines. The effort included rigor in terms of regular and candid updates about the progress being made onsite, safety metrics, and obstacles and issues that had to be resolved without delay.

Progress with the formidable project plan was accelerated as the work with JMW continued, and people working on all aspects of the undertaking became equipped to communicate and operate in new ways.



The Results

With this performance-driven approach—and much to the surprise of most observers—the project team delivered the rebuilt unit eight months ahead of plan, in line with all specifications, on budget, and at new levels of safety metrics. There were also additional wins in terms of human capital, with several of the new leaders in “stretch” positions going on to be senior leaders in their organizations.

Key results included:

- A 27-month project delivered in 19 months
- On-budget delivery despite expanded work scope
- Best safety score in the facility’s history
- Facility relaunched and millions in losses averted
- Customer global recognition award after successful start-up

By all accounts, what made these results possible was the new culture that was created in the work alongside JMW. With strong alignment on the integrated project team, commercial terms and motivations became secondary to the focus on a shared commitment to performance. To this day, people who worked on the project look back at it as a striking example of unparalleled success.

As the project manager recounts:

“This was a completely new way of working for the people involved. We created an extraordinary event. The biggest influence was how we learned to communicate at all levels of the organization, despite the many pressures on us every day. It was a remarkable thing. I’ve managed many projects since then, but there’s never been another one like it.”

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