
Worldwide Project Management Evolution¹

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BACKGROUND TO WORLDWIDE CHALLENGES IN PROJECTS _____

Project management has been in existence for many decades even before the formation of the Project Management Institute (PMI®) in 1969. In 1996, PMI® published the first version of the PMBOK® Guide. Today, we have the 8th edition of the PMBOK® Guide with input from thousands of project management professionals.

What many people fail to realize is that the PMBOK® Guide is, and always has been, just a guide for how projects should be managed. Every company worldwide can have their own interpretation on how project management should be practiced in their company and possibly even in their country. We also have a Standard for Project Management, and once again, companies have their own interpretation on how to use the information.

In most project management training courses, the information presented may be just general knowledge but customized for the specific needs of the participants, their companies, and even for the types of projects they may be asked to manage. What is usually not covered, and what is the intent of this article, is to identify some of the unusual or non-standard project management practices that exist in many worldwide companies that present special challenges and create a room for evolution. Most project management personnel may never encounter many of the challenges discussed here, but should be aware of their existence in many worldwide locations.

IMPORTANCE OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT TO EXECUTIVES _____

Most executives worldwide understand the importance of project management but have more of a cursory understanding rather than detailed knowledge of the best ways to implement project management practices. Executives understand that their involvement may be necessary, especially when required to function as a project sponsor, but often do anything possible to avoid sponsorship and prevent having their name associated with a project that might fail and damage their career advancement opportunities. As reflected in Figure 1, many executives may delegate the sponsorship role downward in the

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organization based upon the risk of the project and may even state that they do not want to hear any bad news.



Figure 1 – Identifying Delegation Opportunities

<https://pixabay.com/illustrations/delegate-hand-write-arrow-5140018/>

Executives worldwide understand the value of project management education but many refuse to attend project management courses because they do not wish to have the other attendees, especially lower-level personnel that might be in the room, hear the questions they might ask and the answers. In some countries, executives that plan on attending these courses often ask the instructor not to ask executives any questions during the course for fear that the executive might provide an incorrect answer and look foolish in the eyes of others in the class. This situation holds true even if the class is designed just for executives to attend.

In some countries, executives believe that project management maturity is based upon age. There is a mistaken belief that workers in their 20's and 30's are not mature or experienced enough to make all of the necessary decisions on a project. This belief exists regardless of the project management education the workers possess.

In many of these countries, including the United States, companies tend to assign functional managers as project managers on important or strategic projects. While this sounds like a reasonable approach, many companies have seen a significant failure rate in these long-term projects.

The long-term strategic projects are usually intended to support the growth of the organization. Unfortunately, some companies have stated that as much as 60 % or more of their strategic projects are not providing the expected results. The cause in many cases is based upon bonuses. The functional managers assigned to manage the strategic

projects often receive year-end bonuses based upon the performance in their organization or functional unit over the past 12 months. As such, they tend to assign their best resources to the short-term projects that impact on their yearly bonus and let the long-term strategic projects suffer with staffing based upon who is available rather than the best resources. The future is being sacrificed to support a near-term bonus.

THE CHALLENGE WITH MULTINATIONAL PROJECT MANAGEMENT _____

Most companies have a strong desire to expand their business internationally by selling their products and services to new clients in the global marketplace. Many companies struggle with the belief that they can manage global projects with the same approach that they manage domestic projects. This is quite frequently not the case and new challenges suddenly appear.

A company in the United States decided to expand their business by seeking out international clients. Contracts were awarded and the company started managing the projects with their standard project management approach. What the company soon discovered was that, in some of the countries where they were trying to expand their presence, the most important constraints on their projects were the country's culture, religions, and politics rather than time, cost and scope. This was a rude awakening and significantly altered the problem-solving decision-making processes on their projects.

In some cultures, workers are reluctant to share ideas, especially problem-solving, for fear of criticism by peers and managers. They believe there is less risk if they simply follow orders rather than express ideas. Tapping into the minds of a global workforce, especially with many diverse cultures, has become a significant challenge. When diverse cultures finally decide to express their concerns, there can exist significant disagreements on the direction of the project.

In the United States, as well as in other countries, there has been significant growth in identifying effective ways to engage team members at the start of a project. Failing to engage team members effectively and understand the needs of the workers can lead to toxic emotions, abuse of power, and asking workers to act in an unethical manner. Emotional leadership is essential when working with diverse teams that are expected to work together. Team members from different cultures and diverse backgrounds must be willing to communicate with each other.

On global or multinational projects with diverse project teams, such as reflected by Figure 2, even if all the team members appear to be actively doing their jobs, how do you determine if the project is headed in the right direction? This is extremely challenging, especially if constant collaboration with team members does not exist. Unless the project manager believes in "walk the halls management" to continuously collaborate with global team members, the project manager may be under a misconception of true project status.

In one country that had a shortage of power that resulted in blackouts each day, the establishment of several new power stations was essential. The team members in the country viewed these projects as beneficial for their retirement efforts if they intentionally made mistakes and slowed down the work. By the time the project manager understood what was really happening, the creation of additional power needs was years behind schedule. Workforce retirement efforts for project team members became more important than the projects.



Figure 2 – Diverse Multinational Teams

<https://pixabay.com/illustrations/continents-flags-silhouettes-1055960/>

In most countries, when problems occur, we escalate the issues to the project sponsors for resolution. However, there are still countries where project managers may not know where a problem or report will end up once escalated upwards. In some countries, senior government officials will unexpectedly show up on your project to seek out status and information even if the project is not government funded.

Companies must understand the legal issues in the host country related to cultures, politics, religions, and procurements and how they can impact the traditional and newer ways of managing projects. In some countries, contractors are not allowed to utilize resources from other countries that are considered as political adversaries to the country where the project will take place.

In another example of a legal issue, a company was awarded a contract in another country. The customer in the new country stated in the contract that all resources used on the project must come from the customer's country. The contractor understood the requirement and, after conducting some research, concluded that there were many qualified resources available throughout the country with the skills needed. However, once the project was about to begin, the project manager was told that all resources used must come from the two cities in the country that had the greatest unemployment levels. This new requirement created a significant challenge in finding highly skilled resources needed.

USING NEW DEFINITIONS OF PROJECT SUCCESS AND FAILURE _____

For the past several decades, project success has been traditionally defined as completing the project within the required constraints and acceptance by the customer. The new definition of success is now heavily based upon the creation of business benefits and business value. The new definition of success focuses more on project success rather than project management success. It is when the customer is pleased with the business value of what they received and considers continuous project management success as the creation of a lifetime partnership between the client and the contractor.

Although we still struggle with many companies on the best way of defining project and project management success, the real challenge has become how to identify that a project is failing, and it is time to pull the plug. There is a growing necessity worldwide for companies to establish "failure criteria" at the start of the project to help project teams decide that it is time to stop working on a project. Failure criteria on global projects can include:

- Insurmountable obstacles (business or technical)
- Decision-making based upon culture, religions and politics rather than time, cost or scope
- Inadequate know-how and/or lack of qualified resources
- Legal/regulatory or product liability uncertainties
- Laws and government regulations in the country receiving the product or services
- Too small a market or market share for the product; dependence on a limited customer base
- Unacceptable dependence on some suppliers and/or specialized raw materials

One of the biggest worldwide complaints by executives is that project teams tend to continue working on projects that need to be cancelled and hope for a miracle. The result is often wasting funds that could be assigned to projects with a greater likelihood of success.

Having failure criteria is viewed by some as a form of success. At a project management seminar for a Fortune 500 Global Company, the executive vice president stated that more than 80% of his firm's projects requiring innovation were failures. The head of the Project Management Office then spoke up and said that those 80% were not failures. The projects were documented in the company's idea management system to identify where the company should not allocate innovation funding in the future, thus saving the company money.

There are certainly more challenges that could be discussed, especially in the global marketplace. Overcoming the global market challenges may not eliminate all the issues we are currently facing but should make it easier to manage project obstacles and increase successes.

NEW SKILLS EVOLUTION

To address the multitude of worldwide project management challenges and evolve the practice, new skills have to be developed. This requires that companies worldwide should be willing to admit that training for these new skills is needed for their project workforce and take intentional action. Some of the new skills include:

- Brainstorming
- Creative problem-solving
- Design thinking
- Rapid prototype development
- Innovation leadership
- Strategic planning
- Use of Data Analytics and Artificial Intelligence
- Managing self-directed teams
- Managing diversity
- Co-creation team management
- Supply chain management
- Advanced risk management

Many companies have a difficult time justifying the cost of training and are unable to identify a return on investment. Another issue is that they fail to believe that these topics can be taught in the classroom or through distance learning, and that most countries have qualified personnel to teach these advanced topics.

Perhaps the biggest educational evolution facing companies worldwide is the growth in various types of certification programs to support project management efforts. Companies are relying upon the workers to decide what certification programs they wish to pursue.

The problem is that many workers are pursuing what they consider to be the easiest certification programs to pass, and then expect a salary increase for the additional credentials even if the certification program education could not be useful on the company's types of projects. The workers then threaten to leave the company and seek employment in another company that will increase their salary due to the added certifications.

The solution to this challenge is that many companies worldwide are creating certification boards within the company to recommend to the workforce which certifications would be most beneficial for the company. Workers generally accept this idea of using certification boards especially if the company is paying for the specialized certification training.

THE PATH FORWARD

Understanding the challenges associated with worldwide project management practices is key to evolving and maturing these practices. There are multiple takeaways that leaders of global projects should consider:

- With the advances in Artificial Intelligence, there is a line of sight that the classic perception of functional managers should be the project managers, could be reversed. AI provides the access to multiple areas of expertise that complement the functional skills needed for the project managers so that they could best handle the wide spectrum of complex topics encountered on these worldwide projects
- Prioritization behaviors have to be managed to ensure that the planning cycles are done with the best interest of the project portfolio and not just the short-term reward cycle managers could be biased towards
- Empathy for the various ethical standards, ways of working, and cultural drivers worldwide, continue to be of high value in evolving the practices
- It is crucial to have crystal clear joint views of project success and to consider the importance of agreeing, in advance, on failure criteria. This should be supported by the right level of authorization for the project leaders to be in a position to recommend and execute projects' termination as needed.

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Dr. Harold Kerzner is Senior Executive Director for Project Management for the International Institute for Learning (IIL). He has an MS and Ph.D. in Aeronautical and Astronautical Engineering from the University of Illinois and an MBA from Utah State University. He is a prior Air Force Officer and spent several years at Morton-Thiokol in project management. He taught engineering at the University of Illinois and business administration at Utah State University, and for 38 years taught project management at Baldwin-Wallace University. He has published or presented numerous engineering and business papers and has had published more than 60 college textbooks/workbooks on project management, including later editions. Some of his books are (1) Project Management: A Systems Approach to Planning, Scheduling and Controlling; (2) Project Management Metrics, KPIs and Dashboards, (3) Project Management Case Studies, (4) Project Management Best Practices: Achieving Global Excellence, (5) PM 2.0: The Future of Project Management, (6) Using the Project Management Maturity Model, and (7) Innovation Project Management.

He is a charter member of the Northeast Ohio PMI Chapter.

Dr. Kerzner has traveled around the world conducting project management lectures for PMI Chapters and companies in Japan, China, Russia, Brazil, Singapore, Korea, South Africa, Canada, Ireland, Germany, Spain, Belgium, Poland, Croatia, Mexico, Trinidad, Barbados, The Netherlands, Sweden, Finland, Venezuela, Columbia, United Arab Emirates, France, Italy, England, and Switzerland. He delivered a keynote speech at a PMI Global Congress on the future of project management.

His recognitions include:

- The University of Illinois granted Dr. Kerzner a Distinguished Recent Alumni Award in 1981 for his contributions to the field of project management.
- Utah State University provided Dr. Kerzner with the 1998 Distinguished Service Award for his contributions to the field of project management.
- The Northeast Ohio Chapter of the Project Management Institute gives out the Kerzner Award once a year to one project manager in Northeast Ohio that has demonstrated excellence in project management. They also give out a second Kerzner Award for project of the year in Northeast Ohio.
- The Project Management Institute (National Organization) in cooperation with IIL has initiated the Kerzner International Project Manager of the Year Award given to one project manager yearly anywhere in the world that demonstrated excellence in project management.
- The Project Management Institute also gives out four scholarships each year in Dr. Kerzner's name for graduate studies in project management.
- Baldwin-Wallace University has instituted the Kerzner Distinguished Lecturer Series in project management.
- The Italian Institute of Project Management presented Dr. Kerzner with the 2019 International ISIPM Award for his contributions to the field of project management.

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Dr. Al Zeitoun is a Future of Work, business optimization, and operational performance excellence thought leader with global experiences in strategy execution. His experiences encompass leading organizations; delivering their Enterprise Digital and Business Transformation; guiding fitting frameworks implementations; and using his empathy, engineering insights, and collaboration strengths to successfully envision new business models and execute complex missions across diverse cultures globally.

In his recent role with Siemens, he was a Senior Director of Strategy responsible for driving the global program management practices, Master Plan governance, and enabling the Strategy Transformation processes and priorities.

In his position, as the Executive Director for Emirates Nuclear Energy Corporation, Abu Dhabi, UAE, he was responsible for creating the strategy execution framework, achieving transformation benefits, governance excellence, and creating the data analytics discipline necessary for delivering on the \$40B complex country energy mission roadmap.

At the McLean, USA HQ of Booz Allen Hamilton, Dr. Zeitoun strategically envisioned and customized digitally enabled EPMO advisory, mapped playbooks, and capability development for clients' Billions of Dollars strategic initiatives. Furthermore, he led the firm's Middle East North Africa Portfolio Management and Agile Governance Solutions.

With the International Institute of Learning, Dr. Zeitoun played a senior leader and global trainer and coach. He was instrumental in driving its global expansions, thought leadership, and operational excellence methodology to sense and shape dynamic ways of working across organizations worldwide. He speaks English, Arabic, and German and enjoys good food, travel, and volunteering. Dr. Al Zeitoun can be contacted at zeitounstrategy@gmail.com