

## *Projectland Goes to the Movies*

### **Why Stories and Movies Help Project Teams Learn and Align <sup>1</sup>**

**Dawn Mahan and Jerry Manas <sup>2</sup>**

Why do so many projects struggle despite all of the courses, certifications, templates, and tools available to help people succeed?

Often, it's not because people lack intelligence or effort. It's because they lack shared understanding.

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*“We have a lot of people who are project managers by title, and project management is woven into many other roles. But many of them aren't formally trained—they don't really know what project management is.”*

*—James Evans, PMO Leader*

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This goes even beyond training in fundamentals; people are expected to deliver projects without a common language for how projects actually work.

In modern organizations, projects increasingly rely on cross-functional teams, temporary leadership structures, and busy professionals balancing project work alongside demanding operational roles. Under those conditions, shared understanding becomes critical.

This challenge is one of the reasons Dawn coined the term “Projectland®,” which helps professionals understand that when they are working on a project, they are operating in a different world with different roles, rules, pressures, and expectations than the “day job.”

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<sup>2</sup> Dawn Mahan and Jerry Manas are co-editors of the wildly popular book “*Projectland Goes to the Movies: 22 Blockbuster Strategies for Project Success*” published in January 2026 by Project Guru Press. [To learn more about the book, click here.](#)

Unfortunately, many people are dropped into Projectland with little preparation and are expected to somehow figure it out while the clock is ticking. The result is often confusion, stress, misalignment, and teams running in circles without a clear map.

So how might we help busy people understand projects faster, especially when they have no time for formal training and an important project already underway?

One surprisingly effective approach is to start with something people already understand: **stories**. In fact, the [Project Management Institute](#) explicitly highlights storytelling in the 8th Edition of the *PMBOK® Guide* as a premier communication asset for bridging knowledge gaps across stakeholders. By shifting from abstract methodology to narrative frameworks, we can bypass the typical learning curve.

### **Movies Build Shared Language and Culture**

Have you ever tried sharing a movie clip from a memorable movie like *Apollo 13* or *Jaws*? Then, when you say “Houston, we have a problem” or “We’re gonna need a bigger boat,” instantly everyone understands the feeling behind the phrase.

For teams, referencing movie moments can foster cohesion and lighten tension. If your team had a setback, you can quote Alfred in *Batman Begins* (in your best Michael Caine voice): “Why do we fall, Sir? So that we can learn to pick ourselves up.”

Movies give teams a shared vocabulary of struggle and success, helping forge a bond precisely when the project requires it most. In turn, that shared culture becomes a lever for engagement, trust, and teamwork, three things every project could use more of.

In other words, you’re no longer explaining a concept—you’re helping people experience it.

This is exactly what leaders like James Evans are seeing in practice:

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*“We found that when we explained some of these concepts in the usual way, it didn’t really land. But when we used examples from films people already knew, the conversation changed almost immediately. People could grasp it, feel it, relate it to their own work, and that led to the kind of engagement where teams actually started to act on the ideas.”*

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## Why Lessons from Movies Work in Real Life

Many movies, from *Apollo 13* to *The Lord of the Rings*, are, in reality, great project stories. There's a main goal, limited time and resources, high stakes, and a team of people—each with their own quirks, conflicts, and motivations—trying to make things happen in the face of difficult odds. Sound like any projects you know?

It is with this in mind that we decided to create *Projectland Goes to the Movies*, a collection of project and leadership lessons from 22 experts, each inspired by their favorite film. We've always believed that people learn best through stories—and there's no more powerful storytelling medium than cinema when one is pressed for time.

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*“Movies are stories about people, and most of our lives are full of stories or interactions with others or adventures and accomplishments. Great projects make great stories, and the movies are full of them, like life.”*

— **David Pells**, Managing Editor, PM World Journal

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In this article series, we'll be sharing cinematic lessons from the book and beyond—as well as how you can make movies a big part of your personal and organizational learning journey. We'll explore how lessons from the big screen can play a practical role in your everyday project life.

### Next Up in the Series:

In our next installment, we'll look at **5 reasons movies can be such an effective way to help people grow stronger project skills** and leadership capabilities, as well as a few examples of movie-learning in practice.

## About the Authors



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**Dawn Mahan** is the founder of PMOtraining, LLC, and coined the term, Projectland®. She is a dynamic international speaker, award-winning project management consultant, and author of the Amazon #1 bestselling book, *Meet the Players in Projectland: Decide the Right Project Roles & Get People On Board*. Visit her website at [PMOtraining.com](http://PMOtraining.com).



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*Projectland Goes to the Movies: 22 Blockbuster Strategies for Project Success* (2026 Amazon Hot New Release) is available globally.

Visit <https://books2read.com/projectlandgoestothemovies>.

For bulk orders, tools to engage your group, or to inquire about storytelling workshops, email us: [hello@pomotraining.com](mailto:hello@pomotraining.com).