

International Performance Management Council Cooperation in Action

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Over the last decade, the United States Department of Defense and the defense organizations of several other countries have joined in a remarkable example of international cooperation. Known as the International Performance Management Council or IPMC, its origins can be traced to a late 1980s visit by a representative of the Australian Department of Defence to the United States. The visit was prompted by an Australian initiative to improve project management by adopting world-class best practices. The United States “earned value” management technique was seen by Australia as the best way to integrate resource management with schedule and technical performance management.

The Australian visit was followed by a similar overture from Canada to the United States Department of Defense in 1990. Both contacts led to official correspondence and meetings as we learned how to work within our national regulations governing international contacts. By 1992 we had established bilateral working relationships with both countries, which evolved into the IPMC in 1993 with Sweden as the fourth charter member. The IPMC chair rotates by consensus of the members and is held at this writing by Sweden. We operate informally, with all representatives viewed as equals. In this way, no one dominates and all are free to exchange ideas and to learn from one another. Membership now includes New Zealand and the United Kingdom, and remains open to the defense establishments of friendly foreign countries.

The IPMC goals are to share policy and administrative information on our respective programs, to recognize mutually the contractors accepted by each country, and to improve project management using earned value. In an increasingly global marketplace, these goals combine to produce practical results. For example, Australia awarded a contract to a United States company and performed a review jointly with the United States Navy in 1994. Review team members were drawn from several United States defense organizations, Canada and Sweden. Similar cooperation was demonstrated later that year in the first Canadian contract review. And this year, the United States supported reviews conducted by Australia in the United States and in the United Kingdom.

The IPMC respects cultural and environmental differences. No country can simply mirror another’s practices; rather, the objective is sensible, integrated project management using earned value. Means to achieve that end vary among countries. The challenge is to assure mutual recognition of contractors without imposing intrusive procedures on them. Ongoing communication, including a personnel exchange program between Australia and the United States, ensures that all members are informed about emerging developments in each country. The United States Department of Defense earned value web site (www.acq.osd.mil/pm) is a key communications tool.

Industry takes note of such active cooperation among governments. In fact, observers from industry and professional associations (including the Project Management Institute) often attend IPMC meetings. In return, IPMC members participate in conferences and industry meetings as the members engage in outreach to industry, academia, and professional associations. Powerful alliances are evolving as the IPMC ethic—to build on areas of agreement rather than dwell on real or perceived differences—creates opportunities for cooperation on many fronts. For example, authors of industry project management standards from several countries will meet at the 1998 PMI conference and other forums to explore improved coordination of existing national standards, with a view to a possible single international standard or guide. The IPMC members are interested parties in these discussions, as evolving standards will in turn influence their governments’ policies.

The IPMC is pleased to be represented at the Global Project Management Forum and to share experiences with delegates.

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