

PM WORLD TODAY – REGIONAL REPORT – UNITED KINGDOM



UK Project Management Round Up

*By Miles Shepherd
International Correspondent & Global Advisor
London, England, UK*

End of the Iron Triangle?

We all know the so called Iron Triangle of Time, Cost and Functionality (although this last one has several other forms) and indeed it is written into many contracts. But we also know that despite the fundamental truth of the maxim, like many 'truth's of Project Management, it does not tell the whole story. Take the case of Centrica vs Accenture, reported elsewhere in PM Forum, where one side claims the conditions of the Iron Triangle were met while the other claims it wasn't. As we're talking multi-million £ sums for the loser in this court action, this isn't going to be a simple case of on side is right and the other is wrong.

The essentials of the case hinge around functionality in a 5 year project costing more than £300M. Scope creep, cost escalation and hardware specification seem likely to be raised along with how well user testing and handover can done. The action will play out in court in coming months (or years more likely, given the size of the claim) but one of the points it raises is how well can the Iron Triangle represent success in a complicated project running over several years.

Many projects are done for business reasons and have a quantified business case. In this one, the cost of the project was said to be £317 against expected benefits of £397 over 10 years of operation. But how does the business case stack up against changing business requirements that lead to shifting IT requirements over significant timescales? Not only do the business needs change but the technology shifts and the expected benefits alter. We generally have to estimate duration and effort in a project and this is a far from simple task in anything but a trivial project – so it seems we have a problem – time estimates can be and often are extremely unreliable, costs too are often hard to

predict. These problems result in two sides of our triangle becoming unreliable, and as we have seen, there can be significant doubt over what constitutes agreed functionality.

So where does this leave the 'Iron' Triangle? Probably where we started – since in a commercial world we need enforceable contracts and somehow we need measures of performance so that contractors can be fairly rewarded while client expectations can be reasonably met. Careful maintenance of business cases by clients and responsible reporting by contractors remain essential if project management is ever to be seen as a professional discipline.

The Conference Scene in Europe

Spring and early summer herald the conference season in Europe and this year has been no exception with the 4th *Making Project Critical Workshop* in Stockholm at the start of April and *EURAM 08* in Ljubljana in May to get things moving. Also in May, International Project Management Association's first Mediterranean Region Conference takes place in Chios, an idyllic Greek island in the East Mediterranean. The Chios Conference has drawn a cosmopolitan cross section of delegates who will be able to enjoy not only a professionally interesting gathering but also all the delights of a Greek island in early summer.

In July we get PMI's Research Conference in Warsaw which will attract most of the active researchers throughout the Project Management world, including several PM World Today correspondents so those unable to attend will be able to look forward to reports from. APM's Annual Congress takes place in October and will be seeking to repeat the successes of last year's event at the Brewery in the City of London.

The season finishes with the International Project Management Association's World Congress in November. With the theme of 'Projects to run' the Congress has attracted a startlingly large submission of abstracts. The Stream Chairs and Panels have had a very difficult time constructing the technical programme since due to time and space restrictions, it has been possible to select only half of the abstracts submitted, even for the poster exhibition. The World Congress is aimed at the practitioner rather than the specialist researcher but there is an interesting mix of papers that should appeal to all tastes; and the accompanying award programme includes not only the impressive Project Excellence awards but also the Research Awards. Further information about the IPMA World Congress may be found at www.ipmaroma2008.it Again, many PM Forum contributors and correspondents will be present and we look forward to meeting you there.

About the Author:**Miles Shepherd**

*International Correspondent
Global Advisor*



Miles Shepherd is a global advisor and International Correspondent for PMForum and *PM World Today* in the United Kingdom. He is also managing director for MS Projects Ltd, a consulting company supporting various UK Government agencies, nuclear industry organisations and other businesses. Miles has over 30 years' experience on a variety of projects in UK, Eastern Europe and Russia. His PM experience includes defence, major IT projects, decommissioning of nuclear reactors, rail and business projects for the UK Government and EU. Past Chair and Fellow of the Association for Project Management (APM), Miles is also past president and chair of the International Project Management Association (IPMA). Miles is a PM Ambassador™ and available for speaking engagements worldwide. Additional information about Mr. Shepherd can be found at <http://www.pmforum.org/ambassadors/ambassadors.htm#Shepherd>. Miles Shepherd is based near London and can be reached at miles.shepherd@msp-ltd.co.uk.