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Project Management in Politics! How Modern PM can help advance Democracy Worldwide

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It is the political season in America. On 4 November, citizens of the United States will elect a new President, Vice President and many local and state officials. It is an important time in the country, when the most important economic, military, political and social issues of concern to the nation are highly visible, debated by political contestants, and discussed by citizens and political leaders at all levels. This year, the political topics and debates in the USA are perhaps as important as at any time in the last 50 years, as the country is in the midst of an economic crisis, with military engagements in Afghanistan and Iraq. And while politics are the main national activity in the USA, the rest of the world is following developments closely, due to the impact of American economic, military and governmental policies worldwide.

For many years, I have considered the role of project management in the political process. I think that most PM professional leaders avoid this question, as it might imply taking a personal position in current political campaigns or related to current “hot topics”. This is a restrictive and short-sided perspective, however, because political processes, political systems, and governance in general are such broad and important topics. If we are committed to the spread and growth of democracy as a governing political system, then it seems to me that we should understand how our profession relates to politics. So this month I will try to address this topic, and specifically, how modern project management can contribute to advancing representative democracy around the world.

This essay is based on my personal conviction that the application of sound, modern project management methodologies and principles can help make our world a more democratic, safer and healthier place to live. This is even more true when we consider the potential uses and benefits of program management, project portfolio management, strategic project management, agile project management, IT project management, and many other related concepts and modern applications. So here are my thoughts on where projects and programs can be found in politics, and how PM might be more useful.

Democracy – Some Definitions & Clarifications

According to Wikipedia, Democracy is a form of government in which power is held by the people under a free electoral system. As political theory, democracy describes a number of related forms of government and also a political philosophy.

Even though there is no universally accepted definition of 'democracy', there are two principles that any definition of democracy includes. The first principle is that all members of the society have equal access to power and the second that all members enjoy universally recognized freedoms and liberties. [1]

In addition, there are several varieties of democracy, some of which provide better representation and more freedoms for their citizens than others. However, if any democracy is not carefully legislated to avoid an uneven distribution of political power with balances such as the separation of powers, then a branch of the system may be able to accumulate power in a way that is harmful to democracy itself. The "majority rule" is often described as a characteristic feature of democracy, but without responsible government or safeguards, it is possible for the rights of a minority to be abused by the "tyranny of the majority". An essential process in representative democracies is competitive and fair elections. Types of democracy described by Wikipedia include representative, liberal, constitutional, direct, socialist, anarchic, Iroquois, sortition, consensus and interactive. [1]



In this paper, I focus on Representative Democracy, which involves the selection (election) of government officials by the people being represented. Representatives may be elected directly, be diplomatic representatives of a particular district (or constituency), or represent the entire electorate proportionally. Some representative democracies also incorporate other elements of direct democracy, such as referendums. A characteristic of representative democracy is that while the representatives are elected by the people to act in their interest, they generally retain the freedom to exercise their own judgment as how best to do so. A Liberal democracy, such as in the United States, is a representative democracy in which the ability of the elected representatives to exercise decision-making power is subject to the rule of law, and usually moderated by a constitution that emphasizes the protection of rights and freedoms of individuals. A constitution should also place constraints on leaders and on the extent to which the will of the majority can be exercised against the rights of minorities. [1,2]

Elements of a Representative Democracy

Here are some fundamental elements of a representative democracy:

- Constitution (Governing Documents)
- Legislature (Body of Elected Representatives & Leaders)
- Legal System and Independent Judiciary (Laws, Courts & Judges)
- Citizenship and Voter Registration Processes & Systems
- Election Processes & Systems (including referenda)
- Political Campaigns
- Information Systems for Informing Citizens

➤ Police & Security (Structure, Processes & Systems)

This is a simplified list, but includes the elements of representative and democratic system that I want to discuss here. For the sake of this paper, I will not address the governmental bureaucracy, including defense and other agencies, needed to implement and support the above structures, systems and processes. Governmental agencies and departments are big users of program and project management; this can be a subject for future discussion. I also do not want to address political parties, per se, although they are inherently included in the subject of political campaigns.

Nation Building vs. System Improvements

It is important to establish the context, however, with the biggest questions being the following:

- Do democratic processes and systems currently exist?
- If no, then they must be developed – basically “nation building”
- If yes, do they need to be improved or changed?



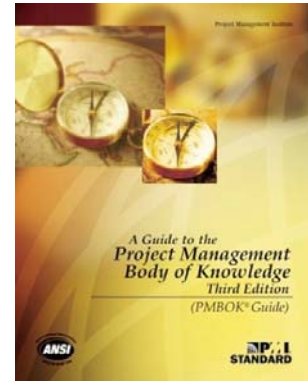
A majority of countries around the world now claim to embrace some form of democracy. However, many still need improvements, or wholesale changes, in voter registration, election, legislative or judicial systems. Other countries may be in the early stages of national development (Iraq, for example). Where there is little or no formal government, for example in Somalia, entire new systems and processes are needed. These represent future nation building programs and projects. Where democracies are expected to follow dictatorships or other forms of government, significant change programs and projects can be anticipated.

Some Applicable Modern Project Management Concepts

Before discussing PM in democratic processes and systems, I want to mention a few modern project management concepts that can be applicable in politics.

Project & Program Orientation – Projects and programs can be found everywhere today, in all organizations, industries and geographic areas. Concepts such as Management-by-Projects, Project-Oriented Business, and even Project-Oriented Society have been the subject of research efforts, presentations and paper publications for the last 20 years. The project orientation of enterprises is well known throughout the world, is growing rapidly and is leading to the rapid growth and popularity of professional project management. Programs and projects can be found in all aspects of political activities, systems and structures.

Modern Professional Project Management – Professional project management means the application and use of modern project management concepts, methods, processes, practices and technologies. Modern PM is generally based on published standards, such as British Standard BS6079, Guide to Project Management (British Standards Institute BS6079 1:2000) [3,4], The Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide, Project Management Institute PMI®), [5] Projects IN a Controlled Environment (PRINCE2) [6], and Project & Program Management (P2M) for Enterprise Innovation Guidebook (Project Management Association of Japan (PMAJ), 2008) [7,8].



Program Management - Program Management is the process of managing multiple ongoing inter-dependent projects. In an organization or enterprise, Program Management also reflects the emphasis on coordinating and prioritizing resources across projects, departments, and entities to ensure that resource contention is managed from a global focus. [9]

Project Portfolio Management – Also according to Wikipedia, Project Portfolio Management (PPM) is a term used by project managers and project management (PM) organizations to describe methods for analyzing and managing a group of current or proposed projects. The fundamental objective of the PPM process is to determine the optimal mix and sequencing of projects to best achieve an organization's overall goals - typically expressed in terms of financial measures, business strategies, or technical goals - while honoring constraints imposed by management or external factors. Typical attributes of projects being analyzed in a PPM process include each project's total expected cost, consumption of scarce resources (human or otherwise), expected timeline and schedule of investment, expected nature, magnitude and timing of benefits to be realized, and relationship or inter-dependencies with other projects in the portfolio. [10]

Project Leadership & Teambuilding Concepts & Methods – Human aspects of program and project management, such as leadership and teambuilding, are important elements of modern professional project management, and fully incorporated into various PM standards, certifications and programs. There are many books on this topic, and many consulting organizations that offer project leadership training and mentoring services. Competence in project leadership is a growing topic, which reinforces the importance of leadership for project management success. [11] Whenever projects involve teams of people, project leadership and teambuilding concepts and methods are needed.

Project Communications Tools & Techniques – According to PMI's Guide to the PMBOK, Third Edition, "Project Communications Management ... employs the processes required to ensure timely and appropriate generation, collection,

distribution, storage, retrieval and ... disposal of project information.” [12] This would seem to be an especially important aspect of managing projects in politics.



Project Planning & Control Concepts & Technologies – According to Russ Archibald, “Systems, tools and methods for integrative and predictive project planning and control are at the heart of the project management discipline... The goal is to predict undesirable results in sufficient time to allow corrective actions to be taken to assure that the undesirable results do not become reality.” [13, 14] Historically, project planning and control has referred to managing scope, schedule and cost factors on projects. Today these topics can cover all aspects of the project. What leader of a political project would not want to achieve the desired results?

Agile Project Management – According to Hass, “Agile Project Management (APM), is emerging in the industry... (as) a highly iterative and incremental process, where developers and project stakeholders actively work together to understand the domain, identify what needs to be built, and prioritize functionality.” [15] Agile PM has emerged in the software and information technology industries where project timelines are short, requirements are not well defined at the beginning, and an iterative development process can be implemented.

Project Contracting, Procurement & Supply Chain Management – A basic element of managing most projects, this subject area deals with understanding and applying various forms and processes related to acquiring products and resources in the open market. Such issues as incentive contracting, contract administration, supply chain management, governmental procurement regulations, legal issues and other factors can dramatically impact any project involving purchases by or for governmental organizations. This is a topic that both elected officials and government administrators must understand.

Projects and PM in Politics

Now let us look at some of the areas of a representative democracy where projects are likely to exist and how modern PM might be useful.

PM for Constitution Development - A constitution is a system for government, normally codified as a written document, that establishes the rules and principles of an autonomous political entity. In the case of countries, this term refers specifically to a national constitution defining the main political principles, and establishing the structure, procedures, powers and duties, of a government. Most national constitutions also guarantee certain rights to the people. Constitutions concern different kinds of political organizations. They are found extensively in regional

government, at supranational (e.g., European Union), federal (e.g., United States Constitution), state, provincial, and sub-national levels throughout the world. [16].

The development of a new constitution for a nation, province, state, county, city or other political entity will require a project involving legal experts, a broad review process and administration. Revising or improving constitutional documents and charters would also entail a project with similar requirements.



Clearly such a project could be achieved better and faster if professional project management is used – for example, clearly defining the scope, stakeholders, resource requirements, communication issues, schedule, deliverables, etc. In addition, maintenance, access, communications and security after development must also be included. In that case, it might become a program, or large project with set of sub-projects, even more reason to apply modern PM concepts and approaches.

PM for Voter Registration – Which comes first, the constitution or constituents? This is a sort of chicken and egg problem faced during the nation building process when new governments are being formed. For sake of simplicity, Constitution is discussed first, but I thought it appropriate to now address the political, logistical and administrative problems of citizen or voter registration.

According to Wikipedia, Voter registration is the requirement in some democracies for citizens and residents to check in with some central registry specifically for the purpose of being allowed to vote in elections. An effort to get people to register is known as a voter registration drive. In some countries, including most developed countries, registration is the responsibility of the government, either local or national; and in over 30 countries some form of compulsory voting is required as part of each citizen's civic duty. Even in many countries where the voting itself is not compulsory, registering one's place of residence with some government agency is required, which automatically constitutes voter registration for citizens, and in some cases residents, of the required age.



In other countries, however, people eligible to vote must "opt in" to be permitted to participate in voting, generally by filling out a specific form registering them to vote. Governments registering people has been shown to be one of the most powerful predictors of high voting turnout levels. Even in countries where registration is the individual's responsibility,

many reformers, seeking to maximize voter turnout, have pushed for wider availability of the required forms; one such effort in the United States led to the

passage of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993, which required states to offer voter registration at motor vehicle departments as well as disability centers, public schools, and public libraries, and to accept mail-in voter registration. [17]

Here are some elements of a voter registration system, for which projects and PM would be needed:

- Voter registration laws – create, change, communicate, administer
- Voter registry or database – create, modernize, administer & maintain
- Voter registration process and procedures – Create, improve, administer
- Voter registration office & staff – Create, hire, train, administer, policies, etc.
- Public communications – to voters, political leaders, local administrators
- Data collection and communications – create, improve, maintain
- Reporting system – to elected officials and prior to elections
- Audit process – create, staff, change, administer

For a national voter registration process, the application of program, project and portfolio management concepts would be useful, along with all modern techniques for managing individual projects. For a new country or new voter registration system, this would be a major program, involving many people and organizations, quite complicated and very important. I remember a presentation at the PMI South Africa Project Management Conference in Johannesburg about a national project to register voters and establish voting systems across South Africa in the 1990s. It was a fascinating story, but also one about employing modern PM to this national political need.

PM in Elections & Referenda – According to Wikipedia, An election is a decision-making process by which a population chooses an individual to hold formal office. This is the usual mechanism by which modern democracy fills offices in the legislature, sometimes in the executive and judiciary, and for regional and local government. The government positions for which elections are held vary depending on the locale. In a representative democracy, such as the United States, some positions are not filled through elections, especially those which are seen as requiring a certain competency or excellence. For example, judges are usually appointed rather than elected to help protect their impartiality. There are exceptions to this practice, however; some judges in the United States are elected, especially at local levels. [18]



Electoral College (USA) - The Electoral College consists of 538 popularly elected representatives who formally select the President and Vice President of the United States. The Electoral College is an example of an indirect election. Rather than directly voting for the President, United States citizens cast votes for electors.

Electors are technically free to vote for anyone eligible to be President, but in practice pledge to vote for specific candidates and voters cast ballots for favored Presidential and Vice Presidential candidates by voting for pledged electors. Most states allow voters to choose between statewide slates of electors pledged to vote for the Presidential and Vice Presidential tickets of various parties; the ticket that receives the most votes statewide 'wins' all of the votes cast by electors from that state. U.S. Presidential campaigns concentrate on winning the popular vote in a combination of states that choose a majority of the electors, rather than campaigning to win the most votes nationally. [19]

Types of Elections – In most democratic political systems, there are a range of different types of election, corresponding to different layers of public governance or geographical jurisdiction. Some common types of election are: Presidential election; General election; Primary election; By-election; Local election; and Co-option. A referendum is a democratic tool related to elections in which the electorate votes for or against a specific proposal, law or policy, rather than for a general policy or a particular candidate or party. Referendums may be added to an election ballot or held separately and may be either binding or consultative, usually depending on the constitution. Referendums are usually called by governments via the legislature, however many democracies allow citizens to petition for referendums directly, called initiatives. Referendums are particularly prevalent and important in direct democracies, such as Switzerland. The basic Swiss system, however, still works with representatives. [18]

Here are some projects and programs involved in each of type of Election:

- ◆ Election (Voting) systems – may be subject to its own referendum.
- ◆ Ballots – forms, modifications for each election, procurement, printing, promotion, delivery, inspection, processing, contract admin, etc.
- ◆ Polling stations – planning, preparing, securing, shutting down after elections
- ◆ Actual elections & referenda – each may be program or portfolio, with staffing, procedures, logistics, administration, oversight
- ◆ Election safety & security – for each election and each polling station, often to ensure secrecy and to eliminate voter fraud, intimidation or ballot stuffing
- ◆ Vote counting systems – electronic or manual? large or small?
- ◆ Voting challenge process & procedures – normally dictated by law
- ◆ Vote audit or review procedures – always needed
- ◆ Voting record database – IT project, data security, data communications
- ◆ Vote reporting procedures & processes – may vary per type of election





Each of these projects may, in fact, be a program or portfolio at a national or state level, with projects at local levels where the elections will occur. Each system must be developed, or maintained and improved if already existing. Each actual election or referendum requires a set of projects to plan, implement and complete the voting, recording and reporting of results. This might seem elementary, but voting systems that reach all citizens can be large, complex, expensive and time consuming to develop or replace. In the USA, the voting system and practices in Florida came under fire

during the 2000 presidential election, after which they were to be upgraded. Obviously, this involved a major program with many sub-projects involving many people and organizations.

PM in Political Campaigns – When the subject of PM in Politics is raised, most people think about the political campaigns that are launched in connection with specific elections, each with very specific objectives or outcomes desired. Political campaigns clearly correlate closely with programs and projects. National campaigns in large democracies like the UK or USA (such as the presidential campaigns currently underway in America) involve a wide range of activities and projects, including candidate preparation, promotion and publicity, specific events, publications, information systems, volunteer mobilization, fund raising, financial management and more. In the case of the USA, where presidential candidates may campaign in 50 states, each state might require a sub-campaign (project or program).

Large campaigns can be seen as portfolios of programs and projects, with all modern program and project management theory, methods and principles directly applicable. One of the reasons for mentioning Agile PM earlier is that many political campaigns require extreme flexibility, especially during the late stages, as strategies, activities and projects must often be changed rapidly based on changing conditions, polls or projections. In any case, any serious candidate for high level office would be advised to include project managers and project management expertise on his or her teams.



PM for Legislature Development – Again, according to Wikipedia, a legislature is a type of representative deliberative assembly with the power to create, amend, and ratify laws. The law created by a legislature is called legislation or statutory law. Basically, legislatures create, and/or approve new legislation or legislation to modify laws presently set in place. Legislatures are known by many names, the most common being assembly, congress, parliament or senate, although these terms also have more specific meanings. The main job of the legislature is to make and

amend laws. In parliamentary systems of government, the legislature is formally supreme and appoints the executive. In presidential systems of government, the legislature is considered a power branch which is equal to, and independent of, the executive. In addition to enacting laws, legislatures usually have exclusive authority to raise taxes and adopt the budget and other money bills. The primary components of a legislature are one or more chambers or houses: assemblies that debate and vote upon bills. [20]



The United States has a bi-cameral national legislative system that includes a Senate (2 Senators from each of the 50 states) and a House of Representatives (435 representatives from various states based on population). Most US states have a similar structure, with a Senate and House of Representatives. A variation of the legislative system is the City Council for setting local laws, regulations and policies for major cities.

While the form and titles may differ in other countries, I think that most principles should apply universally in democratic societies.

Based on my knowledge of legislatures, here are some examples of activities that could or should be managed as programs and projects:

- ❖ For the Legislature:
 - Legislative meetings (sessions) – require planning and administration
 - Legislative facilities – may need to be leased or constructed, administered
 - Legislative security – physical, information and communications secured
 - Information systems – IT support, communications, office systems
 - Staff/HR support – replete with administrative policies, procedures, benefits, support systems, etc.
- ❖ By the Legislature:
 - Conducting legislative sessions
 - Review and passage of laws
 - Elections of leaders
 - Standing Committees and Subcommittees
 - Special projects
 - Special events
- ❖ By individual Legislators:
 - Development or review of individual laws (legislation)
 - Communications and meetings with constituents
 - Written communications and documents
 - Committee work
 - Regular & special events

How many of these activities can be planned and managed as projects? Should they be? Are there programs and project portfolios? There certainly are in the IT area, but probably across the board. Any special project, big event, or major legislation might well be achieved more efficiently and effectively if project managers are assigned and modern PM is used.

PM in Presidential Politics – Even more than in the legislature, it seems that the office of the President and/or Prime Minister in most democracies is full of specific objectives, goals, programs and projects. These range from domestic topics to international and global programs and agendas. Whether the issues are related to national security, economic development, social change or straightforward political strategies, most should have specific, time-constrained and concrete outcomes, around which programs and projects could be structured. It seems to me that the Office of the President should have resident project management expertise, should manage most activities as programs and portfolios of projects, and could accomplish much more if that were the case. And all of those programs and projects could benefit from modern PM methods and practices, including project scope, schedule and cost management, integrated planning and control, leadership, communication management and other principles that we take for granted.

At provincial, state and local levels, the same is true. Governors and Mayors could all use some PM education and more effective use of modern PM principles and approaches. This could increase individual and institutional successes across the board. Project management was developed specifically to help achieve project objectives in the most efficient and most effective manner. If leaders are democratically elected, then modern PM can help them all achieve more, and generally in less time and with fewer resources, while in office.

PM in Judiciary Systems – The judiciary or judicial system is the system of courts which administer justice in the name of the sovereign or state. The term is also used to refer collectively to the judges, magistrates and other adjudicators who form the core of a judiciary, as well as the support personnel who keep the system running smoothly. Under the doctrine of the separation of powers, 'the judiciary is the branch of government primarily responsible for interpreting the law'. It construes the laws enacted by the legislature. [21]



A court is a forum used by a power base to adjudicate disputes and dispense civil, labor, administrative and criminal justice under its laws. In common law and civil law states, courts are the central means for dispute resolution, and it is generally understood that all persons have an ability to bring their claims before a court. Similarly, those accused of a crime have the right to present their defense

before a court. A court is a kind of deliberative assembly with special powers, called its jurisdiction, to decide certain kinds of judicial questions or petitions put to it. It will typically consist of one or more presiding officers, parties and their attorneys, bailiffs, reporters, and perhaps a jury. [22]

Jurisdiction is the power of a court over a person or a claim. In the USA, a court must have both personal jurisdiction and subject matter jurisdiction. Each state establishes a court system for the territory under its control. This system allocates work to courts or authorized individuals by granting both civil and criminal jurisdiction (in the United States, this is termed subject-matter jurisdiction). The grant of power to each category of court or individual may stem from a provision of a written constitution or from an enabling statute. In English law, jurisdiction may be inherent, deriving from the common law origin of the particular court. Wikipedia lists the following types of courts: Appellate court; Constitutional Court; Court of Faculties; Court-martial; Courts of England and Wales; Ecclesiastical court; Equity court; Family court; High Court of Justiciary; Revolutionary Tribunal; Scots Law court; Scottish Court Service; Supreme court; and Trial court. [22]

In the United States, the US Supreme Court is the highest court in the country and interprets national laws, including constitutional questions, as well as issues that have been appealed to the Supreme Court from lower level jurisdictions. There is a system of regional "US District Courts"; each state also has a state Supreme Court, county courts and local "municipal" courts. Here are some activities related to the Judiciary system that might be conducive to project management:

- Establishment of courts and judicial system (nation building activity)
- Judicial Information system (for individual courts, state judicial network, and federal courts)
- Judicial procedures (for individual courts, jurisdictions and court system)
- Individual cases (prosecution, defense and court aspects)
- Court facilities, including access and security
- Case research support system
- Court libraries and document management systems
- Clerks, financial management systems, fines and fees structure



This is an area that needs more analysis and consideration.

PM for Better Public Information – Generally speaking, Western democracies have depended on "the Press" to publicize and disseminate information of general political interest. If complete "freedom of the press" is not present, however, this will not suffice. At the same time and especially in the modern era, each political

institution and organization generally makes public that information resulting from or related to its activities. In the USA, citizens and the general public have a right to information produced by and for the government, including local, state and federal agencies.

One of the best statements supporting public access to information can be found in Texas state law and reads as follows: “Under the fundamental philosophy of the American constitutional form of representative government that adheres to the principle that government is the servant and not the master of the people, it is the policy of this state that each person is entitled, unless otherwise expressly provided by law, at all times to complete information about the affairs of government and the official acts of public officials and employees. The people, in delegating authority, do not give their public servants the right to decide what is good for the people to know and what is not good for them to know. The people insist on remaining informed so that they may retain control over the instruments they have created.” [23]



In the United States and in most other countries, therefore, there is a Government Printing Office and other departments and agencies responsible for communicating information to the citizens and public. This means that there are publishing, communications and information technology requirements and projects that every government must undertake to keep the citizenry informed.

Such activities, by definition, must be connected to the various decision making bodies in the government, must establish processes and procedures for communicating various types of information, whether the results of elections or decisions, emergency news or announcements, or other critical or vital information. This clearly leads to the need for IT projects, project management and various other PM-related tools, principles and methodologies. This is an area ripe for PM improvements. In developing nations or nation building situations, this must involve a major set of programs, projects and priorities. It is also needed at state and local levels.

PM for Police & Security – I want to briefly mention police and security as a subject area for projects and project management because without security, any democracy is both unstable and insecure. I see this as a Future Frontier for Project Management, especially as economies and societies become more integrated and inter-related on a global basis. There are many programs and projects within the police and security sectors ranging from defensive programs to investigative and prosecutorial projects, to physical police facilities, IS/IT projects and systems. Rather than expand on this subject area for modern PM, let us defer the topic for a future discussion.

Conclusion: How can we help advance Democracy around the world?

So how can we really help advance democracy with project management? The above examples suggest some areas where programs and projects exist in the political spectrum – at national, regional, state and local levels. Since these programs and projects must be planned and managed by those directly involved, often government officials and bureaucrats, here are three simple suggestions.

PM Research – more research is needed to document the experiences, methods, issues, best practices and solutions related to projects and project management in politics. I would encourage project management professional organizations, research organizations and academic researchers worldwide to explore some of the issues introduced in this paper.

PM Education for those in Government – Politicians, and program and project managers responsible for developing political systems and solutions, need to know more about project management. This is especially true for multi-lateral investment banks and non-governmental organizations involved with “nation building” activities. So much of the political infrastructure needed for representative democracies can be developed and implemented better, faster and with fewer resources if professional project management principles, techniques and technologies are used. This is also especially true in local and state governmental agencies, where voter registration, elections and local political institutions are developed. More PM education and information is needed in those political circles.

Promotion of Better PM for Democracy Building and Improvement

– Modern Project Management must be recognized as both necessary and helpful, and actively promoted, for developing and improving democratic processes and systems. The underlying infrastructure needed for healthy democratic government and governance can be implemented with projects and programs, and most effectively and efficiently using project management. And of course, anything that can be defined as a program or project can be planned and managed better using modern professional project management principles. That seems both logical and clear!



In closing, please be sure to vote this election season, and

Good luck on your projects!

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