

VIEWPOINT

PMI Congress Seattle 2006 &
Reflections of a Long Distance Journey
By Brian R Kooyman

The annual PMI Conference in North America is always one of the most significant project management events of the year, but perhaps more significant for those of us who travel many thousands of miles (or to the metric-minded, kilometres) to attend such an event. The major considerations of attending such an event from the other side of the world is the cost and time required to travel, and I wonder why since having attended all but two PMI North American Conferences since 1994, I am still drawn back on such a regular basis?

Is it the content of the conference program? Is it the potential of a significant increase in knowledge? Is it all the new people one is likely to meet? Is it re-connecting with old friends and networking? Is it the chance to improve your career opportunities? Or is it just the challenge and chance to travel overseas and perhaps to include a bit of a holiday?

For each of us that travel such a distance, it is for perhaps a number of the above reasons. Due to the pressure of work, and the lack of time throughout the year, for me this trip was primarily to catch up with old friends, the chance to travel and this time include a bit of a holiday with my wife and eldest daughter (valuable time with my family which seems so hard to balance).

As those who have travelled to Australia know, perhaps the strangest part of the journey is crossing the International Date Line which means we gain a day coming to the US, but lose a day returning. For example, we flew direct from Sydney to San Francisco, departing from Sydney at 13.55 hrs. on the 15th October, arriving in San Francisco at 10.15 hrs. on the same day – a net gain of 3 hours and 40 minutes. Thus we had accelerated our holiday by the 14 hours of flying time plus the gain of 3 hours 40 minutes – a total acceleration of 17 hours and 40 minutes. What an interesting challenge for a project manager and the project program!

After enjoying the delights of San Francisco for 3 days, we then hired a car in the US, again a challenge as everyone in the US drives on the wrong side of the road compared to Australia. It was a constant source of amusement to my family as I continually got into the front passenger's seat and wondering why the steering wheel had disappeared. We then began our 4 day driving journey to Seattle, starting through the Napa Valley (trying not to taste too much wine – as Australians are perhaps keen to do), then on day 2 along the northern coastline of California on Highway 1, meandering through the wonderful Redwood Forests of northern California. Day 3 saw us driving along the coastal road of Oregon, with scenery that was so different to what we see in Australia – so many mountains, so many rivers and so many Spruce trees.

We arrived in Washington State at the end of day 3 and spent day 4 driving through the scenic wonders of the Olympic National Park. I had been considering such a journey along the north west coast of the US for many years, and as we drove into Seattle on the Sunday morning (a carefully considered judgement as everyone was still driving on the wrong side of the road and the traffic was quieter), I felt very pleased that we had finally done the trip, as my body time clock had adjusted to the 17 hour time zone difference to Sydney and the trip was everything (and more than) I had anticipated.

From a project perspective the first 2 major milestones had been achieved: 1 week's holiday and time with my family.

Now, for Seattle and the PMI Conference.

Following our Sunday arrival at the hotel, I wandered up to the Convention Centre and registered for the conference. It was a delight to immediately meet with some old friends from past conferences and throughout international project work, and within the first hour arrangements had been made for dinner with friends on both the Sunday and Monday evenings, and delightful evenings they were for which I thank those friends gratefully.

In reviewing the program for the conference, I noted that the format was, as usual, key note addresses and the various streams of interest and presentations. What a shame that we cannot determine a more innovative format that provides more interaction between panel style sessions and perhaps open discussions of project experiences and lessons learned. As a veteran of many conferences I personally would find this of greater value than just presentations (many of which have been given before in different words and by different speakers – perhaps this is the dilemma of getting older). However, for many new attendees the information is of greater value, although it was noticeable that there were the extra popular sessions and the less crowded sessions – for those that were unable to attend the popular sessions there was disappointment which was only partly overcome with the repeat of these. The challenge is to find a better way for all to attend.



The key note speakers were, as usual, interesting and stimulating with their presentations, but as so often happens one walks away with short term enthusiasm and long term memory lapse, or perhaps it is the weariness of returning to work. The networking evening was an opportunity to catch up with many friends I had missed to that point, but I managed to still miss many.

On reflection the Seattle PMI Conference was a good conference, although I noted that many of the PMI Fellows and old friends were not there. This seems to me a great shame, and some way of assisting attendance for Fellows and veterans (as well as students and some international attendees) could perhaps be considered by the PMI Board as the cost of registration for the Conference, accommodation and travel becomes quite onerous to those who are not supported by a company and have to personally incur the costs.

Post Conference

Wednesday morning 6.00 hours 25th October, I find myself and family about to board a flight to Philadelphia (via Denver – an obvious shortcut) to continue more of our holiday. The diversity of US culture has always fascinated me, and it is never more apparent than travelling from the West Coast to the East Coast in one day. The historical influence of European settlement in America is immediately noticeable in the local architecture, the local history and the diversity of people, and Philadelphia provides a wonderful experience of this. After 3 days enjoying the history of Philadelphia, we again ventured onto the road spending 2 days touring through Lancaster County and through Gettysburg. Surprise, surprise – everyone was still driving on the wrong side of the road, despite me taking a wrong turn and enjoying the delights of the New Jersey Turnpike not once, but twice!

Finally, the last week of our travels, we caught the train from Philadelphia to New York. New York is without doubt a unique experience, the 24 hour 7 day a week city and the week seemed to disappear in a flash between Broadway shows, sightseeing and enjoying the restaurants.

Finally we left New York flying direct to Sydney. Leaving on the 4th November we arrived in Sydney on the 6th November, and nature reclaimed the day gained on the journey over – we are still looking for the 5th November. Back in Sydney (Australia) and back to work, what are the benefits? A wonderful holiday, time with the family and a wonderful opportunity to meet up and network with old friends and meet new acquaintances! In my mind I achieved four of the six objectives fully, the other two objectives partially, and most importantly had a wonderful and memorable time. See you next year!



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