

VIEWPOINT – JANUARY 2008

The future of Project Management – a UK perspective

By Miles Shepherd

As our Editor has said, this is a moment to reflect on the past year and seek to discern the trends and possibilities for the New Year. Hopefully this allows me to share with you the achievements of 2007 and to give you my view of how the world of project management may evolve in 2008.

So what were the achievements of 2007? We can see the successful outcomes of project management, with many highly successful developments. In UK, examples include the completion of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link and many arts projects such as the National Gallery's 'Discoveries' project demonstrate the effectiveness of management by project. So project management looks set to remain the preferred way to delivery major change. But to my mind, the real successes of the year are organisational – as project management professional societies show increasing signs of maturity.

The International Project Management Association (IPMA) has continued to build its network of Member Associations and now consists of more than 40 National Project Management Societies in Europe, North and South America, the Indian sub-continent and in Asia. Talks continue with a number of other counties and 2008 may well see numbers breaking the 50 barrier. Beyond the simple numbers game, IPMA has expanded its technical services with the introduction of an Education Board to support the ever increasing number of universities and business schools providing degrees in project management. This is a critical requirement of a true professional society.

At long last, IPMA is taking part in the world of International Standards and is represented on several working groups. The Research Management Board has continued its work and this year recognised individual research successes by making awards at IRNOP. Perhaps most significantly, IPMA is becoming more reflective: President Veikko Väililä called a meeting of past presidents in London, to seek views and explore the agenda for development. Several PM Forum Global Advisers were contributed to this encouraging meeting. As IPMA grows both in size and influence, it became clear that its structure also requires development. Work by two past Presidents showed that the By Laws could not simply be redrafted and a full governance review was initiated. IPMA's great strength is its recognition that there is no one single way to manage projects. Its respect and accommodation of local, national and international culture makes it unique in management circles.

The largest of the IPMA related National Associations, the United Kingdom's Association for Project Management (APM) also has had a good year. The major governance changes initiated in my time as Chairman, delivered by Tom Taylor, have been implemented effectively by the new Board of Trustees. There has been strong growth in individual and corporate membership over the past year with numbers in both categories reaching new highs. It is perhaps this growth in corporate membership that has driven the decision, taken at the recent AGM, to seek a Royal Charter. For many, the award of a Charter is a formal recognition of professional standing, allowing project managers to take their place alongside engineers and many other respected occupational groups. There is much work still to be done to gain this recognition and but many of the key steps have been initiated and the whole endeavour is of course planned as a programme.

Arguably, one of key steps for APM is the enhancement of its academic links. There are encouraging signs of progress in this area with the provision of support for student research. This support is likely to include access to questionnaire populations as well as individual experts able to offer opinion and commentary on student projects. Hopefully, APM will see more students submitting their projects for academic awards. APM has also introduced its own Academic accreditations scheme and the first assessor's workshop was held at the beginning of December.

It seems to me that one of the significant requirements for any profession is the provision of a career development path. IPMA's approach here is interesting since their qualification system leads from basic practitioner qualification to Director of Projects or Programmes via intermediate levels of project manager and senior project manager. In an industry that lacks the critical elements of supervision, this is the very least that can be expected. This lack of supervision is arguably the biggest hurdle that we must overcome on the road towards wider recognition as a 'profession'. The medical world as well as lawyers and engineers requires a period of supervised practice that allows the practitioner to demonstrate not just a technical knowledge but inculcates the ethical behaviour essential for wider practice.

Rumour has it that PMI has commissioned work on the ethical dimensions of project management and IPMA has scheduled an Expert Seminar on practical aspects of ethics for the PM so it seems that we are beginning to think about the separate and specific moral and behavioural aspects that are relevant to project management. In our post modern age, this may expose some limitations to the structures supporting our 'profession'.

However, in my judgement, the progress we have seen in the past twelve months coupled with the willingness to at least look at complex issues such as ethical behaviour affecting our 'profession' indicates a big step in the right direction.

There are many other issues that affect Project Managers; in particular, in this age of global warming, we need to examine how we can act in a more sustainable way in the execution of our projects. Perhaps we will also see a move towards managing projects to help deal with the problems mankind has inflicted on the environment.

So it seems to me that we are seeing signs that the professional societies are acting professionally, with some welcome steps towards tackling issues of relevance to ourselves and our society. The future of project management is in good hands. These signs of growth, not just in raw numbers, show that real PM maturity is being achieved.



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