

## PM WORLD TODAY – VIEWPOINT – NOVEMBER 2009

Global Networks –  
Brain Shifting the Ways of IT Project Management

*By Melvyn Lee*

IT projects herald the age of global networking. Great shifts are taking place in project management which has been catalytically influenced by the advent of global network formation.

The formation of global networks implies that managing projects is no longer bound by local parameters. Global networks thrive on diversity - Finding and connecting resources on the entire globe, then consolidating them for a common purpose. Networking enables a gravitation of skills, resources or materials from different formats of alliances which are formed and configured any which way we choose, to benefit or influence the project positively.

Traditional IT projects are not so straightforward when operating in a global network world. Those who are part of these networks will need to follow the network economy and rules. A global network, in particular, if not carefully designed and governed, can create identity crisis, dominance of cultures, misalignment of governance and, to some extent, power struggle.

Today, the dawning of the communication age prevents many projects from being attributed to specifics. Rather the outcome of a project can easily be the result of a melting pot effort. No one party can claim success for themselves. Efforts put on projects are the result of international osmosis crossing borders with little or no restriction.

The network rules have in fact changed the inner dynamics of running IT projects. There are four major types of networks that can cause great shifts in managing projects and determining their outcomes:-

- Network of Crowd
- Network of Virtual Expediency
- Network of Dispersed Knowledge
- Network of Trendsetter

**Shift #1 - From Local Participators to Exploiting Global Network of Crowd**

In the business of outsourcing, the need for a crowd is imperative because there is a dire requirement for supply to meet the demands of projects. As IT projects step into the international arena and affecting global market, so would the crowd they seek as supplies become more distributed. This corollary is becoming more evident by the day – the more global an IT project

is, the more global the team composition is. The more crowds are found in different parts of the globe.

As project owners and sponsors seek resources to fulfill critical roles against the march of time, networks of crowds mean projects can look away from their local milieu and seek any parts of the globe for the right crowd and skills. In some projects, it is a numbers game that sets the criteria for scouring for a larger crowd.

Locating the right crowd provides different ways to configure the to befit the purpose of a project. A crowd may not be confined within a single location. It can be a total makeup from any part of the globe that is integrated through a global network configuration. Offshore outsourcing is a typical example.

Whenever a crowd exists that can provide the right people for a project, a creative way of recruiting, deploying and mobilizing capable resources to run the projects can be managed - through a wide orchestration using a network-based model.

Network of crowd is known to foster aggressive connectivity; Connection of one node to another that can eventually lead to an outbreak of a multitude of other connections. It may mean small numbers here and there and yet fulfill the definition of a crowd when put together collectively.

A crowd network-based model qualifies any entities with vested interest in similar projects to admit into the network realm virtually without a need for one project team to physically meet other teams. Such a form of network promotes inter-pollination of new knowledge, albeit the challenge lies in choreographing the entire network nodes to be in alignment with project standards and goals.

As crowds in the form of resources are welcomed, such a network model in the process tends to erase the identity of nationality and recreate an identity of alliance. The creation of such new identity disregards the perception on political boundary, race and language because common project goals are now the main focus. In the end, masses that are working on projects are better known as citizens of project rather than citizens of nations. In a network of crowd model, every node owns a part of the project and thus carries an economic and social identity associated with the project.

Network of crowd model is not without consequences as it can give these undesirable side effects:-

- Higher risks on people management
- Higher dependability on those outside the tangible reach.
- Higher emphasis on the overall quality delivery
- Higher level of intolerance
- Higher expectation from client

Furthermore, it can also create a series of challenging shifts:-

- From timing alignment of individual-based to sub group or location-based
- From familiarizing with a single language to global business language
- From mobilizing local to global minds
- From emphasizing product checkpoints to people checkpoints
- From operating based on a single culture to heterogeneous culture
- From depending on single group power to uneven balanced of decision power
- From seeking creation of knowledge wealth from individuals to nodes on the network

No doubt, the existence of crowds offers richer options in terms of team presentation to fulfill the demands of projects. The availability of a crowd in the network realm provides a creative arrangement to “slice and dice” teams to meet different aspects of project management.

In essence, a network of crowd fulfills projects that are performed by illusionary resources, namely unseen people scattered, evenly or unevenly, in different parts of the globe, an event coined as mass collaboration or crowd participation. Never mind if you don't get to see them. You know the crowds are out there and their fingerprints can only be found in the final outcome of the project; product.

### **Shift #2 – From Tangibility to Network of Virtual Expediency**

“*One need not see another to get the job done*” is already an IT proverb used for running projects by teams that are located far away from the axis of local projects.

The trend of managing IT projects today is bordering between physical and virtual. What was once regarded as preferred, resources within sight, may no longer be appealing when bottom-line values are the results of top-line deployment strategy.

The reality of global connectivity these days has opened up a portal of possibility for a dramatic shift from physical collocation of project people to one that can be virtually anywhere. This is the virtual network-based model. And it can be an answer to fulfill pressing expectation of new prospects.

The Virtual Network-based model provides realistic possibilities for project accomplishments even though the project team is out of sight but still available somewhere. It means tapping the global landscape and market where resources are reachable but scattered. But for Senior Management and Project Managers, a virtual model requires wrenching adjustment. Trade-off is required.

These trade-offs may be worthwhile proposing. We look at some of them that supports the recommendation of a virtual network model:-

- When time is of the essence, familiar close-range engagement is an acceptable trade-off for fast deployment of resources from other locations, regions or countries. The usual traditional “up, close and personal” no longer applies.
- When specialist is a compulsory requirement, local resources are “traded off” for the greater skills and knowledge-driven resources from around the world. In this case total cost of ownership may require profit-margin sacrifices.
- When headcounts are important to get the job done, traditional recruitment is traded off for global mass recruitment.

The existence of the virtual network model strongly suggests the breaking away from well defined project teams. Such network-based model prepares our stance to embrace contributions from any part of the globe transcending culture, time and location. Formation of a virtual network model is paradoxical by its effect, which means the course of a project is no longer dictated by time and being bounded by geographical location.

The paradoxes of this model are as follow:-

- While one part of the world sleeps, another is deeply engaged with project activities.
- While some teams are not seen, many are still there working on the projects.
- While some have weaknesses, others provide the strengths.
- While certain project teams are out of reach, they are still imaginably near to the overall team

### **Shift #3 – From Concentrated Locale to Network of Dispersed Knowledge**

The danger of localization can cause knowledge to exhaust. “*I have been around here for too long and know not what’s over there*” is an indication that knowledge has reached its limit. The antidote to this is knowledge acquisition the global way. Global experience is so essential for fighting against the strongholds of “stalemate”, “routines” and “mindsets” knowledge.

This means that although a project can afford “local” people to run its show, it does not necessarily represent the best-of-breed to complete the project.

Local people can be the culprit to lack of innovation. After all they are the ones who form concentrated knowledge. Concentrated knowledge creates a non-verbal agreement format with little need to be challenged. Decisions in a local group within the same environment have an inclination to move toward majority rules. Such is the herd instinct that can kill the spirit of innovation. Fortunately, today's global network formation can disrupt conventionality and traditionalism through the presence of networks of knowledge.

An invasion of dispersed knowledge can offend the ruling power of a local majority. Mining the global terrain for creativity seems best as global knowledge is richer, more diverse and broader, which is essential to cultivating the creativity needed for highly complex and "never done before" projects. A diversity of teams from around the globe can run a local project, fitting the niches and rarity of skills you cannot get locally. Their international knowledge and experience can challenge concentrated knowledge.

In fact, a larger tapestry of knowledge can be cultivated because minds from different parts of the world have every reason to showcase their unique abilities and skills. This conscious effort weaves dispersed knowledge into a single montage of knowledge, imparted during the lifecycle of the projects. Such brilliant output is a collective process derived from the global network brain, which can provide expert and non-traditional treatment so lacking in complex projects.

A global network brain can break into project minds and create new precepts and fresh approaches that a local brain may be too myopic to provide. A local brain simply means a local project team has already reached a state of complacency within its immediate surrounding and cannot break into newer knowledge, often owing to lack of experience.

A global network brain is a creative network which champions the integration of talents and competencies. It therefore personifies the best collection of knowledge, innovation, strength, and product experience.

#### **Shift #4 – From Old Patterns to Network of Trendsetters**

Pattern is often caught rather than taught. The way projects have been run traditionally may not work well with the current circumstances or for overcoming rising challenges. Global networks provide a way to first catch the benefits of running a project using practices, methods or techniques that have yet to reach your local shore.

The importance of reaching for other network nodes from afar opens up great possibility of change. "Old habits" of running a project may soon give way to new found ways that other parts of the network have tried and concluded successfully.

Networking enables interested parties in the international market to export more ideas and solutions that may have never been thought of as possible. When solutions for a project are accepted, the successful project can become a pilot or model for other projects to emulate.

A project can experience a dramatic successful change when it is run by teams networked across the platform globe and ever expanding in the name of value-add knowledge and global standards. From “*we have never used this route before*” to “*this is the way we do it*”, a global network of trendsetters can positively influence the routines of local projects.

We must realize that a network is an expanding chain where influence triggered at one end can impact the full spectrum of the chain. The stronger a node in a network, the more likely it can influence the behavior of the overall nodes, and thus the way projects are managed and run. In a global network, there can be pecking orders that set the cue for others to follow and the failure of doing so leading to incompatibility.

## **Conclusion**

In this explosive age of communication creativity, project management must be prepared to face flexibilities and changes. Though many principles of project management remain unchanged, the ways projects are managed need to be seriously reviewed to explore new possibilities for change - especially where masses, time, labor cost, priorities and skills top the list in project considerations. Though the physical shape of the world remain perennially the same, the shape of the world’s mind is ever changing. In the passage of time, the world will converge towards a single community, birthing network models that are already bringing a dramatic shift to project management.

**About the Author:****Melvyn Lee***Author*

**Melvyn Lee, PMP** has worked in various IT organization. He has taken on different roles such as Analyst Programmer, System Analyst, Product Specialist, Pre-Sales, Offshore Development Manager, IT Project Manager, System Integration Project Manager, Resourcing Manager and Technical Manager. He is currently working as a Technical Manager in Axon Solution Malaysia, an established a world-class SAP-shared services centre providing project implementation, application management and offshore/onshore services. The company has high quality consultants supporting Axon's customers not only out of its head office in the UK but also from its bases in the USA, Europe, Malaysia and Australia. He can be contacted at [lee\\_wmeng@hotmail.com](mailto:lee_wmeng@hotmail.com).