PM World *Journal*   *What exactly is your project?*
Vol. VI, Issue III – March 2017   *Welcome to this Edition*
www.pmworldjournal.net   David Pells, Managing Editor

What exactly is your project? The Growing importance of Categorization, Context and Typology in Project Management
and
Welcome to the March 2017 PMWJ

David Pells, Managing Editor

Welcome to the March 2017 edition of the **PM World Journal** (PMWJ). This 56th edition continues to reflect the international nature of this publication; **32** original articles, papers and other works by **41** different authors in **21** different countries are included this month. News articles about projects and project management around the world are also included. Since the primary mission of this journal is to support the global sharing of knowledge, please share this month's edition with others in your network, wherever in the world they may be.

Since last August, on the recommendation of several respected advisors, I have been using this opportunity to mention new trends or important issues that I see as journal editor. This month I want to discuss an emerging set of nagging questions: if every project is truly unique (Most definitions of a project seem to include the word "unique"), how practically useful are general bodies of knowledge, standards and qualifications? How real or applicable are "best practices" in project management (PM)? Why aren't the now acknowledged millions of people working on projects around the world flocking to PM education, certifications and organizations? Why don't more senior executives jump on the PM band wagon when so many of their projects are of real strategic importance?

When I first entered the PM field in the 1970s, I learned about the work breakdown structure (WBS) and WBS dictionary (scope), critical path planning (schedule), resource estimating and planning (cost), and quality (this was on a nuclear power plant). Risk was addressed with contingencies and reserves; communication, leadership and soft skills were just part of the job, with managers attending some internal courses. I knew the type of project was different from those in other industries and organizations, but these were not considerations we worried about.

In the 1980s I got involved with the Project Management Institute (PMI), joining a chapter, then founding and serving as a chapter president. We brought people from various organizations and projects together to share information. I bought into a common PM body of knowledge, terminology, standards and certifications. During the 1990s I was in the forefront of PMI's specific interest group (SIG) initiative as a SIG founder and chair. I began to recognize some differentiation for projects and project management as PMI members with different interests began to congregate and collaborate. New standards emerged for some industries, for example, construction and information technology (IT). Still, the commitment to a common set of concepts, principles and standards remained the rule.

Now in the 21st century, as the PM professional field has grown worldwide while the failure rate of projects has remained relatively constant, there seems to be an emerging realization that the "one-size-fits-all" approach may not be enough. Diversity seems to be emerging as the rule rather than the exception in the PM world. Just as there are vast numbers and types

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of projects around the world, there are vast numbers of unique differences. Project categories, either industry, geography or other distinctions, and project types are receiving new emphasis for describing and studying projects and programs. Context is also growing in importance.

What exactly is your project?

I now think that the word "unique" deserves more attention, and a better understanding of unique project factors may hold the secret to achieving more project success. Understanding the category, type and context of one's project could dramatically improve the ability to plan, identify critical risks and success factors, avoid pitfalls and create value.

Below are a few comments about these three aspects of project characterization, not in depth as there's not enough space here - others have already addressed these topics much better than I can. Also included are some comments about Situational Project Management, a topic introduced by Oliver Lehmann in his good recent book. [6]

Categorization of Projects

Before 2003, I had not thought much about project categories, other than industry differences. A number of authors had previously discussed project management in specific industries, in textbooks and papers. The breakthrough for me was Russ Archibald's papers, co-authored with Prof Vladimir Voropajev in 2003, then Russ's series of 2004 papers presented at several conferences in which he described a full project categorization model. Russ' model includes 11 major categories, each with multiple sub-categores. According to Russ, "most organizations recognize that projects they fund and execute fall within different categories, but the discipline of project management has not fully recognized that these different types of projects often exhibit different life cycle models and require different methods of governance, prioritizing, authorizing, planning, executing and controlling… no systematic method or system exists for identifying the several basic categories of projects, and the many variations in the key characteristics that can exist within those categories." [2]. You can find Russ' excellent papers on the topic on his Project Categories web page. [1]

Russ and Darci Prado incorporated the Archibald Categorization model in their important research on project management maturity in Brazil. [3] More recently, Alan Stretton published an excellent four-part series on Categorizing Projects and Programs in the *PM World Journal* during August-November 2016. In his first categorization paper, Alan references the Archibald model, but points out that it appears to be a mix of application sectors (aerospace/defense, communication systems, events, media/entertainment and healthcare) and project types (organizational change projects, facilities projects, information systems projects, produce and service development projects, and R&D projects). In his fourth article in the series, Alan offers some additional categorization options, including the Project Diamond Model developed by Shenhar, et. al, comprised of four axes: project pace (time frame); product novelty (market uncertainty); technology (technological uncertainty) and project complexity (system scope). [8, 10]

More recently, Niknazar and Bourgault state "although ordering and classification schemes play a crucial role in the project management field, classification as a topic of study has been undervalued in the literature. Accordingly, there is a semantic confusion and lack of uniformity about the definitions and theoretical implications of two commonly used terms in project management classification and typology." [6]

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Project Typologies

In his third series paper, Stretton discusses five primary project types (paralleling the types found in the Archibald Categorization Model from 2004): organization/business change; engineering/construction; ICT systems; product/service development; research & development. According to Stretton, "there are very many types of programs/projects… and these are independent of the Application Sectors in which they operate. It appears to me to be important to the program/project industry that a clear distinction is made between Application Sectors in which programs/projects are undertaken, and the Program/Project Types that operate over more than one Application Sector." [9]

According to Lehmann, "Typologies and with them classifications allow to better manage diversity… In scientific papers and articles, any difference between project types are also commonly ignored." Based on research that resulted in his book, Situational Project Management [6], Lehman offers a simple typology of 9 categories: Mark1 vs Mark n; greenfield vs. brownfield; siloed vs. solid; blurred vs focused; high impact vs. low impact; stand-alone vs. satellite; predictable vs. exploratory; and composed vs. decomposed projects. He goes on to say, "most projects undergo massive change during their performance…while the typology above speaks of project types, projects can move between these types, when requirements on project managers and their teams are highly dynamic." [4] I highly recommend reading this article.

Project Context

Project context has received far greater attention in the literature than categorization or typology, for good reason. Context is often more pervasive and obvious, especially when considering complexity, stakeholders and risks. Again referring to research by Stretton, who also references Peter Morris, "project management knowledge is not context free…. In spite of its ubiquitous nature, the management of project context as a topic in its own right receives little attention in the project management standards and guidelines. There are few guides that emphasize influencing context, let alone guidelines on how to go about it… the possible types of project contexts are so numerous and varied that it is hardly suprising that there is so little direct overall guidance in the literature on how to manage them. [11]

Stretton offers a useful model for capturing project contexts, based on three grouping: Interfaces with a project's wider external environment (for example, government, economy, financing, community, media, etc.); Interfaces with the rest of an organization (for ex; other projects, top management, line management, personnel offices; financial system, computer systems, marketing, etc.); and Interfaces within the project (major breakpoints, responsibility changes, information interfaces, geographic interfaces, etc.) Stretton references Morris "different contexts create the need for different management responses. Many contextual factors can, and typically do, affect the project, and how it is managed." Stretton goes on to discuss seven variables influencing project contexts, also introduced by Morris (three independent variables and four dependent variables. [11] I also highly recommend reading this article on Managing Project Contexts.

To add insight to this topic, Lehmann introduces "customer projects" as an important but overlooked category/type/context of projects – those managed by contractors, subcontractors, suppliers, consultants and others who are hired to supply a product or service. In addition to accomplishing project outcomes for customers, these projects must also be profitable. [5]

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Situational Project Management

When you have a unique project type within a specific category (industry or other classification), with various characteristics and contextual conditions, you often have a project in a unique situation. Returning to one of my questions above, Lehmann states "the claim of best practice contrasts with the definitions of the term 'project' used in the various international standards… differences between seemingly similar projects can arise due to the specific processes applied or may be affected by the unalike environments in which the projects are performed… In reality, the same practice that has led to success in past projects may lead to failure in others, and vice versa. The principles may not only be relevant to entire projects and their lifecycles, but to situations during these times. Approaches that have led to success in certain situations may cause trouble in other situations still in the same project. Situational project management is then the application of those practices that are favorable in given project situations.." [4] This seems totally understandable.

Like Mr. Lehmann, I also argue that situational project management needs to consider the true nature of the project – its industrial or operational category, its type, its context and its fundamental conditions. In my opinion, a better understood project, with appropriate PM processes and pressures brought to bear, should have a higher probability of succeeding. The point is, a project manager needs to fully understand what exactly his or her project really is.

Perhaps projects really are like wild animals, with all the complexity of living things. The nature of the beast arises from its species (category), herd or community (sub-category), family (type), environment (context) and individual conditions (situation). As I learned growing up in the country many years ago, one should know the beast before trying to tame it!

Now - This month in the Journal

Now for this month's journal which again contains some interesting and outstanding works. Seven featured papers are included this month, on quite different topics by 13 authors in eight different countries. These are all serious conference quality papers, most fully referenced. Eight of the authors have PhDs, all current or former professors at universities in their respective countries.

Three series articles are again included this month. Darren Dalcher has facilitated another '*Advances in Project Management'* series article by Routledge author Prof Douglas Long in Sydney and his co-author Ngaire Hunt in New Zealand. Darren's article is titled "it begins with trust" while the Long/Hunt article is about "the Project Manager as tightrope walker. Intriguing titles, interesting articles! A second article in the series on *Managing and Working in Project Society* is included this month, authored by Prof Rolf Lundin (Sweden) and Prof Jörg Sydow (Germany). Lundin and Sydow are co-authors of the award winning book of the same title; their article is titled "Project Networks – More than managing projects." Theirs is a great book; this is a good article.

Four useful advisory articles are included, by Americans Alan Shefveland and Rex Reagan, Zeta Yarwood in Dubai and Alfonso Bucero in Madrid. Three Commentary articles are included – from authors in Argentina, India and the USA. These seven articles are relatively short, but well written and interesting, so please take a look.

We are happy to include two very unique works this month, a play by Anil Seth in India and a Personal Story by Fred Fanning in the United States. Anil's creative work is titled "An

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Engineered Parrot" while Fred's story is "What I learned from a failed project." If you have a creative work or personal story, please let us share them with others. Just email them to me at editor@pmworldjournal.net. Three interesting Second Edition papers are included this month, provided by Kik Piney in France, Charles Villanyi Bokor in Canada, and Jolita Kiznyte in Lithuania (and her co-authors Marcos Welker and Prof Dr. André Dechange in Germany).

Interesting regional reports are included from Alfonso Bucero in Spain, Jouko Vaskimo in Finland and Miles Shepherd in the UK. Five good book reviews are also included. All of the articles, papers, reports and reviews this month contribute to the global project management body of knowledge. Please read those of interest to you, then share them with others. Sharing knowledge multiplies the impact of good ideas, and some ideas (like projects) can change the world.

The rest of this article is our monthly boilerplate. But please read if this is your first time with the PMWJ or read again if you are a subscriber (if you don't mind), as it's important for sustaining this publication.

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If you are a student of project management at an accredited university, consider our virtual project **research internship** program. Learn about our interns here. See opportunities for students at http://pmworldlibrary.net/students/. The PMWL is intended to support continuous learning in the field of program and project management but is proving especially useful for students. Help us create a truly global resource; visit www.pmworldlibrary.net and become a member.

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Thanks to Authors and Sponsors

I want to thank the authors who contributed to this edition of the PMWJ. Most have included an email address at the end of her or his author profile. If you find an article or paper useful or interesting, let the author know. Better yet, ask questions, start a discussion, share information and knowledge. We also want to thank our advisors, correspondents and contributing editors around the world. These teams include leaders from academic and professional organizations in around 50 countries.

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Share it forward

If you found something interesting in the PMWJ this month, please **SHARE IT FORWARD** - send the link to colleagues, co-workers or friends. If you have knowledge or a story to share, submit an article or paper for publication. We are especially interested in those that contribute to solving global problems. Thank you for reading this month's edition of the PMWJ, have a great January and good luck with your projects!

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David L. Pells is Managing Editor of the **PM World Journal** (www.pmworldjournal.net) and Managing Director of the PM World Library (www.pmworldlibrary.net). David is an internationally recognized leader in the field of professional project management with more than 35 years of experience on a variety of programs and projects, including engineering, construction, energy, defense, transit, technology and nuclear security, and project sizes ranging from thousands to billions of dollars. He has been an active professional leader in the United States since the 1980s, serving on the board of directors of the Project Management Institute (PMI®) twice. He was founder and chair of the Global Project Management Forum (1995-2000), an annual meeting of leaders of PM associations from around the world.

David was awarded PMI's Person of the Year award in 1998 and Fellow Award, PMI's highest honor, in 1999. He is also an Honorary Fellow of the Association for Project Management (APM) in the UK; Project Management Associates (PMA - India); and Russian Project Management Association. Since 2010 he is an honorary member of the Project Management Association of Nepal. From June 2006 until March 2012, he was the managing editor of *PM World Today*. He occasionally provides high level advisory services for major programs, global organizations and the U.S. federal government. David has a BA in Business Administration from the University of Washington and a Master's degree in business from Idaho State University in the USA. He has published widely, spoken at conferences and events worldwide, and can be contacted at *editor@pmworldjournal.net*.