

## **Project Management is not so “advanced” as many think!**

By Paul D. Giammalvo

In PM WORLD TODAY EDITORIAL, July 2007 David Pells wrote “Why is Project Management so White Hot - Cool?”

Not to date myself, but at one time, Hula Hoops were once “cool”, as were 8 track tapes, Betamax and bra burning.....

So what’s my point? We have to be careful to differentiate between fads and facts, propaganda and proof, sizzle and the steak.....

Project management is certainly not “new”. The taming of fire, invention of the wheel..... the Pyramids, the Great Wall of China, Panama Canal, Empire State Building..... These and many more examples stand as ample evidence that project management is an integral part of mankind’s development and evolution. Stated another way, initiating, planning, executing, controlling and closing of projects seems to be “hard wired” into the human psyche. And somehow, at least up until around the early 1980’s, these projects were all done without benefit of the PMBOK Guide, PRINCE2 or any certifications.

It seems as though it’s only been since PMI’s outstanding marketing efforts in establishing the “brand” of the PMP (1984), Tom Peter’s “Innovation Management” (1992), And Thomas Stewart’s “Project Management-Career Choice of the 90’s and Beyond” Fortune Magazine March, 1995 that project management has been widely “recognized” as a stand alone occupation, much less a profession. Yet let’s do a little bit of a reality check. Despite ~50 years of AACE, CMAA, PMI, APM et al, are we really doing any better at project management than we did prior to the “popularization” of the process?

All one has to do is pick up any newspaper to see examples of project failures..... Ford Motor’s “Everest”, the US Governments blunders <http://www.wired.com/techbiz/it/news/2005/01/66445> , Australia’s Custom Software <http://www.cio.com.au/index.php?id=723894471&eid=-601> And our Construction colleagues, while supposedly more mature users of project management methodologies as a delivery system, are not a whole lot better than our IT colleagues.

I am currently about to attend a symposium of the Systems Dynamics Society- you know, the people who believe that if a butterfly flaps its wings in the jungles of Malaysia, that it could spawn a hurricane in Florida? While this may well be “pie in the sky” thinking, having spent my life in project management as both a practitioner and as an academic, I am becoming highly skeptical of the methodologies being espoused not

only by PMI, but APM, AACE and other organizations as well, for no other reason that while certainly a good start, as we are finding out from our systems dynamics and systems engineering colleagues, there is NO single methodology or process which can consistently deliver “successful” projects. (defined to be on time, within budget, substantially meeting technical specifications while substantially fulfilling the purpose for which the project was undertaken in the first place)

Because of these observations, I would urge the readers of the PM forum to not be lulled into complacency. Project management is today where medicine was back in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. We are experimenting with what works and what doesn't and while we know there are some tools and techniques which work better than others, we still haven't reached the point where we are justified in calling what we do a profession. Before we move forward, we all need to take an introspective look into our track record, step back a little and reflect on who we are, what we are doing and where we want to go in the future, for ultimately, in order to professionalize what we do for a living, we need to be able to show we can produce consistent, predicable, repeatable results.

BR,  
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from the Systems Dynamics Society symposium, MIT, Boston, MA, USA

## About the Author



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For 25+ years, he has been providing Project Management training and consulting throughout South and Eastern Asia, the Middle East and Europe. He is also active in the Global Project Management Community, serving as an Advocate for and on behalf of the global practitioner. He does so by playing an active professional role in the Association for the Advancement of Cost Engineering International, (ACEI); Construction Specifications Institute (CSI) and the Construction Management Association of America, (CMAA). He previously served on the Board of Directors of the American Society for the Advancement of Project Management (asapm) <http://www.asapm.org/> and served previously as the Chair of the Certification Board of the Green Project Management organization. <http://www.greenprojectmanagement.org/> He is active as a regional leader and a compensated consultant to the Planning Planet’s Guild of Project Controls. <http://www.planningplanet.com/guild>

He has spent 18 of the last 45 years working on large, highly complex international projects, including such prestigious projects as the Alyeska Pipeline and the Distant Early Warning Site (DEW Line) upgrades in Alaska. Most recently, he worked as a Senior Project Cost and Scheduling Consultant for Caltex Minas Field in Sumatra and Project Manager for the Taman Rasuna Apartment Complex for Bakrie Brothers in Jakarta. His current client list includes AT&T, Ericsson, Nokia, Lucent, General Motors, Siemens, Chevron, Conoco-Philips, BP, Dames and Moore, SNC Lavalin, Freeport McMoran, Petronas, Pertamina, UN Projects Office, World Bank Institute and many other Fortune 500 companies and NGO organizations.

Dr. Giammalvo holds an undergraduate degree in Construction Management, a Master of Science in Project Management through the George Washington University and a PhD in Project and Program Management through the Institute Supérieur De Gestion Industrielle (ISGI) and Ecole Supérieure De Commerce De Lille (ESC-Lille- now SKEMA School of Management) under the supervision of Dr. Christophe Bredillet, CCE, IPMA A Level. “Dr. PDG” can be contacted at [pauldgphd@gmail.com](mailto:pauldgphd@gmail.com).