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## **Report from the Systems Dynamic Society Meeting in Boston and a Call for incorporating more Systems Thinking in Project Management**

**(And lets get the PMBOK into the public domain!)**

*By Paul D. Giammalvo, PhD*

The week of 29 July through 2 August 2007 saw some 500+ leading thinkers from around the world descending on Boston, Massachusetts, USA to attend the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Systems Dynamic Society Annual Symposium, hosted by MIT and held at the Boston Seaport Hotel complex.

The keynote speaker was Jay W. Forrester, an MIT educated Electrical Engineer, credited with being the “father” of Random Access Memory (RAM) and the first computer graphics. However, his most notable contributions have not been in the field of computers, but in the field of Systems Dynamics, or the counter-intuitive behavior of complex social systems.

Professor Forrester was amongst the first to create a model which helped to predict many of the global problems we are experiencing today- global warming, climate changes, inability to make peace with our fellow men and women. In his book “World Dynamics” he modeled the complex interactions of economics, population growth and ecology. While originally met with skepticism, some 30+ years on, his model has proven to be disturbingly accurate. (See Limits to Growth- A 30 Year Update:

[http://www.mnforsustain.org/meadows\\_limits\\_to\\_growth\\_30\\_year\\_update\\_2004.htm](http://www.mnforsustain.org/meadows_limits_to_growth_30_year_update_2004.htm) )

So what does all this have to do with project or program management? Based on numerous studies, as well as a scan of your daily newspaper, we can see that project management as we are currently approaching it, is not working. Boston’s Big Dig, the IRS attempts to computerize their operations, Ford Motor’s attempts to create a Customer Relations Program stand as but a few examples of how well intentioned projects turn into disasters. And the larger and more complex the project, the more likely it will become a disaster.

So why, after ~50 years of the existence of project management as a recognized discipline, aren’t we doing a better job? And more importantly, what can we do about fixing it?

After belonging to the Systems Dynamics Society for several years, and attending their symposia, I believe it is time project management set aside our “not invented here” syndrome and our focus on trying to establish a legal stranglehold on the Body of Knowledge and start to look at what other societies are doing that compliment or even replace many of our most cherished beliefs and practices.

In his keynote address, Jay Forrester stated “we cannot simplify complexity. We MUST face it.” He further explained that “we cannot solve the problem of complexity by making small decisions. The only way to deal with complexity is by looking at complexity holistically”. And that can only happen if we are willing to “reverse ingrained policies and practices”. That includes much of the “not invented here” inbred thinking which currently permeates project management.

Forrester suggested the following solutions-

- 1) Practitioners MUST bring the issues to the people who are being negatively impacted by so many failed projects. Only when the shareholders, taxpayers, consuming public and other key stakeholders know they have an alternative to “the way we’ve always done things” will we be able to implement change.
- 2) We need to get Systems Thinking OUTSIDE of academia and into mainstream thinking.

Harold Kerzner, Jim Lewis, Shlomo Globerson, Avraham Shtub, Terry Williams are but a few of the project management guru’s who identified early on that project management is a “process, method or system”. This was confirmed by my own PhD research, which polled some 400 global practitioners. We need to listen to them and then look to collaborative alliances between the various professional organizations which represent Project Managers and the Systems Dynamics and Systems Engineering Societies. We need to expedite the integration between the BoK’s associated with Project Management and the BoK’s of Systems Dynamics/Systems Engineering. Once we’ve done that, we can start to adapt or adopt those practices which will move the practice of project management to a level where we EARN the right to call ourselves a profession.

Unfortunately, this cannot be realized unless we are willing to reverse the restrictive and regressive policies of a few of the leading professional organizations claiming to represent project management by aggressively copyrighting intellectual property produced by the member/owners.

I call on my colleagues and fellow practitioners in the world of project management to lobby professional organizations to put the creation and maintenance of the BoK’s into the “public domain” under “Copyleft” or “Gnu Licensing” much along the lines of Wikipedia. Attempts to “own and control” the “knowledge” freely donated by member/owners of these organizations and sell it back to them is morally bankrupt and ethically reprehensible. It is

no longer consistent with the concepts of knowledge creation and maintenance.

<http://freedomdefined.org/Licenses>

Follow the lead of the Global Alliance for Project Performance Standards (GAPPS) [www.globalpmstandards.org](http://www.globalpmstandards.org) or the American Association for the Advancement of Project Management (asapm) <http://www.asapm.org/> . To my knowledge, GAPPS and asapm are the FIRST and ONLY organizations purporting to represent the practice of project management which have put the collected knowledge and wisdom of the member/owners into the public domain under “Copyleft” or “GNU Licensing”. <http://www.gnu.org/copyleft/>

For more information-

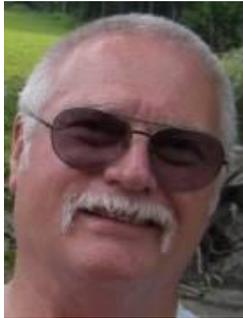
Systems Dynamics Society- <http://www.systemdynamics.org/>

International Council on Systems Engineering- [www.incose.org](http://www.incose.org)

Santa Fe Institute- <http://www.santafe.edu/>

Complex Dynamics Systems and Control- <http://www.cdsc.newcastle.edu.au/index.shtml>

## 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, (AACE); 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).