

## **"WHAT BOUNDARIES?"**

### **A play about project management in four dimensions**

*Originally presented at the IPMA World Congress in Florence, Italy, June 1992*

**By Martin Barnes**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

I was on the planning committee for the IPMA congress in 1992 held in Florence.

At an early meeting, my colleagues came up with an entirely conventional and rather boring plan for the opening ceremony. I protested and pointed out that Florence, 500 years earlier in 1492, must have been dominated by the project managers of the time who brought about and managed every aspect of the renaissance, the most important political and cultural advance of that millennium. What a project!

I persuaded them that we should have a play on this theme as the focal point of the opening ceremony.

I wrote a play which needed three people. The characters were Prospero (me) and Ariel (Sally Aylard), both characters from Shakespeare's 'The Tempest'. All other parts were played by David Hadfield. The structure of the play is based on Charles Dickens' book 'A Christmas Carol' with 'scenes' from the past, present and future. We came on at the end of the morning session, hence the various references to going to lunch.

The various references to boundaries are there because the congress was called "Project Management Without Boundaries". "Fangel Day" is referred to because Morten Fangel, the Great Dane, was President of IPMA at the time.

#### **BACKGROUND**

The play is intended to make people think more widely about the possible range of application of Project Management than they may have thought before. They may conclude that it has no geographical or time boundaries and that there are few areas of human activity into which it cannot be taken.

The project managers represent project managers of the past, present and future. Lorenzo the Magnificent is chosen because the congress at which the play was performed took place in Florence at the time of his 500 year anniversary celebrations. Prospero and Ariel develop their argument between the appearance of each project manager.

## **The project managers and their projects:**

### **Project Management Past**

Pharaoh Cheops	His great pyramid	3508 b.c.
Lorenzo de Medici	The Reformation	1492 a.d.

### **Project Management Present**

Boris Yeltsin	The change of Russia from a communist to a free market economy	1992 a.d.
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500 years later

### **Project Management Future**

M/25435/560/22157	CL246 to 281 and 4241A	2042 a.d.
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Another 50 years later

David	Galactic Health	2092 a.d.
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## **STAGE DIRECTIONS**

The three actors are on stage all the time. The project managers are all played by one person who changes character - changes can be made on stage but should be out of the spotlight. Full costume is not required but there should be a piece of symbolic costume for each project manager.

Technical facilities required are a large back projection screen upon which symbols and pictures of the projects are projected during each interrogation. Prospero and Ariel are strongly lit as is the witness project manager's position. Music on a tape introduces and concludes the play. All three players have neck microphones.

## **INTRODUCTION - CONGRESS CHAIRMAN**

'And now, to conclude the opening session of Internet 1992 and to take us up to lunch -

We have a play. Sit back and enjoy it.

The theme of our congress is

**"Project Management without boundaries"**

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and the title of the play is

**"What boundaries?"**

It is a play about Project Management in four dimensions.

It was specially written for the congress by Martin Barnes, former chairman of the council of The International Project Management Association and of the Association of Project Managers, our member organisation in the UK.'

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**THE PLAY**

**[Start music tape at high volume at the beginning. At 35 seconds, fade out over 4 seconds. Run tape on to 75 seconds without any sound being broadcast. Pause there with sound right down. ]**

**[Play begins with screen blank.]**

Prospero     **[As music fades.]**

You look as if you are thinking hard, my wandering helper. What is in your mind? Is it something we can amuse ourselves discussing until we eat?

Ariel         I have been speaking to some other timeless spirits about what strange things these humans are. The things they think and argue about, the things they do well, the things they do badly and how narrowly they have to think.

Prosp         Why narrowly?

Ariel         They know nothing of what they call the future and only about things going on in their own time which they can communicate from one to another.

Prosp         True, my helpful half, and they know hardly anything about what they call the past! I suppose it is the tight boundaries of their time vision which explains why they develop their abilities so slowly.

Ariel         And so patchily.

Prosp         What do you mean - patchily ? An English word I do not understand.

- Ariel            It's like this, at any one time, some of them are good at things and others useless. Some can manage their little tasks well, others achieve nothing.
- Prosp            Managing their tasks - is that not what they called Project Management?
- Ariel            Only for a short time. I think may be less than a hundred of their years, around the time they call 2000. Before that they managed projects but did not know they did, after that it became part of what they always did and they never talked about it.
- Prosp            You talk nonsense, how can something real, with no boundaries of time, place or activity only be in their minds for a tiny part of their time on earth?
- Ariel            I never persuade you by my arguments! I will bring you some project managers to question, perhaps they will make my point for me.
- Prosp            Do that, my own project manager, put some of your like before me and let them try to make your point without knowing what it is! Who is first?
- Ariel            Lets start in - 3508 b.c.

**[Slide one on - Egyptian tomb painting]**

**[Cheops appears - Pharaoh of Egypt]**

- Prosp            Who is this?
- Ariel            Cheops, Pharaoh of Egypt, ask him about his great pyramid.
- Prosp            Great Pharaoh, welcome! Why are you building your great pyramid?
- Cheops            To be my tomb and memorial.
- Prosp            You could have a much smaller tomb and memorial. Why so large?
- Cheops            To show my subjects and those who come after me what a powerful ruler I am.
- Ariel            Ask him how he manages the project, lunch is soon.
- Prosp            Will it take a long time?
- Cheops            No, about fifty years I expect.

- Prosp            That seems a long time.
- Cheops         I shall be dead before it is finished so I don't mind.
- Prosp            Is it costing what you expected?
- Cheops         What is cost?
- Prosp            **[to Ariel]**    How can this man make your point about project management if he has no time limit and does not even know what cost is?
- Ariel            He understands resources if not time and cost.
- Great Pharaoh, how many people have been used in building your pyramid?
- Cheops         About three thousand.
- Prosp            So few?
- Cheops         Yes, of the twenty thousand who have worked on it, only three thousand have died so far.
- Prosp            And will it do what you intend?
- Cheops         Yes very well, it will impress all who see it for ever.
- Prosp            What difficulties have you had in designing and building it?
- Cheops         None.
- Prosp            How do you motivate the people who work on it?
- Cheops         They all know that if they do not do what they are told, or do not work very hard - they will be killed. Their motivation is very good.
- Prosp            Is it difficult to manage your great tasks?
- Cheops         No, all I do is decide what I want to be done, tell my people what is to be done and how, and then make sure they do it. So long as there is enough time and people to replace those who die or are killed - everything works well enough.
- Prosp            **[to Ariel]**    This is project management, my demonstrator?

Ariel            It has all the things a project has - and it is managed. But the Pharaoh had so many resources and such power over them that to manage was easy. You asked me to prove that project management is all around and has been done throughout all time - not that it has always been done well - it has not.

This Pharaoh was one of the first project managers but probably one of the worst. Later project managers had more respect for life.

**[The Pharaoh departs unobtrusively during this speech.]**

**[Slide one off.]**

Prosp            So project management existed in what they call the ancient world. I doubt whether it existed in what they call the middle ages.

**[Slide two on - Lorenzo with Florentine background.]**

Ariel            But it did - here - test this man - do you recognise him? We are in Florence, exactly 5000 years later - in the year they call 1492.

**[Said whilst Lorenzo strides across the stage.]**

Prosp            He is Lorenzo de Medici whom they call The Magnificent. Can he be a project manager?

Ariel            Ask him.

Prosp            A word, Lord Lorenzo. Are you a project manager?

Lorenzo        I do not understand your question.

Prosp            I put it to you differently - are you a manager of change?

Lorenzo        What is "manager"?

Prosp            Forgive me, Lord Lorenzo - I put my question too crudely. Are you the director of the great changes happening in your city state of Florence?

Lorenzo        Certainly I am. Who but the head of the Medicis could attempt such an undertaking, and which Medici lord has achieved so much?

Prosp            None I am sure, my Lord.

**[aside to Ariel]**

Are all project managers so arrogant, my counsellor?

Ariel            Not all of them!

Prosp            Lorenzo, you have changed Florence into a cultural, business and intellectual centre to compete with Athens and Rome in their prime. Your city leads the world in architecture, music, painting, sculpture, literature, in matters of the Christian faith and in the science of government itself. You have achieved these changes within thirty years. How, and at what cost?

Lorenzo        I do not answer questions - I ask them.

**[Moves to leave]**

Prosp            My helper, bring him back and unlock his mind to me.

**[Ariel catches Lorenzo and brings him back by an invisible power. By a gesture, Ariel causes Lorenzo to answer the questions fully and without arrogance.]**

Prosp            What you call directing changes some call project management - now tell me how you do it.

Lorenzo        I decide clearly what I want to achieve. I divide it into tasks, each of which one person can direct, and I promise them a reward of money and rank if they succeed. I choose people who are themselves good at choosing people who are very good at their special tasks - Michelangelo at carving, Brunelleschi and Giotto at designing great buildings, artists Della Robbia and Ghiberti and a hundred others.

My chosen people achieve great things of quality not known before and play their parts in my schemes at a pace not known before.

Prosp            And where does the money which you pay them come from?

Lorenzo        You are impertinent

Prosp            Helper - a little more of the open mind please.

**[Ariel tries to increase the dose but Lorenzo gets away.]**

Prosp            Let him go my helper. **[pause]**

He seems to be a very good project manager and to apply his skill to every type of change. But he does not recognise that he is managing projects - or even believe that it is anything very difficult or special.

**[Slide two off.]**

I am not convinced, project management sounds rather like what we sometimes hear them call "common sense". I do not understand how it can be real and pervade everything if people only talked about it, as you say, in the hundred years around 2000. I still suspect it is one of the things which humans concern themselves with for a short time - like horses - and television.

Ariel            Not true, my Lord - horses and television were only important for a short time - a few hundred years for horses and a few decades for television. I have already shown you that project management began when human civilisation began. Towards the end of the twentieth century, the humans recognised project management for the first time. It expanded its influence both around the world and around the different activities of the humans at great speed around that time.

Prosp           I am still not convinced. Show me something from that time.

Ariel            All right, we will move exactly 500 years to 1992 and stay in Florence. There is a congress of project managers - talk to some of them.

Prosp           No, my tormentor. No more of Florence! Show me, if you can, a world leader of 1992 who really used project managers.

**[Slide 3 - Helmut Kohl - on briefly - Ariel gestures it away.]**

**Slide 4 - John Major - on briefly - Ariel gestures it away.**

**Slide 5 - George Bush - on briefly - Ariel gestures it away.**

**Slide 6 - Boris Yeltsin - on - Ariel gestures to leave it on. Boris Yeltsin appears.]**

Prosp           Who are you?

Yeltsin          Yeltsin.

Prosp           Have you ever heard of Project Management?

Yeltsin          Of course.

Prosp           What does it do for you?

Yeltsin          Everything.

Prosp           What do you mean?

Yeltsin          I have begun the task of turning my country from a member of a communist federation of different nations to a market economy and an

independent nation. I have to change everything - the way agriculture and industry are organised, I have to create capital and ways of exchanging it. I have to change the way government is chosen and how it works. I have to close down a mighty military machine.

I have to do everything - I have to do it with the co-operation of many people. I have to do it with very little money and I have to do it all in a very short time. And you ask me if I have heard of project management and what I use it for.

Who are you to ask such stupid questions?

Prosp       **[to Ariel]**     My imp, you are playing with me.

Ariel         I am not, this man is right - he helps to make my point.

Prosp         All right - Yeltsin, so who are all your project managers? How can you do it all in a short time?

Yeltsin       I will tell you - it is only just possible.

The international community of project managers is only just big enough to do it.

Only in the last few years, as a result of co-operation between project managers working in different areas of specialism, has the science reached the point where it can be applied by any trained project manager to any task of change.

Many project managers learnt their skill in engineering or information technology, before it was recognised as universal. My changes could not have been managed at any earlier time.

Project management crosses all functions. It is the power which makes change possible.

It is an international skill because much of it has been developed on large projects involving people from many countries. It has a strong international body helping those who are developing the skill. Project management may be the only skill which is truly international - it has no national boundaries!

**[Slide 6 - Yeltsin - off.]**

**[Yeltsin moves off during the next speech.]**

Prosp       **[to Ariel]**

Russians - always the longest speeches. We should have stayed at the congress in Florence.

But he certainly makes your point. There really was enthusiasm for project management in 1992. But what happened after that, my teacher?

Who is this? Another project manager?

**[Slide 7 on - boring image of industrial wasteland.]**

Ariel            This is M/25435/560/22157.            We have moved on 50 years from the Florence congress. It is 2042 and this person is called a project manager. Ask how it manages projects - waste no words - if we were not timeless, it would be nearly time for lunch. Use its short name, M/25.

Prosp            Tell me, M/25, what projects do you manage?

M/25            Projects CL246 to 281 and 4241A.

Prosp            How interesting. What are they?

M/25            Mainly type 384 with WBS enhancement 5T.

Prosp            Tell me about how you manage your projects.

M/25            We are using USPPM/35

Prosp            You speak in riddles, what is USPPM/35?

M/25            I think it might mean 'Universal Standard Protocol for Project Management - version 35'. It's just a lot of forms we fill in and send them off somewhere.

Prosp            Are you achieving some exciting changes at a fast pace - with a happy, well motivated team of people drawn from a wide variety of cultures and technical backgrounds?

M/25            No.

All my staff are permanent members of the department who have worked in it for a long time. I have to say that what we do is not exciting.

Prosp            **[to Ariel]**

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My adviser, why do I have to question this person? It is so boring - and not helping your argument.

Ariel        Tell us, M/25 is what you do different from ordinary management? What makes it Project management?

M/25        It is the same. It has been for nearly twenty years.

Prosp        How did that happen?

M/25        In the early two thousands, all the managers who had not been project managers before became project managers. Once it was accepted that project managers were the managers of change, nobody wanted to be a manager of no change. There were no ordinary managers - only project managers.

But many of the ordinary managers had only changed their titles to keep their jobs - they went on working in the old way. In the twenty twenties and the thirties, project management gradually disappeared in reality - everybody pretended they were doing it but nobody really was.

Prosp        There, my deceiver, I am right! Project management was just one of those human fashions! It lasted for no more than fifty or sixty years. It looks as if that congress in Florence in 1992 was the peak - after that it was diluted until it disappeared. Perhaps project management should have had just one boundary - - the boundary around its special skills.

Ariel        You are quite wrong. I am indeed your deceiver! That scene was my creation.

**[pointing to M/25]** That is an actor. You are deceived!

**[Slide 7 - off.]**

**[M/25 slinks away - boringly and depressingly.]**

Prosp        But the words you made it speak were true. You have lost the argument!

I always enjoy disputing with you - let us away to lunch. You try to be too clever. Be cheerful. Perhaps you will win next time.

**[A handsome, confident young man appears.]**

Prosp        Who is this? Another actor?

Ariel        This is David.

Prosp        We are back in Florence are we? Is this the David of Michelangelo's statue?

Ariel        He looks like him - that is all. He is a real project manager. We see him in 2092, another fifty years on, the time of this conference.

Prosp        No, no, the game is finished, I have won, to our lunch. Send him away.

Ariel        Hear him, it will be only a few moments.

Prosp        All right - but quickly - you question him, my point is made.

Ariel        David, where did you learn to be a project manager?

David        At my mother's knee, then from my father. We practised it at school. I cannot remember when I did not know how to manage projects. Everyone is a project manager. We all have our own tasks, and we all play our parts in the greater tasks around us.

Ariel        How well does it work, David?

David        Well enough. Much better than in earlier times.

Ariel        How do you know?

David        **[Holding up the book of the current congress proceedings]**

I have an old book which belonged to an ancestor, also called David. It tells of project management one hundred years ago. Many men and women helped to write the book, it reports a congress held in what was then called Italy.

At that time, only a few people learned about project management and then not until they were more than twenty years old. In many countries, there were very few project managers at all.

In the book, they are still discussing such things as what computer systems to use for project management, having to think how to extend it into different cultures and how to use it with multicultural teams.

The funniest things in the book are what they call "case studies". At that time, there were some human activities in which project management had not been used at all. Their descriptions of how they first tried to use it in new situations are quite funny when you realise that, now, there is no other type of management.

And they thought they were so good at it!

Ariel           What do you mean?

David           Well, at the congress in Florence, they talked about the projects of that time - and they were so slow! It took three years to change a group of European countries to a market economy, and the international famine relief project they began at about that time took five years. They had so little experience of working really internationally.

Prosp           So how fast are you?

Ariel **[to Prospero]** Master, you said I was to ask the questions.

Prosp           Be quiet, my twister, he interests me.

David - how fast are you?

David           Not particularly fast. The project I am working on now is quality driven, not time or cost driven.

Prosp           What is your project?

**[Slide 8 on - galaxy.]**

David           I'm on the galactic health project. People from all over the galaxy are working on it. Its objective is to eliminate illness. As usual, it has taken a long time to work out exactly how to achieve the objective. Now we are in the implementation stage. It affects every human in the galaxy.

Prosp           It must have a very big organisation.

David           Not particularly. Clear communication and well-informed decision making are standard practice for us. Our organisation works very well - considering how different the people are from each other and that the project has no physical boundaries at all.

Prosp           But how fast, David?

David           We began last Fangel day and will finish by next Fangel day.

Prosp           What is Fangel day, my wise assistant?

Ariel           It is a day's holiday these humans have every twelve months. I forget why it has that strange name.

Prosp           So this David and his team of project managers from all over the galaxy completed their huge and complex project inside a year.

You win at last, my persuader.

Indeed, project management is without boundaries - it moves across all dimensions and all time.

Unless you deceive me still, and this David is another of your actors!

**[Restart music tape. Fade in music slowly during this next speech. High volume immediately the speech has ended.]**

Ariel            I do not. This David is no more an actor than you and I, my master.

**[All three move to front stage and take a bow.]**

**[When music ends, switch off projector and tape.]**

## About the Author



### **MARTIN BARNES, PhD**

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**Dr. Martin Barnes**, PhD, was President of the Association for Project Management (APM), the professional body for project managers in the UK, until the end of October 2012. He was a founding member (no. 10) of APM in 1972 and has been an active APM leader since that time. He was APM Chair in the 1980s and was named an APM Fellow in 1995. Martin has a civil engineering degree from the University of London and a PhD from the University of Manchester, UK. His doctorate was awarded in 1971 for research into improved methods of financial control for engineering projects. Martin Barnes invented the classic Time/Cost/Quality triangle and other project management techniques over the years. He built up his own PM business over 15 years until it merged with what is now PricewaterhouseCoopers in 1985.

Now a consultant in project management, Martin was also Executive Director of the Major Projects Association (MPA) for nine years until 2006. Dr Barnes has advised on significant projects in many countries in Europe, Asia and Africa, for the World Bank, other funding agencies, governments, promoters and major contractors. He has worked on projects in the engineering, defense, aerospace, IT, financial, business change and media sectors. Martin's BBC television programme on project management has been used as a training aid in many countries. He has acted as expert witness in a number of arbitrations concerning major projects. Martin led the team that produced the New Engineering Contract (NEC), a system of contracts designed to facilitate and stimulate the use of modern project management across all the contributors on a project. The NEC is now being used in over 20 countries and has been adopted by the UK government for all publicly funded construction projects.

Martin Barnes has been active in the IPMA since 1972, having attended all but one of its world congresses since that year. He presented papers at most of them. He is a Fellow of IPMA and a former board member and Chairman of its Council of Representatives. Dr Barnes is a recipient of the Chartered Institute of Management's Special Award and of the Institution of Civil Engineers' Watson Medal in the UK, both for his personal contributions to the development of project management. He is a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Engineering, the UK's highest engineering recognition, and is a Churchill Fellow. Martin Barnes lives near Oxford and can be contacted at [cornbrash@aol.com](mailto:cornbrash@aol.com).