
The PM Horizon at 33,300 Feet¹

Implications of two contradictory trends: globalization and personalization

By David L. Pells

For the past six months I have thought a lot about PMI and the project management (PM) profession in North America. I have studied PMI membership statistics, breakdowns by industry and geographic regions, history and projections. It has become obvious to me that PMI's membership, and trends in membership, have reflected changes and trends in American (and perhaps Canadian) industry. We have more and more members in information systems and service industries, fewer in old line industries such as engineering and construction. So it seems PM and PMI's membership reflect industry economic demographics. This is not surprising. And it is a good and true story – in the USA and around the world. That is, PM practice will reflect industrial needs and applications of PM. And the membership in PM associations will follow the same trend.

Several years ago I read John Naisbitt's best-selling book *Megatrends*. Two seemingly contradictory trends discussed in the book were related to technology and modern telecommunications, making the world smaller – leading to globalization, of issues, knowledge, relations, economics and politics. It seems the current globalization of economies and industries is proving that trend true. But it also seems obvious.

At the same time, Mr. Nesbitt discussed the personalization of many aspects of life, primarily driven by the personal computer, miniaturization technologies and personal communications. Technology was allowing for "personalization" of everything, from software to automobiles.

I occurred to me at the time that those trends had implications for project management tools and applications. It seemed exciting! I thought about the impact on project teams, organizations and project managers of these technological trends, that could allow individuals anywhere in the world to work together. Now the INTERNET (world wide web) is making that possibility a reality. And in the process, PM has become more and more personal and applicable to smaller and smaller tasks, smaller projects, etc. This is a great trend.

But when has change ever slowed down?

¹This article was originally the body of a memo from the author when he was a vice president at the Project Management Institute (PMI®), sent to Bruce Rodrigues at PMI South Africa, David Smith at PMI Canada and Ron Eckman at PMI New Zealand, dated 12 May 1995

Now I am on a flight from Dallas to Frankfurt, at 33,000 feet, thinking about PMI and PMI Canada and PMI South Africa, and globalization of PM, and the incredible increase in requests for PMI chapters and the number of new national associations. I'm trying to envision the "best" approach to conduct the Global PM Forum in New Orleans in October. I'm trying to think and feel my way around various PMI marketing issues and where are we? Where are we going? Where should we go?

Then I started reading *The Economist* (April 27th issue) and on page 90 is an article that catches my eye, "Wealth of Nations". It's an article without an author, maybe an editorial. It starts out, "A curious thing is happening in the world..." It goes on to discuss a study conducted by two economists at MIT in Boston, leading to a surprising conclusion. The article is about globalization, but with economic and political implications.

The result of the study was that as the world's economy becomes globalized, it becomes easier and more practical for small nations to exist or local regions to nationalize. That is, the global economy reduces the "economies of scale" of large countries (where national security is not an issue). Examples today range from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union to new countries in Southern Africa or even Ireland. The article concludes with "the twin modern developments of globalization and democratization are likely to lead to more countries, not fewer." Economic integration is more likely to bring political separation rather than cohesion.

What does this all mean to me? Once again PMI, and now the PM profession as reflected in national and regional PM associations, is reflecting the real world we live in. It suggests that our position of more and new "national" PM associations is not only right on, but natural and inevitable.

Maybe we share an enlightened vision of the PM profession. On the other hand, maybe it is only based on a greater sensitivity to history, economics and politics, as well as recent travel and experience in different global locations. I now see the PM profession evolving based on all of the above. PM is growing and spreading, as we know it must, based on its need, applicability and usefulness in various economies, industries, organizations and individuals. This is Trend One. (Maybe PM will replace TQM as popular management trend in America.)

Trend Two reflects John Naisbitt's megatrend of personalization. I think of it as the changing face and personality of PM, as the PMBOK, tools and applications evolve to satisfy new, more varied and personal environments, technologies and applications (i.e. PPM software and hand-held portable, multi-media, multi-functional computer/fax/email/phone systems.) Globalization also supports this trend as more users of and contributors to the PM profession are in different countries, locations, cultures, economic environments and political systems. Finally, the influence of more women in PM is also being felt as, for instance, more women-led organizations and industries apply PM (i.e. in software development, services, etc.). The

influence of human-relations and communications aspects of PM continues to grow, as well as the need for more flexibility and responsiveness in PM systems and tools.

Trend Three reflects the points of the *The Economist* article – globalization of the PM profession. While the PM profession (and PMI) spread around the world, more national and specialized PM associations will be formed. Yes we should promote PM, PMI and more global communication, cooperation and even organizations. But we should also recognize this trend, and the need/desires for national PM associations (with associated identity, cultural benefits and self-control for those local PM associations).

To me this is all very exciting! We must continue current activities, direction and cooperation. It is good for the PM profession! And once again I think we all believe that what's good for the PM profession should be what's good for PMI. Does that all make sense, or is it self-justification for rebellious thinking?

Very Sincerely,
David L. Pells
Somewhere over the Atlantic Ocean
12 May 1995

Cc: R. Waller
D. Bigelow
P. Dinsmore
B. Fletcher
C. Quaife
B. Ruggles
A. Taspinar
M. Scheinberg
D. Florence
R. Glaser

About the Author



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David L. Pells is Managing Editor of the *PM World Journal*, a global eJournal for program and project management, and Executive Director of the PM World Library. 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 SOVNET. From June 2006 until March 2012, he was the managing editor of the globally acclaimed *PM World Today* eJournal.

David has more than 35 years of project management related experience on a variety of programs and projects, including engineering, construction, defense, energy, transit, high technology and nuclear security, and project sizes ranging from several thousand to ten billion dollars. His experience has been in both government and private sectors. He occasionally provides high level advisory support for major programs, global organizations and the U.S. federal government. David has published widely, spoken at conferences and events worldwide, and can be contacted at editor@pmworldjournal.net.