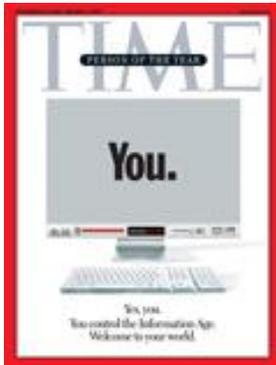


The Future of Project Management is YOU!

David Pells

One of the hot topics among project management professional leaders, conference speakers and PM "gurus" over the last few years has been "the future of project management". The current issue of the International Journal of Project Management ⁽¹⁾ is apparently devoted to articles, projections and predictions on this topic. I have even jumped into the fray with predictions about a "Third Wave of Project Management". ⁽²⁾ Some of the leading experts in the world of project management have waded in, with predictions ranging from "project management will merge with general management" to "project management has a robust future well into the 21st Century". ⁽³⁾

But I now want to suggest a different perspective on this whole subject.



On 13 December 2006, Time Magazine announced its annual selection of "Person of the Year", the long awaited announcement of the individual who the magazine thought had the greatest impact on the world we live in. In a controversial announcement, Time selected "you", individuals around the world who have logged on, connected and contributed to one of the most profound social experiments in history, the building of today's worldwide web.

According to Time's article, "if you look at 2006 through a different lens, you'll see another story, one about community and collaboration on a scale never seen before. It's a story about the cosmic compendium of knowledge Wikipedia and the million-channel people's network YouTube and the online metropolis MySpace. It's about the many wresting power from the few and helping one another for nothing and how that will not only change the world, but also change the way the world changes." ⁽⁴⁾

The Times article discusses "the World Wide Web of today, not the Web that Tim Berners-Lee hacked together (15 years ago, according to Wikipedia) and not the over-hyped dotcom Web of the late 1990s. The new Web is very different. It's a tool for bringing together the small contributions of millions of people and making them matter. Silicon Valley consultants call it Web 2.0, as if it were a new version of some old software. But it's really a revolution." Time's conclusion and announcement was "for seizing the reins of the global media, for founding and framing the new digital democracy, for working for nothing and beating the pros at their own game, TIME's Person of the Year for 2006 is you."

Of course, it is a mistake to romanticize all this any more than necessary. Web 2.0 can harness the stupidity of crowds as well as its wisdom. Some of the comments on YouTube make you weep for the future of humanity just for the spelling alone. This is an opportunity to build a new kind of international understanding, not politician to politician, great man to great man, but citizen to citizen, person to person. It's a chance for people to look at a computer screen and really, genuinely wonder who's out there looking back at them.

On its website on January 1, the BBC's leading story was "Web users driving change in 2007- The web will be at the heart of the big changes that loom in 2007, say a trio of hi-tech veterans." ⁽⁵⁾.

While recent trends in the professional PM world have been noted and studied, they are often only partially projected into the future. For example, such recent developments as enterprise PM, project portfolio management, PM maturity models and competency baselines reflect an increasing demand for more comprehensive models and standards for project management. These trends are developing and becoming apparent in more industries worldwide.

But where does the individual fit into the future of PM? What is the impact on the world of PM and the future of professional PM from the online empowerment of individual PM professionals? How can or will individuals, and networks, influence the future of our profession? For sake of discussion, let me offer some comments on this subject.

In my opinion, the internet and new, more powerful worldwide web, can facilitate the following, which I think will increase and dramatically change our professional world. Some of these trends have already been noted, but let's look beyond the trend for the impact on and role of the individual in the PM world.

Web-based PM learning – as more offerings become available online, more individuals will both seek PM education via the web as well as offer training. While more colleges and universities are offering PM courses, those that include online options will increase in number and profitability. The web creates a level playing field, so individual students are measured on results, and can reside anywhere in the world. Their production, voices and involvement will increase, and they may or may not belong to professional PM organizations. What will these students of PM need in the future? Why does a course, seminar or workshop have to be so expensive?

Web-based consulting – project management has always involved job changes and insecurity for individuals. Advances in the worldwide web and global communications technologies have made it easier and faster for more individuals to enter the PM consulting business. Local, regional and global networks empower individuals, and lead to web-based consulting practices. This trend will increase, in

my opinion. These individuals will play an increasingly important role in the PM profession, but what will it be?

Software as services – as PM software vendors migrate to web-based services rather than desktop products, individual customers and users become more important. Individual professionals are empowered, not just in terms of sales and usage, but in dictating features and solutions. More flexible and customizable products and services will be needed in our business, in the same way mass customization has occurred in consumer goods industries worldwide. Networks and blogs will grow up around every PM product, process and vendor in the world. What is being said in those networks? Who is capturing it all?

Networks as bases for Employment – networks will have increasingly practical uses in the future. While most networks seem to be issue-oriented or interest-oriented, they will begin to play a more important role in the staffing process. We will begin to turn to our personal and professional networks for resources for projects, and for opportunities in the workplace. Who are the experts for this type of project? Who is available? What can they do for our project, from wherever they currently are in the world? This also suggests an increase in contract work, part-time employment, and home offices in the PM business. What is needed for this type of networking and employment to prosper?

Virtual lives – more individuals are turning to the web for work, education, information, communication, relationships and entertainment. This suggests that live meetings, conferences, seminars, workshops and events may decrease in importance, or assume new or different roles. While attendance at PM conferences may continue to increase in the future, simply because the PM marketplace is growing so rapidly, many of those attendees will be “first timers” or attending for purposes other than education or professional development. I believe literally all experienced and mature PM professionals now obtain most of their professional education, knowledge and information via the web, not at conferences or training seminars. And those experienced PM professionals may or may not now be aligned with a professional organization, may or may not be employed by a large enterprise, and may be living anywhere in the world. What are they thinking? What do they need or want?

Empowered professionals in developing economies – technology is changing the way modern PM is introduced and used in Africa, Asia and Latin America. This is a tremendous opportunity being driven by individual professionals in those locations, individuals who are networking with other professionals on a global basis. Professionals in Colombia or Peru can have a powerful support network of PM experts worldwide. Executives in any country can go online and learn about modern, advanced PM. As PM comes to be better understood as a competitive advantage, it is being embraced in every country and industry. The web is

accelerating that trend. Individuals will make it happen. But what do those individual professionals in developing economies need from the PM world?

Perhaps this editorial has not been so clear or convincing, but I firmly believe that individuals will now change the PM world in ways few currently understand. Professional organizations that recognize these trends and address the needs of individual PM professionals will grow and thrive, especially online.

Best Regards,
David L. Pells
Managing Editor

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