

UK Project Management Round Up



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INTRODUCTION

Well, as our friends say, we live in interesting times. As winter creeps slowly into Spring, the news has been dominated by three themes. First, the seeming ever-present BREXIT looms over us, then we have just had a knock-down, drag out fight for control of a major engineering contractor and to cap it all, we have had a major incident in my home city. While all this has been happening, the PM associations have been active – so there is something for everyone this month.

BREXIT

At the end of March, the 29th to be precise, BREXIT is exactly one year away. We are told that negotiations are progressing well, and even the BBC seems to swallow that. So we can all be happy that someone knows what the result is likely to mean even if they are not letting the rest of us know.

The Infrastructure Projects Authority have issued a report (NAO 24 Nov 17) on how they are supporting the Government major projects portfolio and stated that *“there are no new projects to implement EU Exit on the GMPP, but the Authority has identified that EU Exit will affect at least 10 existing projects.”* The report then explains how IPA supports early planning of EU Exit projects. IPA is adapting its approach to assurance to meet the specific challenges of EU Exit and supporting project and programme management capability. It closes with an assessment of the impact of EU Exit on the Authority’s organisation and resources.

This gives a clear indication that the Government’s major projects are well aware of the potential problems, but many will be concerned with the lack a formal Exit Project. According to the *Times*, Lord Adonis claimed that industry infrastructure in the form of power stations, landing capacity at airports, and high speed broad band availability all indicate a failure of Ministerial planning and strategy in hos evidence to the House of Commons Business Select Committee Personally, I’m more concerned that there is no BREXIT Programme as that seems to me that there is no

co-ordination across the whole of Government or indeed any notion that industry more broadly needs some support. We just have to hope that the APM briefings are on point.

Some will also ask, what will there be to report this time next year when the Great Escape has happened – although will be a two year transition period.

THE BATTLE FOR GKN

GKN is an engineering conglomerate with annual sales of around £10 billion employing more than 60,000 staff world-wide and has 160 operating plants in 33 countries so it is an important player in the UK economy. With the weak £ and GKN's sluggish performance in recent years, a battle to take over the company was not unexpected. The take over battle began last year with several bidders in the running but resistance was effective at first, but events moved quickly.

In February GKN announced a transformation plan that was expected to be part funded by the sale of its highly profitable powder metallurgy business, reputedly worth £2 billion with the rest going into the Pension Fund. By this stage, Melrose was offering about £7.4 billion and 57% of the enlarged firm which GKN said was the equivalent of buying them on the cheap and using GKN's money to do it! Needless to say Melrose attacked the GKN sell off plan. Experts noted that any sale would need to make a major contribution to the pension fund which as a £1.1 billion deficit.

Melrose is seen as a corporate raider and any sale is likely to attract the attention of governments – UK as it is an important asset to the UK economy as well as a supplier to BAeSystems and Airbus – and USA as it supplies parts to Boeing and Ford as well as components for the Apache helicopter and the F-35 stealth fighter. Melrose claimed victory after GKN shareholders voted to accept the improved offer but only last week claims emerged that the UK Business Secretary was likely to pass the decision to call in the transfer to the Ministry of Defence as the Department for Trade does not have the experience of defence procurement to make the call. We can expect a decision in the next few weeks but Melrose is a UK based firm so there should be no conflict on national grounds. However, how this plays out in USA is hard to call and Florida Republican Congressman, Neil Dunn, has demanded that the sale be blocked on fears of endangering US security.

The Business Secretary listed binding commitments he wanted the company to make in the event its bid was successful. They included keeping GKN as a U.K. business, paying taxes, maintaining its British workforce, investing in research and development and apprenticeships as well as making satisfactory pensions arrangements. According to Bloomberg, Airbus SE has warned Melrose that any reduction in spending on research and development at GKN would make it “practically impossible” for it to hand the company new work.

This complex story looks set to run for a few more weeks!

PROFESSIONAL NEWS

The Association for Project Management (APM) has continued on its journey towards offering Chartered qualification to members. In an announcement at the end of March, APM revealed that the Register of Chartered Project Professionals will open for applications on 16 May 2018. The Chartered Project Professional (ChPP) standard is a professional benchmark that demonstrates attainment of a defined level of technical knowledge, professional practice and ethical behaviour. It forms the basis of the assessment that applicants must pass to gain ChPP status and inclusion on the Register of Chartered Project Professionals.

An interesting aside to the exciting news about the Register is the jaundiced and outmoded view of a senior Government figure. Liz Truss, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, claimed that the ‘middle class professionals’ deter new entrants and damage growth. Widely reported, her comments echo class based criticism of professions more normally expected of socialists rather than senior members of the Cabinet. Accusations of operating a “closed shop”. Ms Truss criticised lawyers, doctors and teachers for allowing “elements” within their profession to be “constantly lobbying to put barriers up to prevent new people joining them”.

The mastery of an “esoteric body of knowledge” (BOK) is one of the few characteristics agreed by most scholars so the emergence of a revised BOK is of great significance. Last year saw the Project Management Institute (PMI) release its last paper based BOK and now APM has opened up its new, 7th, BOK for comment (see <https://yourviews.apm.org.uk/bok/7>). The comment period closes on 20 April.

In the same post that announced the comment period, APM also announced Dr Ruth Murray-Webster HonFAPM as editor of this edition with Professor Darren Dalcher HonFAPM acting as its academic advisor.

The new edition is split into three chapters each with a number of sections: Chapter 1 covers context in 3 sections comprising 22 sub-section, Chapter 2 covers People in 3 sections made up of 14 sub-sections and the final chapter deals with delivery in 5 sections and 31 sub-sections. The complete structure is shown at www.apm.org.uk/media/12701/body-of-knowledge-7-structure.pdf.

SALISBURY IN THE NEWS

This final part has nothing to do with projects or project management, at least not in the usually accepted sense. You have possibly heard of the events last month in Salisbury, a small city of some 40,000 inhabitants situated in the county of Wiltshire, on the confluence of 5 small rivers. It is best known for its 13th C cathedral and the world heritage site of Stonehenge some 8 miles to the north of the city. What most people did not know was that we were also the home of a retired double agent, Sergei Skripal who was relocated after a spy exchange in 2010. He is a retired Russian military intelligence officer who was convicted of passing the identities of Russian intelligence agents working undercover in Europe to the UK's Secret Intelligence Service, MI6, and jailed for 13 years by Russia in 2006. In July 2010, he was one of four prisoners released by Moscow in exchange for 10 Russian spies arrested by the FBI. He was later flown to the UK.

Col Skripal and his daughter Yulia were poisoned with a nerve agent on a quiet Sunday in March. The fall out has been spectacular with Russian diplomats expelled around the world and Russian retaliatory expulsions raising spectres of the Cold War restarting. I'm telling you this not because it has any specific relevance to Project Management but because I live in Salisbury and am outraged by the murder attempt. About the only good to come out of this affair so far is the decision announced by the UK government to investigate the flood of money coming into London from Russia, a long overdue attempt to build some transparency into how so called funny money is managed in the City. Another welcome factor is the unity shown in Europe and elsewhere in the face of this attack. Locals in Salisbury have welcomed the injection of £1 million to help local businesses affected by a drop off in shoppers. The Wiltshire police have also been given £1.6 million to help fund the investigation, although the suspicion is that much of this will stick to greedy hands in the north of the county.

CLOSING REMARKS

Despite a gloomy outlook brought about by the attack in Salisbury, there is much other news to report. News such as the stem cell breakthrough that may lead to delaying the menopause, thus improving fertility in some women and reducing dependency on drugs. Similarly, the breakthrough in the potential treatment of multiple sclerosis is the result of long term projects in the medical profession and by pharmaceutical firms. These offer great hope for the future and show project managers in their best light – dedicated and professional in outlook and conduct.

About the Author



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Miles Shepherd is an executive editorial advisor and international correspondent for PM World Journal in the United Kingdom. He is also managing director for MS Projects Ltd, a consulting company supporting various UK and overseas Government agencies, nuclear industry organisations and other businesses. Miles has over 30 years' experience on a variety of projects in UK, Eastern Europe and Russia. His PM experience includes defence, major IT projects, decommissioning of nuclear reactors, nuclear security, rail and business projects for the UK Government and EU. Past Chair and Fellow of the Association for Project Management (APM), Miles is also past president and chair and a Fellow of the International Project Management Association (IPMA). He is currently a Director for PMI's Global Accreditation Centre and is immediate past Chair of the ISO committee developing new international standards for Project Management and for Program/Portfolio Management. He was involved in setting up APM's team developing guidelines for project management oversight and governance. Miles is based in Salisbury, England and can be contacted at miles.shepherd@msp-ltd.co.uk.

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