

UK Project Management Round Up



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INTRODUCTION

No prizes for guessing the topic of this month's report – BREXIT rules! However, not in the way most readers, especially in UK would have predicted. As the deadline for departure draws inexorably closer, minds should be concentrating on what this all means for those of us who make up the Project World.

GOOD NEWS

There is precious little good news to report this month but there is always something positive in most situations. Broadly speaking, Project People should be in a good position come the dreadful day as we are the ones who bring beneficial change. Actually, we should have been in a good position with our skills ever since Article 50 was triggered in 2017. BREXIT is by far the largest programme we have faced since the last World War. We will see many changes, some expected, like the trading rules under which the nation operates and the movement of people in and out of the country; some will not be anticipated either because no-one bothered to think the situation through clearly or because the risk simply did not occur to anyone.

OTHER PROJECT NEWS

I reported last month on the review of the business case for High Speed 2. The future of Europe's largest infrastructure project hangs in the balance as the planning for the go – no go review takes place. **Douglas Oakervee** will undertake the review with a remit to report by the end of the year. Oakervee has previous form in chairing reviews as he reviewed the case for the Mayor of London's proposal for a new airport on an island to be constructed in the Thames estuary. Curiously the Mayor was a guy called Boris Johnson...It will be interesting to see the results as Oakervee was also



Photo: Ben Gurr

the Chair of Crossrail in 2009 and of HS2 from 2012 – 2013. He is also an Honorary Fellow of the association for Project Management.

And there's more to celebrate as a £10 million project cuts drug misuse in British jails. The introduction of body scanners, metal detectors and extra staff has resulted in a major reduction in assaults and drug use.

Other successful projects include the construction of more Type 26 frigates by BAE Systems. Last year BAE won a major order from the Australian Navy. ASC Shipbuilding in South Australia becomes a subsidiary of BAE, moving the build from BAE's Glasgow yard to Australia. Canada is also building 15 vessels under licence at yards in Nova Scotia. Meanwhile, back in UK, three of the advanced frigates are under construction in Glasgow but BAE have been concerned that the next tranche of 5 ships has not yet been confirmed. The need for the vessels is not in doubt as UK will need to patrol a much larger area of home waters as part of its fishery protection programme.



Image BAE Systems

Potential projects still loom on the horizon as hospitals gain funding for robots and AI. Both are aimed at reducing staff numbers. There will naturally be concern amongst those who see their jobs threatened but roles such as radiographers have been increasingly difficult to fill, but hospital management may also see a role for Artificial Intelligence (AI) to reduce medical negligence claims as well as increasing productivity.

NOT SO GOOD NEWS

While we have been basking in unseasonably hot weather with a record breaking high of 33.3°C those with marginally longer memories will recall the equally unseasonable rainfall earlier in the month. Many holidays were spoiled and homes flooded but one of the most serious outcomes of exceptional rainfall in Northern England was the overflow at Whaley Bridge which resulted in severe damage to the dam holding back the Todbrook Reservoir. In an emergency project, local Fire and Rescue services provided dozens of pups to lower the water level. They were joined by local people to make the area safe (see photo above) while the village below the dam was evacuated. Later, the Royal Air Force (RAF) joined efforts to shore up the damaged dam (see picture below). These efforts were successful, and the population returned to their homes after 5 days.



Image: Danny Lawson/PA



Image: PA Wire/PA Images

Finally, on the Not So Good News comes a story that some will regard as good news and others as bad. The next wave of offshore wind farms is being threatened by a legal challenge. The Banks Group, a family firm with plans to build on-shore wind farms in Scotland, has raised a judicial review alleging unlawful discrimination against onshore farms by only offering subsidies to more expensive offshore projects under the “contracts for difference” or CFD scheme. The Banks Group successfully challenged Government rejection of their plan for open cast coal mining in Northumberland. Many people feel on-shore wind farms are unsightly and destroy areas of natural beauty while few accept the need to coal mining in any form, let alone the devastating impact that is caused by open cast methods.

BREXIT

And so to BREXIT. The current situation reminds me of Y2K and the Millennium Bug – for Generations X, Y and Z (the Alphabet Soup generations), this refers to the run up to the turn of the 21st century when businesses and Government bodies were planning how to cope with melt down as our primitive computing was widely expected to cease functioning when 1999 ended. In the event, almost nothing happened and we all woke up on News Day 2000 with nothing worse than a slight hangover and the world largely continued to rotate on its axis.



That situation was different, though, as Y2K was a world-wide concern. BREXIT is purely British and so we can only rely on ourselves to sort it out. One good thing to emerge from Y2K was the notion that businesses needed to make plans to meet the unexpected. Clearly we still do, but I wonder how many have kept their plans up to date or have revised them in the light of BREXIT.

One of the unexpected by-products of BREXIT is the latest Government move to prorogue Parliament. This move caught many politicians off balance and has been widely reported as unconstitutional or even illegal in both the Press in general and by the Twitterati. It is nothing of the kind and a fully legal process has been followed. It does raise some issues, though. First, and by far the most significant is the irresponsible way politicians from all sides have tried to drag HM The Queen into the situation. Her position is circumscribed by tradition dating back to Magna Carta, by legal constraints from the time of Charles II and precedent. She is independent of politics and has been vigilant in pursuit of this position from childhood. Traditionalists will not soon forget the machinations of the unscrupulous Members of Parliament which enable the fabrication of yet more fake news.

This situation is fairly straightforward. The vote to leave the EU was narrowly won by what are now known as Brexiteers. Those who voted to stay in the EU, or Remainers, form a sizeable minority and include many Members of Parliament (MPs) who have consistently blocked any kind of deal with the EU to leave, hence Mrs May's resignation. The current Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, is a firm Brexiteer and has built his Cabinet of like-minded MPs. Parliament has no idea what it wants to do in what is rapidly becoming a national crisis, but it wants it now. Remainers want things to remain the same – yet it is impossible, and I doubt that many EU members would want us back anyway. Brexiteers want to leave but equally can't agree on what terms are acceptable. If no agreement is reached by 31 October, out we go with no deal and start trading under World Trade Organisation rules.

An interesting and witty report in the Times newspaper, the term *proroguing* was analysed. The prefix *pro-* is always taken as being in favour of...while the Oxford English Dictionary describes rogues as corrupt, dishonest or bad. It seems unlikely that the Prime Minister is in favour of these people but to the outside onlooker, he may have called it right after all. While the move is not illegal, it is considered sharp practice and poor form. Meanwhile, various MPs are frothing at the mouth about the erosion of democracy and claiming they will occupy the House to prevent the Coup! As I write these notes, the Court in Scotland is still out, other legal challenges are being prepared so it looks like a nice little earner for lawyers.

CLOSING REMARKS

The final piece of good news is that those who look on the bright side of life live longer than pessimists! So let's follow the advice of the Monty Python song (Alphabet Soup can google this and find it on YouTube).

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.