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Interview with Chang Shucha
by Yu Yanjuan, PMR
Interview

PM Is the Most Effective Way to Manage VUCA

Interview with Chang Shucha [1],[2]

Founder of Project Management Review

Interviewed by Yu Yanjuan
Journalist, Project Management Review: PMR (China)

Introduction to the interviewee

If you are interested in project management in China, there's one name you can't miss: Chang Shucha (English name: Jessica).

Chang Shucha is the founder of *Project Management Review* (PMR) magazine, a 4-year-old influential magazine with forward-looking and global perspectives. Besides publishing magazines, Chang Shucha is also in charge of other business units of PMR all-media platform such as PM book publication, PM training courses, PM conferences, etc. By means of various media forms, she builds a bridge between theory and practice, between China and the rest of the world.

She has played a prominent role in the rise of project management publication in China. Professor Wang Shouqing praised her as the person who understands publication most in the field of project management and the person who understands project management most in the field of publication.

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[1] This interview was first published in PMR, Project Management Review magazine earlier this year. It is republished here with the permission of PMR. The PM World Journal maintains a cooperative relationship with PMR, periodically republishing works from each other's publications. To see the original interview with Chinese introduction, visit PMR at http://www.pmreview.com.cn/english/

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Chang Shucha is also Deputy Secretary-General of the Project Management Research Committee (PMRC) of Chinese Society of Optimization, Overall Planning and Economical Mathematics, Executive Member of Beijing Project Management Association, and Research Fellow of Praxis Research Center (China).

Having worked in the field of publishing and media for over 3 decades, she keeps on learning all the time. In her colleagues' eyes, she is a result-oriented enabling leader, who is flexible and good at empowering team members while sticking to the strategic goals. She is not only a media professional who helps spread project management but also a PM practitioner standing at the frontier of PM development.

On the 4th anniversary of PMR, we did an interview with Chang Shucha, in which she looked both back and ahead to share with us her unique insights and observations.

Interview

Part 1

About Media: From Product Strategy to Platform Strategy

Q1.   What's your original intention of creating PMR? What are the driving factors behind establishing PMR all-media platform?

Chang Shucha (Shucha):   The original intention of establishing PMR is to create an innovative integrative publishing platform of project management, which is characterized by co-creation, sharing and win-win, to extend the value chain of publishing media, to provide professional PM knowledge services with the platform as the core, and to explore a new mode of integrative publishing in the mobile Internet era. Over the past four years, PMR has developed around this initial intention, which has never changed.

It had been my dream since over ten years ago to spread project management theory and practice, share the wisdom and achievements of project management, improve individual and organizational project management capabilities, and promote the development of project management across the globe by establishing an innovative integrative publishing platform focusing on project management based on the advantages of publishing media resources and project management resources. At the same time, I wanted to publish by jumping out of publishing so as to explore a new end-to-end knowledge service model based on the advantages of content resources, with the product platform as the core, and through the interaction and integration of traditional and new media. I agreed with what Wang Bin, chairman of CITIC Publishing Group, said in an interview with *Publisher* magazine: "If we open up the extension of publishing, we will see a new world."

To be specific, the establishment of PMR all-media platform is mainly based on the following

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three considerations:

Firstly, to meet the needs of the new era and markets. In recent years, projects have become the greatest driving force for organizational, even social and economic development. Project management has also stood at the center of the management stage and as the most viable management concept and method to adapt to the new economic era, it has attracted unprecedented attention and has been widely adopted in many industries with remarkable efficiency such as in UHV power transmission and transformation projects. However, there was a lack of a high-level media platform for exchanging the latest achievements, methods, lessons and opportunities of project management in China. Therefore, the establishment of PMR integrative publishing innovative platform can meet the urgent need of the times, and it also has great social value and potential market value.

Secondly, to integrate resources, extend the value chain of publishing media, promote digital transformation in publishing, propel integrative publishing innovation, and achieve integrated operation benefits. The development of Internet and mobile Internet technology has greatly accelerated the speed of change of the content industry including publishing. With increasingly diversified media forms and communication modes and with the coexistence of paper, computer, mobile phone, iPad, e-books and periodicals, the integration of traditional and digital publishing is an inevitable trend. In order to realize integrated operation benefits, media publishing enterprises should shift from product strategy to platform strategy, from relying merely on the advantages of content resources to actively embracing the Internet and integrating new technologies, thus gradually developing into an integrated product manufacturer and a multi-dimensional knowledge service provider. Peter Drucker once said, "We are not able to control change but we can go ahead of it."

Thirdly, to make more people and organizations understand project management, recognize the value of project management, apply project management, thus promoting individual and organizational project management level. Since I first came into contact with project management in 1999, I have fallen in love with it. Through active learning and conscious application at work, I have gradually realized the value of project management for work and life, and its value in achieving organizational strategy landing and in enhancing organizational competitiveness. I hoped that I had known project management in my college years, or even earlier so that I could have broadened my thinking earlier, enhanced my abilities more consciously, looked at problems at a higher level, improved my life and work efficiency and created more value for enterprises. So it is the basic starting point of PMR to introduce PM knowledge and methods (which I regretted not having come across earlier) to all kinds of organizations and professionals.

Q2.   PMR celebrated its fourth anniversary on July 26, 2019. Looking back on the past four years, how do you feel and what milestones impressed you most?

Shucha: It is said that we tend to overestimate what we can do in a day, a week, a month or even a year, but we often underestimate what we can do in three years, five years or even ten

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years. That's so true. With four years' efforts, the "infrastructure projects" of PMR all-media platform have been completed, laying the foundation for interaction, integration and integrated operation. PMR all-media platform includes websites (both Chinese and English version), PMR magazine (both Chinese and English version), PMW e-magazine (a soul station for project managers), books publication, WeChat Public Page, App, training courses, etc. Looking back over the four-year journey, we can see how complex a portfolio can be. We encountered many difficulties and twists, such as changes in business environment, difficulties in resource communication and coordination across multiple business areas, high amount and complexity in management interfaces, difficulty in innovation, complexity resulting from construction and operation going hand in hand, etc. Only those who have experienced it can truly understand it. I often ask myself, "If you knew at the beginning that it was so complicated and difficult, would you have the courage to start doing it?" Every time my answer is a definite "yes". Here, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to all the experts, friends and colleagues who have cared, supported and helped me overcome the difficulties together. I am so proud of having such an experience.

As the witness of PMR development, I'm deeply impressed by all the milestones we have achieved. The major milestones of PMR are listed as follows: 1) On June 1, 2014, the Chinese-version PMR website went online. 2) In July 2014, PMR Public Page of WeChat and Weibo were created. 3) On August 8, 2014, Project Management Watch (PMW) e-magazine was launched. 4) In November 2014, PMR hosted a PM conference for the first time. 5) On July 26, 2015, Chinese-version PMR magazine was launched. 6) In September 2015, PMR released the first PMO Report in China. 7) In June 2016, PMR held its first free WeChat online course. 8) In June 2016, the fans of PMR WeChat Public Page exceeded 10 thousand. 8) In July 2016, Professor Ding Ronggui's book _Key Project Management Based on Effective Thinking_ was published by PMR, which marks the first time that PMR has published an English-language book. 9) In May 2017, PMR published a best-seller: _PPP Views by Wang Shouqing_. 10) In April 2018, the English-language PMR website went online, deepening the cooperation and communication between China and the rest of the world. 11) In March 2019, the number of PM books published by PMR reached 100. 12) In June 2019, PMR App was launched. 13) On July 26, 2019, the sample issue of English-language PMR magazine came out. I believe PMR will embrace more remarkable milestones in the future.

Q3.   Looking ahead, what are your expectations for the future of PMR?

Shucha: The essence and innovation of the PMR all-media platform lies in interaction, integration and integrated operation, which focuses on the interaction of books and periodicals in the field of project management, the integration of traditional and new media, integrated operation and revenue generation. It is hoped that PMR will not forget its original intention and continue to tell project management stories, disseminate project management wisdom and shape PMR's project management brand, adhering to the motto of "In Step with Projects and in Pace with Progress". I hope by continuing with the "one body and two-wing" operation mode, PMR can maximize the reuse of resources, provide multi-dimensional and omni-directional professional knowledge services, to enhance individual and organizational PM competence, meet and guide the different needs of different users, contribute to the development of project

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management in China and across the world, and explore a feasible path for the digital transformation and innovative development of the media industry. "To produce products, brands, talents and benefits" is the unswerving direction and goal of PMR.

Q4.   In the "We Media" age, the prospect of paper media is not optimistic. Why do you still insist on publishing a paper magazine?

Shucha: Many people predict that "We Media" will be the end of paper media, which I think is neither scientific nor comprehensive. With the development of digital media, readers' reading and consumption habits are constantly changing, and the trend of paper media being replaced is obvious in the field of mass media, but in the field of professional media and publication, multi-media reading and diversified needs will continue for quite a long time. It's common to see different readers choose different media forms at different times and different places and we can even see many people hold a paper media product in their left hand and a digital one in their right hand. The integration of traditional paper media and digital media has become an inevitable choice.

With the rise of Internet +, Internet revolution, etc., the Internet has become an unavoidable infrastructure. It is everywhere, and no one can escape from it. The only way out is to make good use of it, so that products and operations are constantly digitalized, Internet based and mobile. With the growth of "Z generation" (digital indigenous generation born after 1995) and "post-00 digital indigenous generation", the proportion of paper media is expected to decline considerably.

The original intention of PMR all-media platform including paper media is to satisfy the diversified reading needs of different readers, specialize in the production of one-time content, diversify presentation forms, maximize the coverage of readers and users, and improve the efficiency of communication. I think the key here is not the medium or carrier form itself, but how to make good use of each suitable medium and carrier.

Part 2

About Project Management: PM Awareness Will Increase

Q5.   China is a place with the most intense and active projects, but many enterprises do not attach importance to project management. How would you describe the importance of project management to them?

Shucha: In recent years, there has been a growing awareness for the value of project management on both the organizational and individual level in China, which can be seen from the rising number of international professional qualification certification such as PMP. I'm proud to say that the PMR all-media platform plays a certain role in it. I remember Ma Junru, the former Director of the State Bureau of Foreign Experts, talked to me in early 2017 in earnest, "Although project management has a prominent position in innovation drive, it is still like 'dark matter' in our country, as not many business leaders are competent in it. This 'virgin land' needs to be

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developed urgently, and you (PMR) have made a huge contribution to it." However, from the perspective of the whole society, there is still a long way to go to improve the recognition for the importance of project management.

Professor Wang Shouqing once launched a microblogging campaign to solicit answers on why to learn and apply project management. Many project management experts offered their explanations. For example, Professor Qiang Maoshan of Tsinghua University said, "Project management is the idea and technology for enterprises to achieve strategic objectives efficiently and successfully through effective integration of resources." Project management trainer Wen Jingyuan said, "Project management can help enterprises manage in a project-oriented and result-oriented manner to better support the strategic landing of enterprises; project management can also help enterprises sort out and optimize the process, since good process can ensure good quality and good results, so as to effectively control costs and improve efficiency." Dr. Wang Xiaojin said that the project is the knowledge of making strategy land, the knowledge of making things happen, and the knowledge of making success replicable. I agree with what they said and I believe with our joint efforts, more and more people will recognize the importance of project management.

Q6.   In your opinion, what are the frontiers of project management?

Shucha: In the cover article of the first PMR issue in 2019, we introduced 17 development trends in the field of project management forecasted by many Chinese and foreign experts, with which I totally agree. The 17 development trends include Redefinition of Project Success; From Agile Tools to Agile Mindset; From "Responding to Change" to "Embracing Change"；Digital Competences; More Emphasis on People and Soft Skills; Respecting Diversity; Manage upward; From Projects within Organizations to Trans-organizational Project Networks; Project Governance&OPM; From Management to Leadership; Followership; Sustainable Project Management; Flexible Approach Instead of One-size-fits-all Approach; Full-lifecycle Project Management; Cooperation and Co-creation; From Management of Projects to Management by Projects; Cross-integration of Project Management; Management by Projects, Management for Projects and De-project management.

In addition, I think there are two additional important aspects to pay attention to. Firstly, value management, that is, creating value for stakeholders rather than just achieving project objectives. In practice, multi-project collaborative management is normal, and how to operate after project delivery to maximize value will become one of the concern points of the whole project lifecycle. The importance of value management is reflected in the 6th edition of *PMBOK® Guide* and *ICB 4.0*. Secondly, the management of stakeholders and wider-range stakeholders. It is quite challenging to manage stakeholders in the era of interconnection of all things. Meanwhile, we need to realize that stakeholders not only refer to those being related in terms of interests (profits) but also those being related in terms of interest (tastes).

Q7.   As a leader, which leadership style do you prefer? How do you understand the relationship between leaders and followers?

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Shucha: The essence of management is coordination and integration while the essence of leadership is influence and drive.

Leadership style is not invariable and it is situation-dependent. It varies according to organizations, time, teams and projects. Personally speaking, I prefer goal-oriented or result-oriented leadership style. The first characteristic of this leadership style is to lead by example and do what you require others to do; secondly, trust and empowerment is key. Leaders should recognize and give full play to the advantages of team members, thus producing maximum benefits from the joint force of teamwork. The third is to clarify the vision and objectives, create a relatively suitable and relaxing microclimate within their own sphere of competence, and encourage everyone to work towards self-improvement and common goals.

I think leaders and followers are interdependent and it's a mutually fulfilling relationship. Without followers, there would be no leaders. A good follower can make a good leader and a good leader can also help followers stand out.

Q8.   As a disseminator of advanced project management concepts, have you tried the latest project management concepts in practice, such as Agility and self-organization?

Shucha: Sure. The only thing that remains unchanged is change itself, and the most effective way to cope with change is planning and iteration. The faster the change is, the more we need to plan, constantly adjust and update the plan. If there is no plan, the team will lose the goal and direction of efforts. If there is no iteration, we will not be able to respond to changes in demand in time, and fail to make products or provide services that meet the market needs. Take the publication of PMR magazine for example. For every issue, we make a publishing plan including the cover theme, key columns, publishing date and so on. But for each issue, we will adjust the cover theme and publishing time according to the current project management trends and the key activities or events that need to be coordinated. This kind of rolling planning is typical Agility. Our "Stand-up Meetings" every Monday and Thursday morning is also an application of Agile tools.

The concept "self-organization" originated from Agility. In the era of volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA), the rapidly-changing characteristics of the times require organizations to be capable of responding quickly, which makes it impossible to organize activities according to the traditional hierarchical model. Generally speaking, self-organization should have three characteristics: people organize voluntarily and spontaneously around a goal or a job; secondly, self-organization is the result of two-way attraction and choice, and the person attracted is not necessarily the best, but the most suitable; thirdly, a relaxing environment and mechanism for everyone should be established so that people can think and work towards the common shared goals. In a self-organized team, there should be both output (work results) and input (individual growth based on training and learning). If measured by such standards, our PMR all-media platform is also a self-organizing model.

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Chang Shucha and her team at PMR

Q9.   What are your favorite life or project management mottos? Would you please share them with readers?

Shucha: My life motto is: "Life is like playing the piano with white keys representing happy days and black keys representing blue days; to play beautiful music, both are indispensable." This motto shows that life is a long journey with both sunshine and rain; we must learn to run in the sun and strive courageously in the rain so that we can live an interesting wonderful life!

My project management motto is: "Do things right the first time and pursue the 'zero defect' goal". Strictly speaking, this should be a motto related with quality management, but I think this motto also illustrates the importance of applying project management idea and methods. "Doing things right the first time" is a kind of attitude and habits to deliver what you have said with the guidance of scientific approaches. First of all, to do things right the first time, we need to analyze and decide in advance whether the thing is consistent with the strategic objectives of the organization, that is, whether it is the right thing in the right direction; secondly, to plan and organize ahead of time requires the use of project management methods, techniques and tools. To plan, organize, lead and control the results is to use the correct methods and processes to ensure the correctness of the process and results. Thirdly, we need to identify and manage risks in advance, to predict, avoid and prevent risks in advance, because by doing right the first time we afford the lowest cost and the highest quality, and any modifications and rework will result in

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waste in cost and time.

Q10. What is your attitude towards the future of project management?

Shucha: We live in a rapidly-changing era, which is characterized by VUCA; project management is the most effective way to manage VUCA. At the same time, we live in a project-dominant era, in which projects are the driving force for organizational, social and economic growth. It can be foreseen that the importance of project management will become higher and higher, the methods and concepts of project management will become more and more popular, and the popularity of project management will become an important trend. The era has arrived when everything is a project, everyone is a project manager and everyone has to learn project management.

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About the Interviewer

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Yu Yanjuan (English name: Spring), Bachelor's Degree, graduated from the English Department of Beijing International Studies University (BISU) in China. She is now an English-language journalist and editor working for Project Management Review Magazine and website. She has interviewed over forty top experts in the field of project management. In the past, she has worked as a journalist and editor for other media platforms in China. She has also worked part-time as an English teacher in various training centers in Beijing. For work contact, she can be reached via email yuyanjuan2005@163.com or Linkedin https://www.linkedin.com/in/yanjuanyu-76b280151/.