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Stop the Press! The Project at the End of the Line
by David L. Pells
Editorial

Stop the Press! The Project at the End of the Line

Reflections on the end of PM World Today, Funerals and other Projects at the end of Programs, Projects and Life[1]

David L. Pells
Managing Editor

Introduction

This is the final edition of *PM World Today*. Following months of uncertainty, the board of directors determined in late 2011 that the organization should be terminated, the pmforum.org website shut down and publication of the monthly *PM World Today* stopped. So this is it! After 14 years of publication in some form, and five plus years of monthly production, this well-known global resource for continuous learning will end.

But perhaps this is not such a bad thing. As the saying goes, and as Max Wideman reminds us in his letter to the editor this month, all good things must come to an end. At the end of every program or project, there should be cause for celebration – of accomplishments, of growth and progress by people and organizations, and sometimes of just being successful or alive for so long. This editorial is therefore to reflect on the end of this eJournal and of PMForum, with an emphasis on what has been accomplished over the last six years.

Over the last few months, as the end of these websites came into focus, I have been thinking a lot about how programs and projects end. Sometimes they are terminated for unexpected reasons, at other times according to plans. But stopping a program or project is not as easy as it looks on paper, and often involves many serious and important activities. In fact, I would argue that ending a project or program is a project in its own right, by nearly any definition.

And what if the end is not just of the program or project but of the underlying organization, which is often the case when a joint venture or legal entity has been formed for the sole purpose of completing the project? Shut down activities can involve administrative, financial, legal, logistical, organizational and many other actions, all to achieve the shutdown project objectives. The project can last many months, consume many resources, and require a great deal of management attention.

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Finally, as I watched the memorial (funeral) for the late American singer Whitney Houston on 18 February 2012, [1] I was struck by what a big project that seemed to be. Lasting four hours, with the participation of celebrities, family and friends, and with international media coverage, it was a grand production in honor of a truly beloved and talented artist. And it occurred exactly one week after Ms. Houston's death. Absolutely amazing! It was really fantastic, a fitting memorial to a very popular singer. So who organized, planned and managed that "project"? Aren't all funerals projects? And funerals for political leaders, famous personalities or important public figures can be enormous, involving hundreds of people and costing millions. It occurred to me that here is another type of important project that we must all consider one day in our families, whether for ourselves or other family members.

In the May 2011 edition of *PM World Today*, in my editorial entitled "The Royal Wedding – What a Project!", [2] I discussed the wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton in the UK as a big project. I went on to review weddings as projects, looking at various activities associated with planning and conducting weddings from a project management perspective. Now I am suggesting that funerals should also be considered as projects, important personal projects that can be planned and managed with well known PM concepts. Perhaps this is insensitive, but perhaps this perspective can also ease someone's burden for dealing with a personal loss.

So this month's editorial is not only to reflect on the end of *PM World Today* and PMForum but to broaden this topic to project terminations, funerals and the "project at the end" of nearly anything – a life included. After all, don't all programs and projects have a life and a "life cycle" according to most definitions and textbooks?

PM World Today – a Celebration

The March edition of **PM World Today** is the final edition for this venerable eJournal. Beginning in 1998 as a quarterly eNewsletter produced by the late David Curling, *PM World Today* was converted to a bi-monthly online publication by former editor Hugh Woodward in 2005. In January 2007, *PM World Today* was transformed into a robust monthly eJournal with its own identity and website. Growing to a monthly readership of around 40,000 by December 2011, *PM World Today* was recognized as one of the most international and popular online publications in the project management world.

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Here are some of the accomplishments for *PM World Today* over the last 63 months:

- Increased subscribers from around 2,000 to 13,600 worldwide
- Grew readership from a few hundred to around 40,000 per month
- Published 695 regional reports from International Correspondents around the world
- Published 269 featured papers from authors in various countries
- Published 328 advisory articles, good advice from project management consultants, experts and executives
- Published 188 viewpoints articles and 142 letters to the editor – opinion pieces by project management leaders and professionals worldwide
- Published 64 articles by regular columnists, just since January 2010
- Published 61 editorials (yes, we missed two months over the last five years)
- Published 43 Second Editions papers, previously published papers but with lasting interest and value
- Published 40 case studies and personal stories.
- Published 34 interviews with important figures from the project management professional world, including leaders of IPMA and PMI
- Published 19 Tributes, memorials to leaders from the project management world who passed away, including IPMA founder Roland Gutsch and PMI Founder Eric Jenett
- Published 16 Student Papers, most of which were the first papers ever published by these future project managers
- And a whopping 3,901 news articles about PM events, research, professional organizations, industry and education, and about fascinating projects and other news affecting projects and project management around the world
- Articles and news from over 100 countries, with an average of around 25 countries per month represented by authors and subjects – a truly global picture

I am proud of what has been accomplished and want to give special thanks to our team of international correspondents in over 50 countries who contributed articles, news and regional reports to *PM World Today* on a regular basis.

I also want to thank our academic advisors, educators and leaders at major universities around the world (another 15 countries) that have graduate programs in project management.

A special note of gratitude must also go to our Global Advisors, former leaders of the world's leading project management professional societies around the world who provide moral support, guidance and feedback to me on a regular basis.

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I want to recognize and thank Nelson Soucek in Idaho and Rakesh in New Delhi, India for their technical support. Nelson helped create the *PM World Today* eJournal in 2006; Rakesh and his team helped keep it going on a monthly basis over the last few years.

Finally, I want to thank our sponsors and advertisers, many of whom supported *PM World Today* for many years running. Their support helped keep the publication going up until now.

PMForum – a Global Icon is Retired

The globally-recognized project management website www.pmforum.org has been retired. The world's first and oldest website devoted to professional project management, created by the late David Curling in 1994 and transformed over the last seven years by managing editors Hugh Woodward and David Pells, was taken offline on Friday, 24 February 2012. The contents were replaced by the following statement:

"Thank you for supporting PMForum over the last 17 years! Please continue to support continuous learning and professionalism in the practice of program and project management. And support your local project management professional society! The pmforum.org website has been retired. Good luck with your projects!"

PMForum also deserves a celebration of great things accomplished, from its founding by David Curling in 1994 to the recent expansion of the website over the last five years. Two programs in particular were extremely popular and successful in recent years – the Media Partners Program and the PM GiveAways Program.

Over the last four years, PMForum acted as a media partner for dozens of high-profile project management conferences, congresses and events. Those included annual national and international conferences for AIPM (Australia), APM (UK), IPMA (global), IPYD (Turkey), PMA (India), PMI (global), PMSA (South Africa) and others, and such regional events as the annual UT Dallas Project Management Symposium. We promoted these events, reported news about them, attended the conferences and, in some cases, participated in exhibitions. Here are some photos with great memories.

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On left - David Pells & Brigitte Schaden, IPMA President
On right – Cetin Elmas, President of Turkish Project Management Association and Director of IPMA 2010 World Congress in Istanbul and David Pells
IPMA World Congress in Helsinki in June 2009

On left – PMForum correspondent Olivier Lazar, Carla Pells and David Pells
On right – Veikko Valila, IPMA President; David Pells; Ricardo Vargas, PMI Chair
PMI 2009 Global Congress North America, Orlando, Florida, USA, October 2009

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*Photos: on left, PMForum managing editor David Pells with CEPM/PMGuruOnline team;
on right, Wayne Abba, Adesh Jain, David Pells
Global Symposium in New Delhi, India – December 2009*

*Photo on left: PMSA leaders Les Labuschagne, Taryn Van Olden, Hareesh Patel; Terry Cooke-Davies of Human Systems International; David Pells
On right: David Pells with PMForum correspondents Jaycee Kruger (left), Lissa Stewart (second from right), and Jürgen Oschadleus (far right)
PM South Africa National Conference, Johannesburg, South Africa, September 2010*

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Photo on left: at PMI Research Conference in Washington, DC in July 2010 – Prof Frank Anbari, PMForum Advisor (Drexel U), Prof John Cable, PMI GAC Chair (U of Maryland), Prof Young Kwak (GWU), David Pells

Photo on right: at APM Awards Ceremony in London in October 2010 – Prof Darren Dalcher (Middlesex University, London), APM conference chair and academic advisor to PMForum and PM World Today, David Pells, PMForum global advisor and correspondent Miles Shepherd.

There were many other events that were supported, with many other photos and memories captured. It was a pleasure and an honor to support these important professional events.

The PM GiveAways program was equally successful, with the following results:

➤ Total of 36 drawings were held over a 15-month period, from July 2010 until October 2011
➤ 171 project management books given away by publishers, in 21 drawings, worth a total of $10,204
➤ 8 project management courses were given away, worth a total of $3,984
➤ Drawings were held for 2 free passes to happy projects '10 conference in Vienna (value = $1,200 each) and one drawing for free pass to 4th UT Dallas PM Symposium in Texas (value = $500)
➤ 4 drawings were held for free project management software, with total value of $1,888
➤ Approximately 5,000 people in over 100 countries registered for these drawings
➤ Winners were located all over the world, with 190+ happy winners

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This was an exciting program because it was so global, with many winners located in lower income countries in Africa and Asia. It was great to see their happy reactions to winning a free project management book or course, valued from $50 to $500 each.

One key to the success of the pmforum.org website in recent years was the technical support team in India that supported us. Our webmaster, Rakesh, at the Center for Excellence in Project Management in Delhi, led a team of highly qualified and experienced web designers and technologists that we could draw on as needed. I want to express my gratitude for their great support.

I also want to recognize Hugh Woodward, who managed the pmforum.org website from January 2005 through mid-2006. Hugh implemented some major design changes to the website and sustained it during an important transition period. And a thank you to Nelson Soucek for his technical assistance during 2006-2008, and Rakesh in India for web support over the last four years.

At the end of the day, however, I want to remember David Curling, the creator of the pmforum.org website in 1994 and 1995. I will never forget his speech about the future of web-based technology and his offering the website as a service to those attending the first Global Project Management Forum in New Orleans in October 1995, an historic event. He passed out cards with the www.pmforum.org website address, the world's first website devoted to professional project management. David was a visionary and pioneer, considering that now literally all communication and publishing in the PM world are web (internet)-based. He then went on to expand the pmforum library, contents, outreach and visibility. Until January 2005 when he turned the website over to others, David Curling had an enormous influence on project management leaders and practitioners worldwide. When he passed away in June 2005, the PM world lost an important and influential leader.

Project Terminations – the Project at the end of the Project

For good reason, the termination and closure phase of the project life cycle has received significant new attention in project management conferences and publications in recent years. In my opinion, however, the attention has still been inadequate for one simple reason – project termination can be a significant project in and of itself, involving serious issues and activities that often receive inadequate attention and that can be so expensive as to affect the financial success of the project.

To terminate nearly any project, the following issues must be addressed:

➢ Maintenance, warranties and sustainability of the products of the project

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➢ Closeout of contracts and purchase orders

➢ Transfer of project assets, including facilities, equipment and supplies

➢ Administrative records, and transfer/storage of key project documents – along with completion of configuration control actions (recording of final designs, system architecture, contract closeout, status reports, etc.)

➢ Transfer of personnel, including layoffs, terminations and transfers to other departments

➢ Payment of taxes and filing of reports with regulatory agencies

➢ Addressing any and all final legal requirements and/or issues

➢ Communications with stakeholders, including sponsors, customers, employees, the public (if appropriate) and others

➢ Financial closeout – payment of final costs, final accounting, closing the books, and final cost reports

➢ Recording of Lessons Learned, and final reports to project or program executives

I suggest that project termination and closeout be planned and managed as a project, with budget, schedules, assignments of responsibility and reporting. While this may strike many as overkill, the shutdown of major projects can be very expensive and time consuming. Especially if there are unexpected reasons for the termination or unplanned actions, including claims and lawsuits by contractors. Here are two examples with which I am personally familiar.

The Superconducting Super Collider, a mega project to create the world's largest proton-proton collider and high energy physics laboratory in Texas in the late 1980s and early 1990s. A 50-mile underground tunnel was to be constructed, along with massive experimental systems, computing capacity and laboratory facilities. The project was funded through the US Department of Energy as a separate line item, beginning in 1988. I moved to Dallas in early 1989 as a member of the project startup team. It was a massive project, with a ten-year construction schedule and a cost estimate that grew from US$7 billion to $10 billion. From 1989 through 1992, approximately $2.5 billion was spent on design, real estate acquisition, construction, manufacturing, experimental planning and administration. With the downturn in the US economy in the early 1990s, cost growth on the project and political opposition, funding for the project was terminated by the US congress in 1993. The subsequent shut down of all project

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contracts, construction activities, and other aspects took about five years and cost another billion dollars.

During 1997-1999, I assisted the Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) agency in Texas and the Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Agency (Sound Transit) in Seattle, Washington prepare program and project management plans for their respective multi-billion-dollar transportation improvement programs. These programs included the construction of light rail transit lines and stations, conversions of rail lines to commuter transit lines and stations, highway improvements and bus projects. For all rail line and station construction projects, contractors were hired to design and build the facilities. As each individual construction project was completed, contractors would have a "punch list" of actions to complete, activities needed to complete a contract but not always critical for start of service. Many of these "punch list" items, however, took months to complete, at a cost of thousands of dollars.

The Last Project in a Program

Programs can be equally difficult and expensive to close. But end they will, at some point in time. Ending and closing out a program should entail all of the same activities identified above for ending a project, but may be much larger if multiple projects must be ended, documented and accounted for. In this case, it makes even more sense to have a project at the end of the program to complete all necessary termination actions in a timely and cost-effective manner.

Starting a program is much easier than terminating one. This seems to especially be the case in the public sector, where programs are approved and funded through governmental actions, can be initiated for popular reasons and accompanied by a lot of publicity. Terminating such programs can meet resistance. In some cases, programs may be terminated before they are completed, due to poor performance, significant technical problems or politics. In all cases, funding for program terminations is often under-estimated or insufficient, making the program termination more difficult. In addition, while many people want to work on a new or ongoing program or project, far fewer are attracted to a termination project. Nevertheless, such projects can be very important.

When the Project Organization must also End

Likewise, it is often much easier to create a new organization than to end one. I have read many articles and papers in recent years about new venture development or business startup as projects, with traditional project planning processes promoted for organizational development. I have yet to read an article related to professional project

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management for terminating or shutting down an organization, be it a business or other type of enterprise. Why is this?

Terminating an organization entails all of the types of actions mentioned above for terminating a project – administrative, financial, legal, regulatory, etc. In addition, shareholders and other stakeholders may have significant financial stakes in the organization, often leading to litigation and other complicating legal issues. Rather than discussing the details of such projects, however, here I would like to highlight the subject and suggest the need for more research and literature on managing organization termination projects.

In many cases, such projects are directly related to traditional project management, for example, the termination of project joint ventures or organizations established solely for the purpose of executing a program or projects. (i.e. oil and gas exploration projects, projects for government programs, infrastructure projects, etc.) In other case, more knowledge in this area would be helpful for anyone involved with a failed business or organization that must be closed for financial, legal or organizational restructuring reasons. (i.e. in merger or acquisition, both sides will have a major project. The organization being acquired, however, may have a termination project or projects to manage.)

Funerals and Other End-of-Life Projects

Estate planning and other actions that we should all take as we get older are well known to most of us, and yet many people either delay or neglect to complete many end-of-life projects. So what are we talking about here. Let's consider a few:

Health needs – tending or treating accidents, disease, failing health or terminal illness is something that all humans face at the end of their lives.

Financial matters – wills, asset valuations and sales, transfers of ownership, insurance, taxes and other financial matters will need to be resolved for ourselves and aging family members; accountants and attorneys are often needed.

Funerals and memorials – these "projects" must follow death by only a few days; how much easier if there are already plans in place, reducing omissions, mistakes and stress; As mentioned earlier related to Whitney Houston's funeral in February, these can be very significant projects – involving facilities, money, personnel (those directly involved), stakeholders, communication issues and other activities – on very compressed schedules.

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Communications – with family, friends, significant others and, in the case of public figures, the general public. Perhaps often overlooked, communications can include direct contacts (emails, letters, phone calls), obituaries, tributes in professional publications or even press releases (for example, for public or corporate leaders).

Documentation – a record of all of the above will be needed, both for closure for immediate family members but also for legal reasons. This may seem like an innocuous topic but should be taken seriously none the less.

Celebration – whether included in the funeral or memorial of some kind, whether formal or informal, most lives should be celebrated. We all accomplish something with our lives, most accomplish something positive. Most lives also entail overcoming difficulties and obstacles. Let's not forget to remember and celebrate the lives that end.

Conclusions

The end of a program, project, organization or life is an emotional experience, often a difficult and even painful process. Nevertheless, such endings are natural, common and to be expected. All programs, projects, organizations and lives will end eventually, some much sooner than others. All projects have a specific life span; most programs also have an end that can be planned, scheduled and managed. All lives will end, and all individuals will have projects at the end of their lives.

We just need to plan ahead, estimate the costs and time required, and set aside the necessary time and budgets to do the right things. It will make life much easier for those who come after.

Thank you for reading **PM World Today** over the last five years.

Good luck with your projects.

REFERENCES

[1]   *http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whitney_Houston*

[2]   *Pells, David; "The Royal Wedding – What a Project! Project Management for Weddings and a Tribute to my Wife the Project Manager"; PM World Today, May 2011.*

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About the Author (updated from the original)

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David L. Pells is Managing Editor and publisher of the *PM World Journal* (www.pmworldjournal.com) and Managing Director of the PM World Library (www.pmworldlibrary.net). David is an internationally recognized leader in the field of professional project management with more than 40 years of experience on a variety of programs and projects, including engineering, construction, energy, defense, transit, technology and nuclear security, and project sizes ranging from thousands to billions of dollars. He occasionally acts as project management advisor for U.S. national laboratories and international programs, and currently serves as an independent advisor for a major U.S. national security program.

David Pells 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); the Istituto Italiano di Project Management (ISIMP); and the Russian Project Management Association (SOVNET). Since 2010 he is an honorary member of the Project Management Association of Nepal.

Former managing editor of *PM World Today*, he is the creator, editor and publisher of the *PM World Journal* (since 2012). David has a BA in Business Administration from the University of Washington and an MBA from Idaho State University in the USA. He has published widely and spoken at conferences and events worldwide. David lives near Dallas, Texas and can be contacted at editor@pmworldjournal.com.