

On the Subject of Black Elephants¹

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

18 June 2020

Pells editorial: [Black Elephants and... maybe Project Management](#), June 2020 PMWJ

Dear David,

Congratulations on your Black Elephant editorial. It is excellent.

In response to your invitation to comment, mine is that I think we also have another kind of black elephant (or a somewhat similar beast) in our project management room, which is too seldom recognized – or if recognized, not acknowledged. This is the recognition and acknowledgement that projects are only ever means to help achieve broader objectives, but – and this is the critically important point – that project management is all too often not involved in determining the nature of those broader objectives, and/or of deciding on which particular means (including projects) will be used to achieve those broader objectives.

So, for all our brave talk about the importance of project management, most of the key decisions about where and how project management is deployed are made by others. There are some domains where we have developed extended project-related services which put project management in the position of having a real say in decision making on strategic objectives and/or on strategic initiatives to help achieve them – as discussed in my article in this issue. But these are not nearly as common as many of us would like to see. This was one of my main motivations for writing the article, which is concerned with expanding these types of services to help us have a greater role in such decision making.

[Incidentally, a word on the “black swan” event metaphor. This is purely a Northern Hemisphere invention, and doesn’t make any sense in Australia, where all our native swans are black. (Should I be transposing it here into a “white swan” event?) It could even be more complicated for South Americans, with their ubiquitous black necked swans (which have white bodies) – but hopefully they don’t have such a hemisphere-specific metaphor in the Spanish or Portuguese languages.]

With best regards

[Alan Stretton](#)
Sydney, Australia

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