

Project Management needs a Higher Purpose ¹ (Original Long Version) ²

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Introduction

This is a follow-on to my June 2020 editorial on black elephants³. It's a somewhat obvious extension and partial answer to the question posed at the end of the June editorial regarding 'what to do about it'. What can (or should) the project management professional world be doing to help address some (or all) of the charging black elephants, the looming global problems such as climate change, disease, hunger, homelessness, etc. These are my current thoughts on the matter, but I've been thinking about this for a long time.

With the Covid-19 pandemic still raging around the world, and especially here in the United States, I also wanted to return to the Black Elephant question related to this health crisis. The pandemic has also dramatically exacerbated such global problems as unemployment, poverty, hunger, access to education, inequality and others. The Black Elephants have multiplied, grown larger and are moving faster. Some, like the pandemic, seem to have morphed into a flock of Black Swans, at national, local and project levels.

Meanwhile, climate change and global warming have continued. We are also coming to the end of the current presidential administration in the United States, a period marked by corruption, incompetence and unethical behavior by those in powerful positions. One of the world's oldest (modern) democracies has teetered on collapse as a large portion of the population seemed to be reverting to 19th century attitudes and behavior. Perhaps more importantly, civil society itself seems to be at risk, as the rule of law has been threatened, institutions weakened, and social unrest exacerbated. History came alive as we studied the past and tried to predict the future. But what future do we want?

It is often difficult to step back, to consider the big picture or long-term consequences of current conditions or trends. Nevertheless, we must occasionally do so. As I've gotten older, I find myself thinking more about the history and future of the PM field, program and project life cycles, changes and trends in the world that affect our profession.

So now I ask again, what is the project management world doing in response to the current pandemic and other black elephants? What can we do, now or in the future? What about the future? Obviously, I don't know everything, cannot predict the future, may be missing important information or contexts, may just be wrong. But here are my thoughts.

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² This is the original long version. This editorial was broken into four parts for publication in the *PM World Journal* during the first four months of 2021.

³ Pells, D. L. (2020). Black Elephants and ... maybe Project Management. *PM World Journal*, Vol. IX, Issue VI, June. <https://peworldlibrary.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/pmwj94-Jun2020-Pells-black-elephants-and-maybe-project-management-editorial3.pdf>

2020: The Perfect Storm?

It seems that 2020 became a perfect storm. The Cambridge dictionary defines perfect storm as an extremely bad situation in which many bad things happen at the same time.⁴ The Oxford dictionary says it's an occasion when several bad things happen at the same time, creating a situation that could not be worse.⁵ I like the Merriam-Webster definition: a critical or disastrous situation created by a powerful concurrence of factors.⁶ These definitions all seem to describe this disastrous year.

Let's start with the Covid-19 Pandemic. Here in the U.S., new records for cases, hospitalizations and deaths are being recorded almost daily. According to John Hopkins University⁷, total Covid cases in the United States now surpass 20 million with over 330,000 deaths. Daily increases nationwide are exceeding 250,000 cases and 2,500 deaths. Hospitals and healthcare workers are being overwhelmed in many places, especially in rural areas with fewer resources. Even as vaccines are now being distributed, the situation is expected to get worse with the pandemic lasting through most of 2021. Unemployment has increased, along with hunger and homelessness. And with less income comes lost health insurance, less healthcare, more hunger and misery.



But the pandemic was not the first crisis of 2020. The year started with Australia burning, bushfires consuming millions of hectares of grassland, national forests, farms and towns. More than a billion animals lost their lives, along with many people. The Australian economy took a huge hit. Over the year, massive fires also burned in the Amazon region of Brazil and in Argentina, India, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine, the United States and elsewhere.⁸ Being originally from the Pacific Northwest, I watched in horror as huge portions of Western California, Oregon and Washington states burned last summer.

In May Super Cyclone Amphan hit Eastern India and Pakistan with category 5 winds. In June Cyclone Nisarga was the strongest storm to hit Maharashtra State in India since 1891. In October, cyclone Ninfa hit central Vietnam causing catastrophic flooding. According to Wikipedia, "Throughout 2020, 127 tropical cyclones have formed... The strongest storm of the year so far was Typhoon Goni peaking with winds of 315 km/h (195 mph). The deadliest storm of the year was Hurricane Eta, while the costliest storm of the year was Hurricane Laura, with a damage cost around \$14.1 billion."⁹



⁴ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/perfect-storm>

⁵ <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/perfect-storm>

⁶ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/perfect%20storm>

⁷ <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-1-d&q=covid+cases+johns+hopkins>

⁸ <https://www.resilience.org/stories/2020-10-27/world-on-fire-2020-experts-explain-the-global-wildfire-crisis/> and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:2020_wildfires

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tropical_cyclones_in_2020

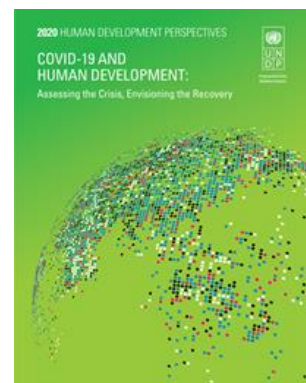
In the U.S., the city of Phoenix set a record in 2020 for the most days with temperatures of 100 degrees Fahrenheit or higher with 144 days. Heat, especially over prolonged periods, exacerbates existing health conditions and is one of the leading causes of weather-related deaths in the U.S. So far this year, the U.S. has had 16 natural disasters (including wildfires, hurricanes, tornadoes and drought) that each caused at least \$1 billion in damage...¹⁰ It was announced recently that last month was the warmest November on record.

The pandemic and climate-related disasters have had enormous economic, social and human consequences. Widespread unemployment and hunger are at record levels. Social and political conflicts and unrest have rocked the U.S. and other countries. Lifestyles and business models have been upended and transformed. To compound the problems in the UK, they are now dealing with their post-BREXIT reality.

Global Crises Accelerate

According to the World Health Organization, “The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a dramatic loss of human life worldwide and presents an unprecedented challenge to public health, food systems and the world of work. The economic and social disruption caused by the pandemic is devastating: tens of millions of people are at risk of falling into extreme poverty, while the number of undernourished people, currently estimated at nearly 690 million, could increase by up to 132 million by the end of the year... Nearly half of the world’s 3.3 billion global workforce are at risk of losing their livelihoods... For most, no income means no food, or, at best, less food and less nutritious food... The pandemic has been affecting the entire food system and has laid bare its fragility...”¹¹

According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) as early as May, “The COVID-19 pandemic is unleashing a human development crisis. On some dimensions of human development, conditions today are equivalent to levels of deprivation last seen in the mid-1980s. But the crisis is hitting hard on all of human development’s constitutive elements: income, health and education... simulations suggest conditions today would correspond to a steep and unprecedented decline in human development. With almost 9 in 10 students out of school and deep recessions in most economies, the decline in the index... would be equivalent to erasing all the progress in human development of the past six years...”¹²



¹⁰ <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-running-list-of-record-breaking-natural-disasters-in-2020/>

¹¹ Impact of COVID-19 on people’s livelihoods, their health and our food systems (2020). Joint statement of ILO, FAO, IFAD and WHO, published by the World Health Organization, 13 October. <https://www.who.int/news/item/13-10-2020-impact-of-covid-19-on-people%27s-livelihoods-their-health-and-our-food-systems>

¹² COVID-19 and Human Development: Assessing the Crisis, Envisioning the Recovery, UNDP. May 2020. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/hdp-covid>

In 2015, member states of the United Nations adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. The 17 SDGs are integrated, they recognize that action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability.¹³



For information and because many of you might not have read much about the SDGs, here the list:¹⁴

SDG1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

SDG2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture

SDG3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

SDG4: Ensure inclusive and equitable **quality education** and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

SDG5: Achieve **gender equality** and empower all women and girls

SDG6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of **water and sanitation** for all

SDG7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern **energy for all**

SDG8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable **economic growth**, full and productive **employment** and decent work for all

SDG9: Build resilient **infrastructure**, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation

SDG10: Reduce income inequality within and among countries

¹³ <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html>

¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sustainable_Development_Goals

SDG11: Make **cities** and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable

SDG12: Ensure **sustainable consumption and production** patterns

SDG13: Take urgent action to **combat climate change and its impacts** by regulating emissions and promoting developments in renewable energy

SDG14: Conserve and **sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources** for sustainable development

SDG15: Protect, restore and promote **sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems**, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

SDG16: **Promote peaceful** and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

SDG17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the **global partnerships** for sustainable development

These are extremely ambitious goals for the world. But it seems to me that they are good goals for individual countries. Why wouldn't we want these same improvements in the UK, USA or any other country? And as you can see, they are addressing the black elephants. Why wouldn't we as individuals, organizations or the PM profession support these positive objectives, every one of which must be achieved via programs and projects?

I want to give a shout out here to GPM Global¹⁵ for their focus on these issues. Their P5 Standard for Sustainability in Project Management provides an excellent framework for assessing any program or project against the 17 SDGs with relevant considerations and actions.¹⁶ I also want to recognize APM and an article in APM's Summer 2020 edition of *Project* by Steve Crosskey, head of the United Nations Office of Project Services. In his article, Mr. Crosskey explains how the SDGs can provide a basis for those involved with infrastructure projects to think about and advance sustainability. (Crosskey 2020)¹⁷

Where is the PM Profession this year?

In my June 2020 editorial, I asked this question and provided a few positive examples from APM and PMI. For the most part, PM professional bodies were focused on changes in how we work, not on what needs to be done to solve problems. Clearly the changes in business and working conditions caused by the Pandemic have deeply affected programs, projects and PPM practices and processes. Perhaps the most significant was the move to remote work, virtual offices, virtual teams – recent trends that became a reality for everyone almost overnight. Literally all PM societies and their branches and chapters stopped meeting physically and ramped up virtual meetings, courses, conferences and communications. The results have actually been both positive and

¹⁵ <https://www.greenprojectmanagement.org/>

¹⁶

<https://greenprojectmanagement.org/images/PDF/P5/The%20GPM%20P5%20Standard%20for%20Sustainability%20in%20Project%20Management%20v2.0.pdf>

¹⁷ Unfortunately, *Project* is only available to APM members; this article might become freely available in the future

impressive, as variety, quality, convenience, cost and efficiencies have all improved. All good!

There have been even more positive developments in recent months. Even before the pandemic, APM had focused on climate change, issuing a policy statement, partnering with other British institutions, and publishing a challenge paper in response to the UK parliament's 2019 declaration of an environment and climate change emergency. Since January, APM has published many articles on responses to the Covid-19 pandemic.¹⁸ One of the most interesting is a June article by Rachael Pells (no relation) titled "Vaccine project management – a race against time".¹⁹ Perhaps the most encouraging was an article in March titled "Helping others during the coronavirus outbreak: A message from APM's CEO" by Debbie Dore.²⁰



APM's three most recent editions of their *Project* magazine for members include some great articles, for example on reacting to Covid-19, sustainable development goals, resilience, collaboration in a crisis, Covid-19 sniffer dogs, rebuilding the economy, navigating crises, complex social change projects. Eddie Obeng's APM blog article describing how Covid-19 is a chance for leaders to 'Shake the Box' by embracing diversity is brilliant.²¹

PMI has also stepped up its volunteer advocacy this year. According to PMI's press release on 12 November, "We partnered with the UN and mobilized our community to pledge 50,000 hours to projects contributing to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Our community exceeded all expectations and contributed more than 150,000 hours. PMI looks forward to continuing this effort each year. PMI's Global Month of Service encouraged staff, members, and volunteers to participate in community service activities... in order to make a positive impact.²² This was aligned with PMI's newly launched Diversity, Equity & Inclusion program.²³ PMI has also launched PMImpact, The Social Good Impact of Professionals in Project Management, to promote and support the activities of PM professionals volunteering to help address problems, resolve issues and meet needs around the globe.²⁴ PMI's Covid-19 Response webpage promotes and supports volunteer efforts during the current pandemic.²⁵

I was also very impressed with PMI's promotion of the "Most Influential Projects of 2020".²⁶ Many of the projects recognized on their list were responses to the Covid-19

¹⁸ <https://www.apm.org.uk/search-results/#/?search=covid-19>

¹⁹ <https://www.apm.org.uk/blog/vaccine-project-management-a-race-against-time/>

²⁰ <https://www.apm.org.uk/news/helping-others-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak-a-message-from-apm-s-ceo/>

²¹ <https://www.apm.org.uk/blog/diversity-why-leaders-must-shake-the-box-to-build-a-new-world/>

²² <https://www.pmi.org/about/press-media/press-releases/project-management-institute-further-supports-global-advocacy-through-month-of-service>

²³ <https://www.pmi.org/membership/volunteer/pmimpact/diversity-equity-and-inclusion>

²⁴ <https://www.pmi.org/membership/volunteer/pmimpact>

²⁵ <https://www.pmi.org/membership/volunteer/pmimpact/covid-19-response>

²⁶ <https://www.pmi.org/most-influential-projects>



pandemic, including the Covid-19 Therapeutics Accelerator, Covid-19 Data Lake project in the U.S. and the Nightingale Hospital project in London, among others. A total of 250 outstanding projects were recognized by PMI.²⁷ PMI has also introduced a PM Philanthropy page on their projectmanagement.com platform where PMI members can share articles, experiences and opinions.²⁸ PMI's Educational Foundation (EF)²⁹ has also had a busy year, promoting social outreach activities among PMI chapters, advancing project management education among youth and nonprofit organizations, and partnering with such organizations as Children International, F1iS, Junior Achievement Africa and Special Olympics International.³⁰ PMIEF also offers a variety of useful resources for nonprofits and educational organizations related to PM, including instructional kits, guides, case studies, reports and studies.³¹ All of these initiatives and resources are great.

IPMA has also moved in a positive direction related to PM and society with perhaps its most significant initiative being the launch of the new academic journal, *Project Leadership and Society* (PLS). To be published by Elsevier as a sister journal of the *International Journal of Project Management* (IJPM), PLS is being led by Prof. Dr. Martina Huemann (editor-in-chief), Prof. Dr. Kirsi Aaltonen and Prof. Dr. Ding Ronggui. PLS articles will address the interaction between projects, project leadership and project management on the one hand, and economic, social, political and organizational processes, on the other.³² Many local PM organizations, including national associations, chapters and branches have also organized or sponsored activities to help society in one form or another.

These are all positive, with many great activities, initiatives and programs achieved or underway. But they only go so far and are not what I am talking about in this paper. What is project management actually for? What is our contribution to the world? What should it be? I think the purpose of project management should be to advance positive change in the world. It should be about more than making money (selling more certifications, course or products, advancing careers to increase salaries, or improving productivity for organizations to be more profitable), developing models and standards (although those are important), or even educating project managers (although this is also key to advancing the PM field itself). The thing is...

Programs and projects come first, then PM (maybe)

Perhaps the most significant thing that I've realized this year is the overwhelming importance of many programs and projects, which have been highly visible during the

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ <https://www.projectmanagement.com/pages/634356/PM-Philanthropy>

²⁹ <https://pmief.org/>

³⁰ <https://pmief.org/about-us/news/meet-pmiefs-non-profit-partners>

³¹ <https://pmief.org/library/resources>

³² <https://www.ipma.world/news/project-leadership-and-society-the-journal-of-the-international-project-management-association/>

pandemic and about which there is no visibility of professional project management (although project leadership has obviously been required, and in some cases just as obviously missing). Some well-known examples:

- **Huoshenshan Hospital** – 1,000 bed facility for quarantined Covid patients built in 10 days in February in Wuhan, China.³³
- **Operation Warp Speed** – A U.S. government sponsored program to produce and deliver 300 million doses of safe and effective vaccines with the initial doses available by January 2021, as part of a broader strategy to accelerate the development, manufacturing, and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics.³⁴
- **World Bank's Health Response to Covid-19** – a combination of new projects, restructuring and emergency components of existing projects, and deployment of disaster finance instruments, the World Bank Group's response is targeted in four key areas: saving lives, protecting the poor and vulnerable, ensuring sustainable business growth, and working to build a more resilient recovery.³⁵
- **Covid-19 Therapeutics Accelerator** – Announced in March 2020 as a partnership of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Wellcome and Mastercard, an initiative to speed-up the response to the COVID-19 epidemic by identifying, assessing, developing, and scaling-up treatments. ³⁶ Selected by PMI as the most influential project of 2020. ³⁷
- **Nigeria Covid-19 Action Recovery and Economic Stimulus - Program for Results (Nigeria CARES):** This program will help increase access to social transfers and basic services, as well as provide grants to poor and vulnerable households. It will also strengthen food supply chains for poor households while facilitating recovery and enhancing capabilities of MSMEs. This is financed through an International Development Association (IDA) credit of \$750 million.³⁸
- **Second Accelerating India's COVID-19 Social Protection Response Program** - A \$400 million World Bank project to support India's efforts at providing social assistance to the poor and vulnerable households, severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This is the second operation in a programmatic series of two. The first operation of \$750 million was approved in May 2020.



There are many other examples this year, in every hospital and healthcare facility in most countries, in many government agencies, in business entities struggling to survive, and in most charities, churches and schools. It is now clear that projects, outcomes and

³³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Huoshenshan_Hospital

³⁴ <https://www.hhs.gov/coronavirus/explaining-operation-warp-speed/index.html>

³⁵ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/immersive-story/2020/12/07/the-world-bank-group-mounts-the-fastest-and-largest-health-crisis-response-in-its-history-to-save-lives-from-covid-19>

³⁶ <https://www.therapeuticsaccelerator.org/>

³⁷ <https://www.pmi.org/most-influential-projects>

³⁸ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/12/15/world-bank-group-to-boost-nigerias-efforts-to-reduce-poverty>

benefits matter more to most stakeholders than project management methods, processes or standards. Knowledge, experience and leadership matter more. I suspect that very few leaders of major programs and projects launched in response to the Covid-19 pandemic hold PMI or IPMA certifications.

Don't get me wrong; I think project management is profoundly important. PM knowledge, competence and qualifications can be critically important, especially for individuals and organizations, and especially in an increasingly project-oriented world. But how can PM really help get important things done? Shouldn't the mission of project management be to achieve positive results, and especially the programs and projects that create a better world (or save the one we have)? Perhaps even ONLY those that create positive change.

What Mission Statements Tell

As a student of management for the past 50 years, I have long understood one of the most important business concepts to be related to organizational vision and mission. Here I quote Peter Drucker: "Each social sector institution exists to make a distinctive difference in the lives of individuals and in society. Making this difference is the mission—the organization's purpose and very reason for being. A mission cannot be impersonal; it



has to have deep meaning, be something you believe in—something you know is right... the mission says why you do what you do, not the means by which you do it. The mission is broad, even eternal, yet directs you to do the right things now and into the future so that everyone in the organization can say, "What I am doing contributes to the goal." So it must be clear, and it must inspire... *Never subordinate the mission in order to get money.* If there are opportunities that threaten the integrity of the organization, you must say no. Otherwise, you sell your soul..."³⁹

Most large public corporations have a mission statement, as well as a vision statement that influence their strategic plans, stakeholders (especially employees) and public relations. For example, Microsoft: "Our mission is to empower every person and every organization on the planet to achieve more."⁴⁰ BBC: "To enrich people's lives with programmes and services that inform, educate and entertain."⁴¹ Asana: "To help humanity thrive by enabling all teams to work together effortlessly."⁴² 3M: "To Improve Every Life through Innovative Giving in Education, Community and the Environment."⁴³ While many corporate mission statements are aimed at customers and shareholders, some include socially conscious statements like those just mentioned; they all have one though.

I thought I would explore mission statements among the world's most influential project management societies and professional bodies.

³⁹ https://www.drucker.institute/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Reading_Drucker-on-Mission.pdf

⁴⁰ <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/about>

⁴¹ <https://alessiobresciani.com/foresight-strategy/51-mission-statement-examples-from-the-worlds-best-companies/>

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Ibid

The Project Management Institute (PMI), based in the United States, is the world's largest PM association, with more than 500,000 members worldwide. According to their 'About Us' webpage: PMI "is the world's leading association for those who consider project, program or portfolio management their profession. Through global advocacy, collaboration, education and research, we work to prepare more than three million professionals around the world for the Project Economy: the coming economy in which work, and individuals, are organized around projects" and PMI works "to advance careers, improve organizational success and further mature the project management profession..."⁴⁴ PMI produces many high-quality products and services for the global project management professional community. Studying PMI's strategic plan, however, suggests a primary focus on markets, competition, products, brand and (PMI) communities. PMI appears to have no vision or mission statements.

According to the Association for Project Management (APM) in the United Kingdom, the world's second largest individual PM member-based professional body: Our mission is: "Inspiring communities to deliver meaningful change for societal benefit by advancing the art, science, theory and practice of project management."⁴⁵ This is more like it. But their vision statement on the same webpage is "to inspire everyone to create 'a world in which all projects succeed with project management as a life skill for all'", which makes me cringe. No, not all projects should succeed; many projects should never even be started.

The International Project Management Association (IPMA), a global federation of 70+ national project management professional associations, starts with the following Vision statement: "Promoting competence throughout society to enable a world in which all projects succeed." There it is again, all projects succeed. Bad idea! Many projects should not succeed or even begin. Their Mission Statement contains four long sentences: "Facilitate co-creation and leverage the diversity of our global network into benefits for the profession, economy, society and environment; Offer know-how, products and services to the benefit of individuals, projects and organisations across public, private and community sectors; Maximise the synergy in our global network to help all member associations develop according to their needs; Promote the recognition of project management and engage stakeholders around the world in advancing the discipline."⁴⁶ Good statements, but they sound like strategies or goals. At least they mention 'society and environment'.

For IPMA USA, their mission statement is similar to that of IPMA, which sounds good but reads more like a set of strategies. However, their Vision Statement reads: "A world in which all projects succeed." Ouch! No, not all projects should succeed. Many should never begin. But then they have a single Goal Statement: "The goal of our Society is to lead the mainstreaming of project management as a core competence of all professions, and as the key to ever-increasing performance in promoting human welfare and societal change."⁴⁷ This seems to be heading in the right direction.

⁴⁴ <https://www.pmi.org/about>

⁴⁵ <https://www.apm.org.uk/about-us/>

⁴⁶ <https://www.ipma.world/about-us/ipma-international/vision-and-mission/>

⁴⁷ <https://www.ipma-usa.org/about-us/our-vision-mission-and-objectives>

The Australian Project Management Institute (AIPM) has the following statement at the top of their About Us webpage: “*The Australian Institute of Project Management (AIPM) is the premier, longest-serving body for project management in Australia. Our goal is to provide quality and relevant services to our members. AIPM's role is to improve the knowledge, skills and competence of project managers and related project personnel, who play a key part in the achievement of business objectives – not just project objectives.*” There is no other statement of vision, mission or purpose. Nevertheless, it is clear that AIPM is focused on their members only.⁴⁸

Project Management South Africa (PMSA) has an organizational description but apparently no statements of vision, mission or purpose.”⁴⁹

AACE International in the U.S. has the following Mission Statement: “AACE members drive projects to complete on time, on cost, and meet investment and operational goals. We arm our members with the technical tools and expertise to support successful projects and programs”. Their Vision Statement is “To be the gathering place and source of thought leadership for professionals who drive successful project and program delivery.”⁵⁰

The Major Projects Association (MPA) in the UK: “The purpose of the Association is to improve the initiation and delivery of major projects through the interaction of members from all sectors in sharing experience, knowledge and ideas.” The MPA homepage features the words “Connecting People – Sharing Experience – Improving Major Projects”⁵¹ There are many other PM-related professional bodies not mentioned, but these are probably representative. These organizations are all producing high quality products including standards, guides, certifications, educational products and services. The questions for each are: “Do you have a vision or mission statement? Are they the right ones? And do they go beyond just serving your members (or customers)?”

What about Social Responsibility?

Another strategic management concept that is relevant to this discussion is social responsibility. According to the Association of Corporate Citizenship Professionals, corporate social responsibility (CSR) in the USA seems to have originated with the philanthropy of American industrialists Andrew Carnegie and David Rockefeller over a hundred years ago. It was formalized in a 1953 book by Howard Bowen called the “*Social Responsibilities of the Businessman*”, then gained traction in the 1970s among large public corporations.⁵²



⁴⁸ <https://www.aipm.com.au/about-us>

⁴⁹ <https://www.projectmanagement.org.za/page/Overview>

⁵⁰ <https://web.aacei.org/about-aace>

⁵¹ <https://majorprojects.org/>

⁵² https://www.accp.org/ACCP/ACCP/About_the_Field/Blogs/Blog_Pages/Corporate-Social-Responsibility-Brief-History.aspx

CSR truly began to take hold in the U.S. in the 1970s, when the concept of the “social contract” between business and society was declared by the Committee for Economic Development in 1971. The social contract is based on the idea that business functions because of public “consent,” therefore business has an obligation to constructively serve the needs of society. This is often referred to today as “license to operate” – that is to contribute more to society than solely their products for sale. ⁵³

The social contract outlined three responsibilities, and they’re still applicable today:

1. Provide jobs and economic growth through well run businesses.
2. Run the business fairly and honestly regarding employees and customers.
3. Become more broadly involved in improving the conditions of the community and environment in which it operates.⁵⁴

According to Wikipedia, which I quote for convenience: “CSR is a type of international private business self-regulation that aims to contribute to societal goals of a philanthropic, activist, or charitable nature by engaging in or supporting volunteering or ethically-oriented practices. While once it was possible to describe CSR as an internal organisational policy or a corporate ethic strategy, that time has passed as various international laws have been developed and various organisations have used their authority to push it beyond individual or even industry-wide initiatives. While it has been considered a form of corporate self-regulation for some time, over the last decade or so it has moved considerably from voluntary decisions at the level of individual organizations to mandatory schemes at regional, national and international levels.”⁵⁵

“Considered at the organisational level, CSR is generally understood as a strategic initiative that contributes to a brand's reputation. As such, social responsibility initiatives must coherently align with and be integrated into a business model to be successful. With some models, a firm's implementation of CSR goes beyond compliance with regulatory requirements and engages in ‘actions that appear to further some social good, beyond the interests of the firm and that which is required by law’. Furthermore, businesses may engage in CSR for strategic or ethical purposes...”⁵⁶

According to Investopedia: “Social responsibility means that businesses, in addition to maximizing shareholder value, must act in a manner that benefits society. Social responsibility has become increasingly important to investors and consumers who seek investments that are not just profitable but also contribute to the welfare of society and the environment... Social responsibility means that individuals and companies have a duty to act in the best interests of their environment and society as a whole. Social responsibility, as it applies to business, is known as corporate social responsibility (CSR).”⁵⁷

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corporate_social_responsibility

⁵⁶ Ibid

⁵⁷ <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/socialresponsibility.asp>

Several definitions of social responsibility refer to ‘individuals, and there is a related dimension, as also noted in a Wikipedia entry, as follows: “One common view is that scientists and engineers are morally responsible for the negative consequences which result from the various applications of their knowledge and inventions. After all, if scientists and engineers take personal pride in the many positive achievements of science and technology, why should they be allowed to escape responsibility for the negative consequences related to the use or abuse of scientific knowledge and technological innovations? Furthermore, scientists and engineers have a collective responsibility to examine the values embedded in the research problems they choose and the ethics of how they share their findings with the public.”⁵⁸

Following this logic, why shouldn’t PM professionals also embrace social responsibility? Since PMI and other professional bodies are also registered corporations (albeit non-profits), shouldn’t CSR requirements also apply? Of course, this takes professional ethical standards to a new level, which I think is needed and to which I turn to next.



But first, to reinforce my perspective, I want to quote Dr. Karen Thompson at Bournemouth University in the UK: “Will Social Responsibility be in a shadow or the spotlight after COVID-19? Historically, financial drivers including notions of benefits and value have overshadowed project management concerns for the environment and society... Professionalisation confers some responsibility for the environmental and social impacts of projects and, in recent years, there have been a range of initiatives to address environmental impacts but much less activity on social responsibility...”

After COVID-19 there will be demands for projects to rebuild economies and society. Pressure from local communities for projects to create both social and economic value is likely to increase... In the UK, the Social Value Act 2012 requires the public sector to ensure that the money spent on services creates the greatest economic, social and environmental value for local communities, and from April 2020 the requirement applies to spending by central government. Social Value can be used by other organisations, including projects, to evaluate impact and quantify social benefits. Incorporating social value into projects is in its infancy but the importance of doing so has been highlighted. If project professionals develop new competencies around using the SDGs and tools such as the Social Value Portal, then COVID-19 could provide new impetus and put social responsibility in the spotlight.”⁵⁹

(By now many of you may be thinking, “ok, we get it. Get to the point! What do you suggest?” Unfortunately, I still need to mention a few more relevant issues.)

⁵⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_responsibility

⁵⁹ From page 7-8 in Insights Report: Project Management After Covid-19, edited by Ipek Sahra Ozguler, *PM World Journal*, May 2020; <https://pmworldlibrary.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/pmwj93-May2020-Ozguler-project-management-after-covid-19-Report.pdf>

The Rogue Black Elephant: Corruption

Transparency International (TI) is a global movement working in over 100 countries to end the injustice of corruption. They focus on issues with the greatest impact on people's lives and hold the powerful to account for the common good. Through advocacy, campaigning and research, they work to expose the systems and networks that enable corruption to thrive, demanding greater transparency and integrity in all areas of public life.⁶⁰ First published in 1995, TI's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) scores and ranks 180 countries/territories based on how corrupt a country's public sector is perceived to be by experts and business executives. It is a composite index, a combination of 13 surveys and assessments of corruption, collected by a variety of reputable institutions. The CPI is the most widely used indicator of corruption worldwide.⁶¹

TI defines corruption as "the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. Corruption erodes trust, weakens democracy, hampers economic development and further exacerbates inequality, poverty, social division and the environmental crisis."⁶² In the 2019 CPI, the average score was 43/100, with 2/3rd scoring below 50/100. The United States (my home country and point of reference) ranked 23rd, scoring a 69/100, it's lowest score ever.⁶³ The USA trailed Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, UAE, the UK and most Western European countries.⁶⁴ No doubt, America's CPI score is even lower this year.⁶⁴

In the introduction to this editorial, I mentioned the presidential administration in the United States as one of the destructive forces in the United States in 2020. The 2015 presidential campaign was the subject of a massive investigation; since then, many of the president's associates including campaign manager and national security advisor were convicted of crimes, journalists and other political leaders have been verbally attacked and bullied, and so many lies have been told that it's been hard to keep up. Through August 2020, the U.S. president had told more than 22,000 lies while in office.⁶⁵ By now over 25,000 lies, more than 50 per day.⁶⁶

After the U.S. presidential election in early November, the U.S. president led an organized campaign to overturn election results (his loss of the presidency), telling more lies, spreading misinformation and conspiracy theories on a daily basis. His efforts amount to an attempted coup and are expected to last through January and possibly longer.^{67,68,69,70}

⁶⁰ <https://www.transparency.org/en/about>

⁶¹ <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi>

⁶² <https://www.transparency.org/en/what-is-corruption>

⁶³ <https://tradingeconomics.com/united-states/corruption-index>

⁶⁴ https://images.transparencycdn.org/images/2019_CPI_Report_EN.pdf

⁶⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Veracity_of_statements_by_Donald_Trump

⁶⁶ <https://www.inputmag.com/culture/fact-checkers-cant-keep-up-with-trumps-growing-lie-count-25k>

⁶⁷ <https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/trump-s-election-lies-are-attempted-coup-biden-other-democrats-ncna1248573>

⁶⁸ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/trump-broadens-his-efforts-to-overturn-election-outcome-11605800104>

⁶⁹ <https://nmpoliticalreport.com/2020/12/14/trump-campaign-files-suit-to-overturn-nms-election-results-even-after-they-were-certified-and-electoral-votes-were-cast/>

⁷⁰ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-12-11/trump-campaign-to-run-ads-promoting-effort-to-overturn-election>

His efforts have not changed the outcome of the 2020 U.S. presidential election but have been successful in dividing the country, casting doubts about America's voting and election systems, and hurting democracy.^{71,72}

In a 2015 study published in *Nature* in March 2016, researchers found that individuals are more likely to lie if they live in a country with high levels of institutional corruption and fraud—suggesting that poorly run institutions hurt society in more ways than previously suspected. The researchers pulled data on government corruption, tax evasion, and election fraud from the World Bank and Freedom House, a nongovernmental organization that researches democracy and political freedom, for 159 countries. They combined these rates into an index that measured institutionalized rule-breaking.^{73,74}

I think the definition of corruption above from Transparency International and used in the SDGs is incomplete. I believe that dishonesty itself underlies all corruption. Dishonesty includes lying, cheating and stealing. Without honesty, there can be no trust between individuals, organizations or groups of any kind. If we cannot trust what others say, how can we work with them? Trust is the basis, the foundation of civil society. How can we prosper or even live in a society where we cannot trust our leaders (business, political, institutional), laws, systems or institutions? There are no two ways to say this; civil society cannot survive the lying and corruption of political leaders.

According to the FBI in the United States: “Public corruption, the FBI’s top criminal investigative priority, poses a fundamental threat to our national security and way of life. It can affect everything from how well our borders are secured and our neighborhoods protected to how verdicts are handed down in courts to how public infrastructure such as roads and schools are built. It also takes a significant toll on the public’s pocketbooks by siphoning off tax dollars—it is estimated that public corruption costs the U.S. government and the public billions of dollars each year...”⁷⁵ The FBI is primarily talking about corruption that results in financial crimes. I think the same dangers result from lying, dishonesty and political corruption.

I want to remind readers that every professional association or society establishes and promotes a code of ethics, or code of professional conduct, that includes important behavioral requirements and guidelines. They become ethical standards. Codes of ethics are the bedrock of any profession. Corruption of any kind, and especially dishonesty, violates every code of ethics that I have ever read. I wrote about this in 2015.⁷⁶ As I pointed out in my February 2017 editorial,⁷⁷ Political leaders like our 45th president violate those ethical standards that we hold so dear. So do those who support them. They are a risk to civil society.

⁷¹ <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2020/09/how-historians-rate-the-danger-trump-poses-to-democracy.html>

⁷² <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/nov/01/trump-has-gone-a-long-way-toward-hindering-democracy-in-other-countries>

⁷³ <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2016/03/corrupt-societies-encourage-lying>

⁷⁴ <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/national-corruption-breeds-personal-dishonesty/>

⁷⁵ <https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/public-corruption>

⁷⁶ <https://pmworldlibrary.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/pmwj30-Jan2015-Pells-Guiding-Principles-second-edition.pdf>

⁷⁷ <https://pmworldlibrary.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/pmwj55-Feb2017-Pells-the-big-reverse-editorial.pdf>

Let me be even more clear. Those who support dishonest political leaders who lie, including other politicians, religious leaders, business executives, managers, supervisors and even project managers and PM professionals are a risk to civil society. So are news and social media companies that spread or facilitate the spread of lies and misinformation, whether intentional or not. (including those responsible for negative unintended consequences!)

For those of you who do not buy into my expanded definition of corruption, especially American readers, I refer you to the cadet code at one of the most respected institutions in the United States, the U.S. Military Academy at West Point: “A cadet will not lie, cheat, steal, or tolerate those who do.”⁷⁸ We should all adopt this code!

The Future of the Planet is at Risk

I vividly remember one time on a flight across the country some years ago, at around 30,000 feet looking down on the land far below and thinking, “wow, the band of atmosphere in which humans live on the earth is really small, only around 3,000 meters (less than 10,000 feet), much less for most people. That’s a really narrow band of air for the entire human race.” If you also consider that we live on land masses, and primarily in hospitable locations, the situation seems very fragile. This leads to the obvious realization that climate change, severe weather and natural disasters will be devastating to many people and perhaps to civilization itself.

Those thoughts have magnified my perception of the risks of climate change, especially as I’ve been studying disasters in recent months. While researching global warming, climate risks and disasters for this paper, I was thinking a lot about the massive fires in Australia and California, the hurricanes hitting the United States and Central America this year, and typhoons in the South Pacific, the heat waves and droughts. And of course the Covid-19 Pandemic that has infected and killed millions worldwide. It seemed to me that severe weather is becoming more common and is likely to continue, and this is what climate experts also predict. But how bad can it get?

Then I noticed an announcement on LinkedIn in late November by Prof Bent Flyvbjerg of Oxford about his latest paper published in the December edition of *Environmental Science and Policy* on how to survive Covid-19, the climate crisis and other disasters.⁷⁹ Access to the full paper was free for 30 days so I quickly found and read it. It scared the hell out of me. Here is Bent’s abstract: “Regression to the mean is nice and reliable. Regression to the tail is reliably scary. We live in an age of regression to the tail. It is only a matter of time until a pandemic worse than covid-19 will hit us, and climate more extreme than any we have seen...”⁸⁰ In his paper, he lays out the statistical argument, identifies some likely coming disasters, and offers some basic principles for navigating such extreme risks, for governments, businesses and the public.

⁷⁸ <https://www.westpointaog.org/netcommunity/document.doc?id=621>

⁷⁹ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1462901120308637?dgcid=author#bbib0025>

⁸⁰ Ibid

We've all seen movies about massive earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes and fires and for most of us, they're just entertaining. Having lived in California, I am very conscious of the history and risks of earthquakes on the West coast of North America and, in particular, along the famous San Andreas Fault. A massive earthquake has been predicted for decades, potentially resulting in the coasts of the U.S. states of California, Oregon and Washington sliding into the Pacific Ocean. In February 2001, I actually experienced a major earthquake that struck Seattle. It was pretty scary!

See my 2011 editorial titled "Project Management in the Ring of Fire."⁸¹ I also refer you to an article posted in February of this year by Christopher McFadden with a list of potential natural disasters that might threaten much of life on earth.⁸² It's really not funny!

Now I want to refer you again to the seminal 2017 document prepared by Prof Peter Morris, emeritus professor of construction and project management at University College London (UCL) and published by APM (Morris 2017). According to Peter's introduction, "...There has always been climate change, but this time the size, speed and consequences are so much greater than before, and have often been so willfully created that we would surely be foolish not to be addressing it... This document reviews where society stands regarding the potential impact of climate change and what project management as a discipline could, and should, be doing about it... project management uses a number of tools and techniques, and deploys practices, processes and procedures, by people having special skill sets, which together form a distinct body of knowledge... There is a danger that, as a discipline, project management can be more concerned with the use of these practices than with what its impact is on producing outcomes of real value... there is clearly a case for making sure that the discipline focuses on ends rather than just means: on ensuring its work contributes in the most effective way possible to society."⁸³

As Sara Drake, APM's CEO, said in her foreword to Peter's report, "Research on climate change has so far been led predominantly by physical scientists, but addressing how to mitigate and adapt to it will also require management and social science skills. Those expert in the world of projects and their management should have a significant role in this..."⁸⁴

And in case some readers think that fighting climate change is just about environmentalism (and anti-business), consider the impact of deforestation on human health. As tropical forests disappear, dangerous human/animal interactions are increasing. If you want to be really frightened, read "Disease X: The Next Pandemic"⁸⁵ or "Hunting for 'Disease X'".⁸⁶

⁸¹ <https://pmworldlibrary.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/pmwj21-apr2014-Pells-Ring-of-Fire-SecondEdition.pdf>

⁸² <https://interestingengineering.com/13-disasters-that-might-threaten-the-world-in-2020>

⁸³ <https://pmworldlibrary.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/171101-APM-Climate-Change-Report.pdf>

⁸⁴ Ibid

⁸⁵ <https://www.ecohealthalliance.org/2018/03/disease-x>

⁸⁶ <https://www.cnn.com/2020/12/22/africa/drc-forest-new-virus-intl/index.html>

The Future of Civil Society is at Risk

If the planet dies or becomes unlivable, civilization will collapse and the human race might die out. There have already been times in history when humans survived catastrophic climate change, but civilization did not. (Diamond 2005) While the probability of such a future seems low, negative changes in civil society are another matter. It is already happening.

According to the World Health Organization, “Civil society refers to the space for collective action around shared interests, purposes and values, generally distinct from government and commercial for-profit actors. Civil society includes charities, development NGOs, community groups, women's organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, trade unions, social movements, coalitions and advocacy groups...”⁸⁷ The United Nations defines civil society as “Civil society is the ‘third sector’ of society, along with government and business. It comprises civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations.”⁸⁸

Wikipedia expands on these definitions as follows: “Civil society can be understood as the ‘third sector’ of society, distinct from government and business, and including the family and the private sphere. By other authors, *civil society* is used in the sense of 1) the aggregate of non-governmental organizations and institutions that manifest interests and will of citizens or 2) individuals and organizations in a society which are independent of the government... The term *civil society* goes back to Aristotle's phrase *koinōnía politiké* (κοινωνία πολιτική), occurring in his *Politics*, where it refers to a ‘political community’, commensurate with the Greek city-state (*polis*) characterized by a shared set of norms and ethos, in which free citizens on an equal footing lived under the rule of law... Robert D. Putnam has argued that even non-political organizations in civil society are vital for democracy. This is because they build social capital, trust and shared values, which are transferred into the political sphere and help to hold society together, facilitating an understanding of the interconnectedness of society and interests within it...”⁸⁹

According to George Ingram at the Center for Sustainable Development, “If anyone needs a crash course in the critical role played by civil society organizations, COVID-19 is providing it—from increased need for the services they provide to those less fortunate, to the strain they are experiencing from lack of supplies and the need to “social distance,” to government having to act too quickly without civil society input. But beyond the current crisis, civil society is an essential building block of development and national cohesion. In a country blessed with peace and stability, civil society fills the space untouched by government and the private sector. In a fragile and conflict-ridden country, it plays an even more important role...” (Ingram 2020)⁹⁰

According to the Joint Economic Committee of the U.S. Congress in December 2019, before the Covid-19 pandemic began, “Civil society is both integral for social health and

⁸⁷ https://www.who.int/social_determinants/themes/civilsociety/en/

⁸⁸ <https://www.un.org/en/sections/resources-different-audiences/civil-society/index.html>

⁸⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_society

⁹⁰ <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/04/06/civil-society-an-essential-ingredient-of-development/>

irreplaceable by the market or the State. It comprises institutions that facilitate what we do together beyond the home. Though often formed to provide material support and mutual aid, its principal contributions to society are immaterial. As articulated in the Social Capital Project's inaugural report, 'What We Do Together' civil society holds our common life together by supplying 'extended networks of cooperation and social support, norms of reciprocity and mutual obligation, trust, and social cohesion' and by 'forming our character and capacities, providing us with meaning and purpose.'⁹¹

According to Sarah Repucci at Freedom House in her report *A Leaderless Struggle for Democracy*, "Democracy and pluralism are under assault. Dictators are toiling to stamp out the last vestiges of domestic dissent and spread their harmful influence to new corners of the world. At the same time, many freely-elected leaders are dramatically narrowing their concerns to a blinkered interpretation of the national interest. In fact, such leaders... are increasingly willing to break down institutional safeguards and disregard the rights of critics and minorities as they pursue their populist agendas. As a result of these and other trends, Freedom House found that 2019 was the 14th consecutive year of decline in global freedom. The gap between setbacks and gains widened compared with 2018, as individuals in 64 countries experienced deterioration in their political rights and civil liberties..."⁹²

I feel it in the United States, this year in particular. In early 2020, the Black Lives Matter movement resulting from highly visible police brutality against minorities led to social unrest and divisions. Since the recent presidential election which the current president has contested, a broad campaign of lies and disinformation has divided America as 40% of voters seem to believe these messages. Plots and threats against elected officials have increased, along with demonstrations, political clashes and riots. Animosity, even expressions of hatred, seem to be everywhere, even in churches, schools and other civil institutions. It seems that civility and civilized behavior are in decline, even as civil society is needed more than ever during the current health and economic crises. It seems a mess in this country, but it also seems to be happening in some European countries, in the UK, India, Brazil and other countries.

Now I need to mention the doomsday scenarios, the predictions of catastrophe based on the collapse of life on the planet due to extreme climate change AND the collapse of civilization as we know it. These predictions have been around for centuries, some associated with the "end of days", with millions of believers and followers. They have led to an entire "survivalist" movement with its own industries. The latest appears to be a 2018 paper titled "Deep Adaptation: A Map for Navigating the Climate Tragedy"⁹³ by Jem Bendell, professor of sustainability leadership at the University of Cumbria in England. Prof Bendell convincingly argued that it is already too late to avoid climate collapse and its repercussions.

⁹¹ <https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/republicans/analysis?ID=78A35E07-4C86-44A2-8480-BE0DB8CB104E>

⁹² <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2020/leaderless-struggle-democracy>

⁹³ <https://mahb.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/deepadaptation.pdf>

According to Bendell: “My own conclusion that it is too late to prevent a breakdown in modern civilization in most countries within our lifetimes is not purely based on an assessment of climate science... It’s based on my view of society, politics, economics from having worked in probably 25 countries across five continents, worked in the intergovernmental sector of the U.N., been part of the World Economic Forum, working in senior management in environmental groups, being on boards of investment funds...”⁹⁴

While Prof Bendell’s scientific claims have been disputed⁹⁵, he now has an online forum and millions of followers; his paper has been translated into multiple languages⁹⁶ and has spawned a global movement.⁹⁷ It seems to me that the deep adaptation approach while raising a useful alarm may actually be contributing to the breakdown in civil society. I think neither climate change resulting in environmental collapse nor the collapse of civilization has either a 100% or zero probability. But there appears to be some probability that life on the planet could be at risk if current climate change and negative trends in civil behavior continue unabated. More corrective actions are clearly needed, and more programs and projects to reduce the risks. More honesty, less corruption, is needed as well. We don’t need so many public lies, distortions of fact and conspiracy theories in society, and certainly not if we want important programs and projects to be successful.

Doing the Right Projects

Returning to the topic of project management, one of the most significant shifts in the PM world occurred some 20 years ago, when Terry Cooke-Davies in the UK and a few others recognized that if you are working on the wrong project, it doesn’t really matter how well it is managed. As portfolio management picked up steam, Terry and the late Paul Dinsmore in their 2005 book “*Right Projects Done Right*” addressed three important questions: Has the right portfolio of projects been chosen to ensure that company strategy is implemented successfully? Have the right projects with the right scope been selected as candidates for the portfolio? Are the projects managed well? (Dinsmore/Cooke-Davies 2005). Since then, many others have addressed the topic of ‘doing the right project’, including Alan Stretton earlier this year in this journal. (Stretton 2020b).

Portfolio management and the selection of the ‘right projects’, of course, moves program and project management into the strategic planning space, which has happened in recent years. The identification and selection of projects represent the front end of a broader, more comprehensive lifecycle model for program/project management. On the back end, post project, the focus in the last ten years has been on project outcomes and benefits, ultimately the critical determinants of project success. The late Russ Archibald devoted serious attention to this broader model in this journal^{98,99} and in conference speeches.

⁹⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/26/style/climate-change-deep-adaptation.html>

⁹⁵ <https://theecologist.org/2020/jul/15/deep-adaptation-flawed-science>

⁹⁶ <https://jembendell.com/2019/05/15/deep-adaptation-versions/>

⁹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deep_Adaptation

⁹⁸ <https://pmworldlibrary.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/PMWJ5-Dec2012-ARCHIBALD-DI-FILIPPO-Featured-Paper.pdf>

⁹⁹ <https://pmworldlibrary.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/pmwj29-dec2014-Archibalds-DiFilippis-Linking-ICEC-paper-second-edition.pdf>

Numerous models have now been developed that incorporate program, project and portfolio selection into the strategic planning process. Some, but not all, also incorporate the post-project phases of outcomes and benefits in a broader strategic management model. In recent months we have published a series of papers by Alan Stretton, who has developed a comprehensive strategic management model showing these relationships. (Stretton 2020c). Alan is now revisiting his model in a new PMWJ series titled “Revisiting Organisational Strategic Management: A Recursive strategic management model...” (Stretton 2020d).

Of equal importance to this whole topic has been the expanded perspective of projects and programs as subsets of a broader asset management process in many organizations, made clear in important papers by several PM-based authors like Paul Giammalvo¹⁰⁰ in Indonesia, Steve McGrath in Australia¹⁰¹ and Bob Prieto in the USA¹⁰². Considering programs and projects in the context of asset management introduces a much longer view, as many physical assets have a 10, 20, 50 year or longer lifespan. This perspective is important in asset-heavy industries such as governmental organizations (at every level), infrastructure, buildings, manufacturing, heavy industries, mining and other natural resources, etc. Consideration of projects in the asset life cycle context introduces issues related to the end use, operations, maintenance and disposal of project outputs. An obvious issue becomes longer term costs versus project investments – the return on investment (ROI).

This longer-term perspective has resulted in a widespread focus on sustainability in asset management, and by extension in the planning of programs and projects that create assets. This is exactly what’s been happened in the project management world, as sustainability has been one of the most visible topics in PM papers and conferences over the last decade. It’s even the topic of research projects and graduate degree programs in universities. And this brings us full circle back to climate change and the SDGs.

I believe “doing the right project” must go beyond corporate strategic alignment. The impact on the environment and society must be considered – for ALL Projects. The first, and most important, consideration is “Do No Harm!” This of course can require quite a lot of analysis and planning, for example, understanding the supply chain, reviewing materials and resources for sustainability, reviewing contracts, reviewing processes and procedures, etc. Many organizations are already doing this, for example, examining the “carbon footprint” of their various activities and supply chains; but every program and project should be doing this as well. An assessment of project elements against the SDGs should also be performed, perhaps using GPM’s P5 Standard or something similar, to determine potential harm to the environment, various stakeholder groups, institutions or civil society. Some professional bodies are already moving in this direction, for example in the UK where public projects must comply with the Social Value Act of 2012.

¹⁰⁰ <https://pmworldlibrary.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/pmwj80-Apr2019-Giammalvo-Agile-is-not-a-subset-of-project-management.pdf>

¹⁰¹ <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/18421731.pdf>

¹⁰² <https://pmworldlibrary.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/pmwj15-oct2013-prieto-Role-of-Sound-Asset-Management-System-FeaturedPaper.pdf>

The second consideration for the “right” projects is, how does the project benefit the environment or society? Use the SDGs as a scorecard. If an organization is serious about social responsibility, this should go without saying. Yet this also takes a lot of work. Nevertheless, I think these considerations should be institutionalized in standards, models and processes for selecting and managing projects (and programs).

The third consideration is related to corruption, as I’ve explained it above. Projects that advance corruption in any form should never be launched. I believe the PM professional world should take a stand on this issue as well. It is not enough to regulate the activities of PM professionals. Corruption on all programs and projects should stop. Those who lie should not be condoned, should be questioned and corrected. The saying in our profession of “the right project done right” must mean done honestly, so that stakeholders can trust both the performance and the results.

These are the reasons that I said earlier that not all projects should succeed, nor should some projects even be started. Projects that cause harm, are conceived for corrupt (or illegal) purposes, or rely on corrupt (dishonest) means should never see the light of day. Corrupt organizations should not be condoned! Corrupt leaders should never be followed!

What about Governance?

Some discussion of governance is highly relevant here, as we consider the relationship of PM to social responsibility, organizational strategy, corruption and doing the “right projects”. Governance of projects, and of project management, have been front and center in the PM world in recent years, with guides and standards issued by professional associations, many excellent papers published (for example, see Kelly (2010) and Weaver (2007) as well as their respective references) and a few excellent books. Governance has also been incorporated into portfolio, program and project management standards and approaches.

The attention to the governance of projects and project management stemmed directly from the changes in corporate governance laws following public scandals in the United States. The public corruption of Enron and WorldCom corporations led to the now famous Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002¹⁰³ (widely known as “SOX”) passed by the U.S. congress, followed by similar legislation in the UK, Europe, Australia and other countries.¹⁰⁴ Although SOX was primarily focused on corruption and the welfare of investors, corporate governance frameworks and guides broadened as “the structure through which the objectives of the company are set, and the means for attaining those objectives and monitoring performance are determined.” (OECD, 2015)¹⁰⁵

In the UK and other countries, corporate governance and social responsibility were married, as is the case of the Social Value Act 2012¹⁰⁶ which requires the public sector

¹⁰³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sarbanes%E2%80%93Oxley_Act

¹⁰⁴ <https://www.pmi.org/learning/library/project-governance-apm-directing-change-7368>

¹⁰⁵ <http://www.oecd.org/corporate/corporate-governance-factbook.htm>

¹⁰⁶ <https://socialvalueportal.com/legislation-overview/>

to ensure that money spent on services creates the greatest economic, social and environmental value for local communities...(Thompson 2020). Those social value regulations were updated in September 2020 to incorporate new needs stemming from the Covid-19 pandemic.¹⁰⁷

As mentioned above, many leading authors and authorities within the project management world have addressed, discussed and defined project and PM-related governance as defining how corporate governance requirements can or should be applied to projects and PM and thus how PM should be implemented and monitored on projects. One of the most widely used is APM's "*Directing Change: A guide to governance of project management*" (APM 2011)¹⁰⁸ The APM guide defines governance of project management as "those areas of corporate governance that are specifically related to project activities. Effective governance of project management ensures that an organization's portfolio is aligned to the organisation's objectives, is delivered efficiently and is sustainable. Governance of project management also supports the means by which the board and major stakeholders exchange timely, relevant and reliable information."¹⁰⁹

The APM governance guide is a fantastic document, containing 11 outstanding governance principles and describing four core components of PM governance: portfolio direction, project sponsorship, project management capability, and disclosure and reporting. APM's other related guide is equally significant, *Sponsoring Change: A Guide to the Governance Aspects of Project Sponsorship*. (APM 2009) PMI has incorporated governance into its Standard for Portfolio Management, among others; as far as I know, all other PM professional bodies have embraced project governance in line with the APM guide.

Since alignment of projects with corporate strategies and project management with corporate governance are fundamental aspects of the governance of projects and PM, it seems that this is where the issue of selecting the right projects belongs. This is also where the issue of project ethics should be addressed. Yet on both matters, I think current project governance guidelines may be inadequate, for five main reasons.

First, on the issue of ethics, I quote Peter Morris in his book *Reconstructing Project Management* on the issue of governance. After describing APM's Principles of Project Governance, "Not a bad list, though curiously there is nothing on morality or ethics when of course much of the recent attention to governance has arisen as a result of abuse of power, as in Enron and WorldCom in 2001-2002. Are projects morally agnostic (they are): are project managers? (they absolutely should not be.)" (Morris 2011, p161)

Second, I think the link between organizational strategies and corporate mission (and corporate responsibilities and governance requirements) are often weak or missing. Project governance models and guides assume that both strategies exist and that they

¹⁰⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-measures-to-deliver-value-to-society-through-public-procurement>

¹⁰⁸ <https://www.totalmetrics.com/process-improvement/Project-Governance-Guide.pdf>

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, page 7

align with corporate missions as well as governance and social responsibility requirements. Where strategies are missing, weak or wrong, how can the “right” projects be selected or supported? Doesn’t mature project management have a right to ask the questions: Is this the right project? Is this a good project and worth doing? These questions become more complicated as programs and projects are implemented, conditions change and strategies need to be re-examined. These questions may be adequately addressed in the APM Directing Change guide in the Portfolio Direction section on page 12, but I’m not convinced.

Third, I’m not sure current project governance models and guides work in the real world of project business. For example, most government agencies and many public companies achieve programs and projects through contractors, subcontractors and suppliers. With whom do the governance requirements lie, the project owner, each contractor? Where are project sponsors? Does each company involved on a project have its own governance requirements, project sponsor, strategic alignment issues, etc.? How do governance requirements flow down the supply chain? Through contracts? I think it’s highly unlikely.

Fourth, project/PM governance is a rather mature topic. Governance is also aimed at executive levels of organizations. Many executives have little or not enough knowledge of project management, let alone program or portfolio management, project sponsorship, project governance, strategic alignment and the other matters discussed above. Executives in large public corporations will generally understand corporate governance, social responsibility, strategic planning, portfolio alignment and related topics. Executives in private companies, small and medium sized enterprises, new businesses, civil institutions, non-profit organizations may not. Younger and less experienced leaders, most likely not.

Fifth, many guides, models, policies and statements are too general. We all try to simplify things, to produce an “elevator speech”, to communicate more quickly and easily with others. But many concepts and issues, including governance and social responsibility, can be quite complex. A corporate mission statement, for example, might be two sentences. But the issues and discussions that resulted in it were undoubtedly more extensive and complicated. This is one reason that I felt compelled to discuss so many issues in this editorial.

The Power of Why

Why is a mission statement needed? Why are corporate governance, project governance, project management governance needed? Why is social responsibility important? Why were the SDGs formulated and supported by millions of people around the world? Why is sustainability such an important topic now? Why should we worry about doing the right project when we get paid to just implement a project well?

According to New York Times best-selling author Simon Sinek¹¹⁰, there are two main ways to influence human behaviour: manipulation and inspiration. Inspiration is the more

¹¹⁰ <https://simonsinek.com/about/?ref=mainNav>

powerful and sustainable of the two... people are inspired by a sense of purpose (or "Why"), and that this should come first when communicating, before "How" and "What".¹¹¹ His TED talk is worth watching.¹¹² His book, *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*, has been a best-selling leadership book in the United States since its publication in 2009.¹¹³

I think we simply need to explain WHY more often.

The Future of PM – a Few Comments

The future of project management seems to be everyone's favorite topic this time of year. Dozens of articles are published each January with authors predicting trends and developments for the coming one, five or ten years. But what about projects and project management in 20, 50 or 100 years, if the planet is unlivable or civil society collapses, in one or more countries?

Advancing project management is obviously still very important – more and better knowledge; better models, methods, tools; global standards; more qualified project managers and PM professionals. But why are these advances important? As pointed out by many already, the project management discipline has historically been primarily focused on implementation, as a means to an end, rather than on project outcomes, which should always be more important it seems to me.

To help think about this topic, I revisited Peter Morris' classic 2013 book, *Reconstructing Project Management*. The book is full of PM history, best practices, new information, perspective, wisdom and many relevant statements; so I quote: "*Managing projects effectively is not just a question of having the right people organized in a manner appropriate to the characteristics of the project and the environment it is in. Nor is it just a question of using project management tools and techniques. There is something about the 'why' and 'how' one does projects; the 'to what end?'; I've called this 'the project management ethos.'*" (p. 257)



and "...while mankind faces some of the biggest, most serious and dangerous issues in its history, project and program management as a discipline are almost totally silent on addressing them. We should look, as a discipline, at this. What does the future hold?" (p.270) and "How might project, program or portfolio management help society to address these and similar challenges, and how will these changes affect the practice of m.o.p/p3m? It will be no surprise to see that most of the direction is set via policy decisions taken prior to portfolio, program or project management kicking in... m.o.p/p3m does have a value-enhancing role, inputting implementation perspectives to policy creation and strategy formulation, and in this way it can positively contribute to addressing society's

¹¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Start_with_Why

¹¹² https://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action?language=en

¹¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Start_with_Why

challenges.” (p. 273) (Morris 2013) Peter was thinking about these things long before he authored his important report on climate change for APM four years later. (Morris 2017)

So how can project management really influence strategies and project selection? It’s already happening with portfolio management in general and in some industries. Alan Stretton has also recently provided some examples and a model for PM involvement in the strategic formulation and reformulation processes. (Stretton 2019, 2020a)¹¹⁴ I would go a step further and suggest that PM have some influence on organizational vision and missions by raising the issues of social responsibility and ethics.

This raises another serious issue in my mind: almost all discussion for projects and PM related to strategic planning, including portfolio management, has been focused on business organizations, the commercial sector. It seems to me that government and public entities and most civil institutions, the so-called 3rd sector, (nonprofits, churches, schools, etc.) have not been fully served and even highly underserved by the PM professional world. And it is governmental and civil organizations that are directly engaged in addressing the black elephants, the topics covered by the SDGs.

So here are some predictions (that I hope come true):

- Projects will be recognized as more important than project management, leading to “management of projects” (MoP) as the driving force.
- As projectization of both industry and society continues to grow, the wide variety of programs and projects will lead to wider recognition of the importance of ‘context’, as well as experience and competence, in PM.
- Technology trends such as digitalization, big data analysis, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and others will dramatically impact projects & PM in many industries, but not all. Traditional PM will continue to be used (and required) in many industries. While PMI and others focus on PM in the business and technology sectors, dirt farming, food production, house building, infrastructure and many other basic industries and activities will continue. Applicable models and processes will be used or developed for those contexts and needs.
- Programs and projects in the public and civil sectors will demand more attention, as local regional and global social problems increase (as shown during the Covid-19 pandemic).
- As knowledge about climate change grows, and the awareness of sustainability increases, program and project lifecycles will be incorporated into asset lifecycles extending to end-of-life disposal considerations – long terms BRM and ROI.
- As the importance of solving global problems increases, more social responsibility will be incorporated into organizational strategies, goals, and selection and characterization of programs and projects.
- PM organizations and leaders will recognize that ethical behavior does not stop with professionals, but should be true for everyone we work with and do business

¹¹⁴ <https://pmworldlibrary.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/pmwj94-Jun2020-Stretton-further-notes-ppm-involvement-in-choosing-right-projects.pdf>

with. The PM professional world must take a more visible stand against corruption, in all its forms, everywhere.

- PM guides, methods, models, processes, systems and standards will need to increase and change to keep up.

To quote Antonio Nieto-Rodriguez, former Chair of the PMI Board of Directors and author of *Lead Successful Projects*, *The Project Revolution* and *The Focused Organization*: “I firmly believe that we have a unique opportunity to both re-invent leadership and re-invent project management. That we go back to the initial values and human beliefs and that we improve them to address the current and future needs of our planet. And the best way to do it is through inspirational projects and strategic initiatives...”¹¹⁵

As Reinhard Wagner, IPMA chair has recently written: “recent years have also shown that it is time to strengthen international cooperation in order to meet the many challenges of our time... The Covid-19 pandemic shows, as if under a magnifying glass, that these problems cannot be solved in the narrow context of national boundaries but can only be overcome through international cooperation. This is equally true for the worsening climate crisis, waves of migration and refugees, and regional conflicts...A societal agenda is needed, helping us to focus on what really matters and helps to shape our future.”¹¹⁶

Will the future of project management include more attention to solving social and environmental problems? Will the “right” projects include doing more “good” projects? Will governance include more attention to social responsibility, anti-corruption and broader social value? Will the focus of the PM professional world dramatically expand beyond business interests and economic measures?

Some Questions

- Do you agree with the (any of the) points made above?
- Do you think that professional PM could have helped or still can help deal with the Covid-19 Pandemic?
- Do you think Climate Change is real, or that the PM professional field has any responsibility to help deal with it?
- Do you think there is something we can (or should) do to help the world address the Black Elephants?
- Should PM professional organizations like PMI, APM, IPMA, AIPM, AACE more actively (and visibly) embrace social responsibility?
- Do you think PM is more important than the projects you work on?
- Do you think the PM profession can have an impact on global corruption?

¹¹⁵ From page 2 in Insights Report: Project Management After Covid-19, edited by Ipek Sahra Ozguler, *PM World Journal*, May 2020; <https://peworldlibrary.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/pmwj93-May2020-Ozguler-project-management-after-covid-19-Report.pdf>

¹¹⁶ <https://www.ipma.world/project-based-cooperation-at-global-level-as-a-condition-for-mastering-current-and-future-challenges/>

Some suggestions

One obvious question that I had when I began thinking about this whole topic, a higher purpose for PM, was whether it could be a top-down or bottoms-up movement. Since there is no organization that represents the entire PM professional world, top-down is currently unfeasible. International cooperation, however, is certainly possible. There are also some things that professional organizations and individuals can do. Here are a few:

For PM Professional Organizations

- Take a position on social responsibility, and especially regarding the issues raised in this editorial. Evaluate vision and mission statements, and adjust accordingly, or create new ones
- Reach out to governments to advance professional and ethical PM standards, knowledge, education and performance. Passive approaches are no longer appropriate.
- Reach out and partner with institutions in civil society to help address local and regional problems (black elephants).
- Increase focus on programs, projects, outcomes and benefits, not just on PM.
- Consider modifying program and project lifecycles to fit inside organization, asset or product life cycles, to better highlight outcomes, benefits and sustainability (both environmental and social).
- Add social responsibility (or SDG) reviews to governance models, standards and guides.
- Take a more visible stand against corruption and unethical behavior in industry, government and civil society. Update ethical standards to include “no condoning of corrupt behaviour, including lying, cheating or stealing.
- Increase cooperation and partnerships with other professional associations and organizations to advance the use of modern project and program management for solving global (social) problems faster and more effectively.
- Establish interest groups, networks and special projects to help solve environmental and social problems.
- Promote and support academic research into such solutions.

For Individual Professionals

There are plenty of things we can do as individuals; here are just a few:

- Reconsider the project or program that you are working on. Is it aligned with corporate strategy? Have social or environmental impacts been considered during project planning? If not, consider raising those issues. Do any other issues mentioned in this paper apply?
- Consider your organization. Is there a visible commitment to professional ethics? Is there or has there been unethical behavior, including untruthful reporting to stakeholders? Take action as appropriate, but don't stay silent.

- Review standards for ethical behavior and recommit yourself to professional ethics, and to my expanded definition of corruption. Don't lie, cheat or condone ANYONE who does.
- Advocate for the changes noted above with leaders of your local, national or international professional association.
- Volunteer with your professional society to advance one or more of these issues, for example, help create a new role, SIG or program for social responsibility or to support local communities. Or volunteer with a civil society organization to benefit the environment or local community.

But first things first: PM for Emergencies & Disaster Response

As the Covid-19 pandemic is now making clear to everyone, we need to be better prepared for emergencies. Emergency and disaster responses are projects; some become massive programs such as the response and rebuilding after a hurricane – or in response to this dangerous virus. Why isn't the project management professional world more actively engaged in these programs and projects?

Bob Prieto has authored papers on responding to big disasters (events of scale) in this journal. (Prieto 2010, 2011, 2013). I have also written extensively on this topic over the years, as explained in my Black Elephants editorial (Pells 2020). But now I've realized that I was thinking about this topic from the wrong angle. There is extensive experience, knowledge and expertise related to emergencies and disaster responses among government agencies (national and international), first responders (fire, police, emergency medical, defense, security and other organizations), civil society bodies (churches, non-profits, other) and some industries (construction, for example).

The PM profession should partner with some (or all) of those organizations to capture and document their knowledge in the context of project management bodies of knowledge or guides for emergency response project management. Perhaps more than one topic area, for example, medical emergencies (pandemic, cholera, other); natural disasters (hurricanes, fires, floods); environmental emergencies (chemical spills, plant explosions, etc.); aftermath of conflicts/wars (refugee crisis, other). This is an application area where Agility is really needed, where agile decision making and action taking can save lives and help mitigate more damage. But I'm not talking about scrum teams of 5, 10, or 20 people; emergency responses often require dozens of organizations and hundreds of people working together, often across borders, and involving very rapid planning, massive logistics and extensive safety, medical, health, security and other skills. Agility of a whole other dimension!

If we want to be socially responsible by contributing our expertise for responding to emergencies, then I think every PM organization should establish an emergency response initiative, program, organizational element, SIG or network. Those teams could reach out to local and national emergency responders, better understand emergency response

requirements, needs and processes, and begin to capture that knowledge. Guides should then be produced, courses developed and conferences sponsored. This could also become a large career field for project management professionals; and all emergency responders everywhere should be educated about project management. The numbers and impact of natural disasters and their associated emergencies are only increasing. So why not?

The Eye of the Storm

If we consider 2020 a perfect storm, perhaps January 2021 will represent the eye of the storm, when the air clears, we can assess the damage and better glimpse the future. In the United States, national elections have concluded, a new president and administration will be installed, vaccines are being distributed, and steps taken to address the healthcare crisis, floundering economy and other big problems. The same should be true in Canada, China, Europe, India, Mexico, South America, the UK and other parts of the world.

I'm worried but hopeful. I'm not as optimistic as I used to be; global problems are too visible now. This country seems a mess. The whole world seems a mess. But I have children, as many of you do. The future must improve. I know many brilliant people, doctors, engineers, scientists, professors, leaders in the PM field, so I know great things are possible. I know what can be accomplished using project and program management approaches, methods, knowledge. Why can't these skills and resources be brought to bear.

So What's it to Be?

I think the PM profession needs a higher purpose. I think the purpose of project management should be to help achieve important projects and programs that serve society, achieve positive changes, contribute to a better future for more people and for the planet. I also don't think I'm alone in this thinking; for example, see Reinhard Wagner's recent articles and papers (Wagner 2020a, 2020b, 2020c)

But we need to decide both individually and collectively, what projects do we want to achieve? What are the "right" projects in our organizations? In order to stop the black elephants, I think we need to climb on our collective high horses and meet the charge. Take the proverbial bull (elephant) by the horns! The world needs help. Why shouldn't project and program managers, who know how to get things done, be more involved?

Happy New Year!

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Addison, Texas, USA
Late December 2020

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David Pells has been an active professional leader in the United States since the 1980s, as founder and president of several PMI chapters, founder of PMI's first SIG (Project Earth), and member of the PMI board of directors 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; the Instituto Italiano di Project Management (ISIMP - Italy); Project Management Associates (PMA - India); and the Russian Project Management Association (SOVNET). In 2010 he was made an honorary member of the Project Management Association of Nepal.

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