

On Project Management needs a Higher Purpose ¹

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

3 February 2021

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Dear David,

I have read your PMWJ January 2021 Editorial three times. Yes, I have read your “Black Elephants...” as well, another three times.

They impacted me. Both are reflecting what I think. I agree with your concerns and I am joining to your (sorry) crusade.

Some will consider your words as unimportant. Others will say that you are a Don Quixote fighting against windmills. Probably, a lot of people haven't read them. Who knows how many will agree with you?

Let me say that I am much older than you. I don't know if I am mature or sage, but I am very worried about mankind's future, the world we live in and the things our species is doing to ourselves and our planet.

But I'm concerned also about how Project Management and Project Management professionals can contribute to a better world and a less conflicting life.

Project Management is a discipline whose most practitioners are from “hard areas”. A lot of us are engineers or IT professionals, practical and “rational” (or logical) people. This is good but not great.

Our profession seeks to achieve goals and results, deliver outcomes, and contribute to improving companies and their profits. Ok, we also work for NGOs and help governments to do what they are elected to do. However, in spite we work with and lead people, our focus is on goals and deliveries, numbers, schedule, costs, risks, quality, the next sprint, etc. This is not wrong, but it's not enough.

All the wonders of modern life came from science, human creativity, and technology. However, all of them were once a project. Projects are the road that mankind has used

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to achieve a better, comfortable, and healthier life. Ok, I'm not forgetting that weapons came from projects, as well. Everything has two sides.

I am sure that no Egyptian pharaoh had a WBS for his pyramid. Louis XIV didn't follow the Versailles Palace construction by a Gantt Chart. The Statue of Liberty was erected with no sprints. Today Noah's ark would probably cost less, spend less time and be much safer and "navigable".

We have learned a lot and we have had a huge improvement. But we are just talking about results. How many slave lives did Cheops Pyramid cost? The site where Versailles was erected prior was a dense and lush forest where the king used to hunt. These things today are unimaginable.

From ancient times to today, we have learnt to use WBSs, Gantt Charts and sprints. Now, we must learn that people, the Human Resources, are folks like us, that our planet is not renewable, and that the future started a long time ago. Finally, we must play another role and have complimentary accountabilities and responsibilities. All this with the things we have done since 1954.

What new roles? What accountabilities? And what responsibilities?

Most of us are accomplishing missions. No questions, no doubts, no critics. Just do it. It's time to ask why. It's time to start questioning, suggest changes and new directions, and have hard discussions about scope, outcomes, benefits, and sustainability. We can no longer continue to be passive. Projects are so important. They are the way to make strategy work. Today, they (the projects) have a narrow margin for errors, delays, cost overruns, waste, and rework. They must have also a narrow margin for environmental and social failures. We live in a world where ESG – Environmental, Social and Governance factors are being considered by investors (thanks, God) and the SDGs - Sustainable Development Goals are becoming important to win consumers and value a company.

So, I believe that we, the Project Management professionals, can't work the same way we worked in the 20th century or in the first decade of this century. There are a lot of changes, there are new things to consider, there are new pressures and demands from society. Despite those who do not want changes, radicals on duty, political polarization and denier leaders, we, the people, mankind, our society, continue to evolve (and, to improve).

So, Project Management must change. Project Managers must change, Project Management professionals and practitioners must change. We don't have other alternative.

Best wishes.

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