
Project Management needs a Higher Purpose!

Part 2: Mission Statements, Social Responsibility and the Rogue Black Elephant ¹

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Introduction

In late December, I authored a long editorial as a follow-on to my June 2020 editorial on black elephants². On good advice, that long editorial has been broken into four parts so that a few more readers might make it to the end. That said, the long original covers many topics, all of which I thought important to my argument that the project management professional world needs a higher purpose than earning more money, helping organizations become more efficient or profitable, or just advancing PM processes, methods or skills. What is that higher purpose though? It's for us to decide. For those interested in reading the long editorial, it has been posted in the PM World Library.³

Meanwhile, in part 1 published last month, I introduced the topic and referred to my June black elephants editorial in which I discussed the Covid-19 pandemic, climate change and other global problems (the black elephants that everyone knows about but few seem to want to address) and what the PM professional world could (or should) be doing to help.

Well, the pandemic rages on. Vaccines are being rolled out worldwide, but in many places it seems to be going way too slowly. As of today (Feb 4th) there have been 105, 133, 357 cases and 2,284,281 deaths worldwide (27.1 million cases and 462,253 deaths in the USA; 10.8 million cases and 154,841 deaths in India; 9.3 million cases and 227,883 deaths in Brazil; 3.9 million cases and 110,259 deaths in the UK).⁴ Predictions for the remainder of 2021 remain dire for many parts of the world. Progress is being made, but how much time has already been lost? Here in the U.S., the GAO recently published a report that is highly critical of the U.S. government Covid response during the Trump administration.⁵ Many of the failures mentioned are related to projects and programs that

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² 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>

³ <https://peworldlibrary.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/pmwj101-Jan2021-Pells-project-management-needs-a-higher-purpose-editorial-January-complete2.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>

⁵ <https://www.gao.gov/assets/720/712030.pdf> and https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/gao-trump-covid-biden/2021/02/02/38f0a0a8-65a4-11eb-bf81-c618c88ed605_story.html

never happened or happened too slowly or incompletely, or because of blatant leadership failures.

As also pointed out last month, 2020 started not with the pandemic but with massive fires and climate related disasters unfolding around the world, but especially in the Southern hemisphere. Well its happening again, as a massive fire is threatening the city of Perth in Western Australia this week.⁶ Antarctica and Greenland are melting, oceans are rising and cities are sinking into the sea. Millions of children worldwide are still out of school or falling behind due to the Covid pandemic; healthcare is crumbling; migration continues as millions flee broken political and social systems; the black elephants seem to be increasing in number and size.

In part 1, I also tried to credit those PM organizations which are, in fact, doing good things, trying to help in small but meaningful ways. But is it enough, or is it too little too late? What is project management for anyway? More importantly, are we working on the right projects? I highlighted the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a possible benchmark for addressing these questions. But really, what I was trying to get at was this. As experts in the delivery of programs and projects, don't we have a responsibility to society to help solve global problems?

That is what I discuss in the balance of this month's segment. That and what might be the biggest roadblock of all, what I call the Rogue Black Elephant – Corruption. But first, what is our vision for the profession?

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..."⁷

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

⁶ <https://www.9news.com.au/national/western-australia-perth-hills-bushfire-threatening-homes-shady-hills-woorloo-evacuations/c6a46041-8279-4e7f-958c-10057d970f9b>

⁷ https://www.drucker.institute/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Reading_Drucker-on-Mission.pdf

organization on the planet to achieve more.”⁸ BBC: “To enrich people’s lives with programmes and services that inform, educate and entertain.”⁹ Asana: “To help humanity thrive by enabling all teams to work together effortlessly.”¹⁰ 3M: “To Improve Every Life through Innovative Giving in Education, Community and the Environment.”¹¹ While many corporate mission statements are aimed at customers and shareholders, some include socially conscious statements like those just mentioned; most large organizations have one though.



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

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...”¹² 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.”¹³ 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

⁸ <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/about>

⁹ <https://alessiobresciani.com/foresight-strategy/51-mission-statement-examples-from-the-worlds-best-companies/>

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

¹² <https://www.pmi.org/about>

¹³ <https://www.apm.org.uk/about-us/>

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.”¹⁴ 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.”¹⁵ This seems to be heading in the right direction.

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.¹⁶

Project Management South Africa (PMSA) has an organizational description but apparently no statements of vision, mission or purpose.”¹⁷

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.”¹⁸

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”¹⁹ There are many other PM-related professional bodies not mentioned, but these are

¹⁴ <https://www.ipma.world/about-us/ipma-international/vision-and-mission/>

¹⁵ <https://www.ipma-usa.org/about-us/our-vision-mission-and-objectives>

¹⁶ <https://www.aipm.com.au/about-us>

¹⁷ <https://www.projectmanagement.org.za/page/Overview>

¹⁸ <https://web.aacei.org/about-aacei>

¹⁹ <https://majorprojects.org/>

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.²⁰

*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.*²¹

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.²²

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



²⁰ https://www.accprof.org/ACCP/ACCP/About_the_Field/Blogs/Blog_Pages/Corporate-Social-Responsibility-Brief-History.aspx

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid

decisions at the level of individual organizations to mandatory schemes at regional, national and international levels.”²³

“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...”²⁴

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).”²⁵

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.”²⁶

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

²³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corporate_social_responsibility

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/socialresponsibility.asp>

²⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_responsibility

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."²⁷

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.²⁸ 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.²⁹

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."³⁰ 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, its lowest score ever.³¹ The USA trailed Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, UAE, the UK and most Western European countries.³² No doubt, America's CPI score is even lower now.

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

²⁷ 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>

²⁸ <https://www.transparency.org/en/about>

²⁹ <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi>

³⁰ <https://www.transparency.org/en/what-is-corruption>

³¹ <https://tradingeconomics.com/united-states/corruption-index>

³² https://images.transparencycdn.org/images/2019_CPI_Report_EN.pdf

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 were 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.³³ According to the Washington Post, by the end of his presidency, Donald Trump had made 30,734 false or misleading claims.³⁴

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.^{35,36,37,38} 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.^{39,40}

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.^{41,42}

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 leaders.

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

³⁴ https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/politics/trump-claims-database/?itid=lk_inline_manual_4

³⁵ <https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/trump-s-election-lies-are-attempted-coup-biden-other-democrats-ncna1248573>

³⁶ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/trump-broadens-his-efforts-to-overturn-election-outcome-11605800104>

³⁷ <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/>

³⁸ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-12-11/trump-campaign-to-run-ads-promoting-effort-to-overturn-election>

³⁹ <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2020/09/how-historians-rate-the-danger-trump-poses-to-democracy.html>

⁴⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/nov/01/trump-has-gone-a-long-way-toward-hindering-democracy-in-other-countries>

⁴¹ <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2016/03/corrupt-societies-encourage-lying>

⁴² <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/national-corruption-breeds-personal-dishonesty/>

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...”⁴³ 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 2015.⁴⁴ As I pointed out in my February 2017 editorial,⁴⁵ 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.

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.”⁴⁶ We should all adopt this code!

Part 2 Wrap up

In part 1 published last month, I discussed the pandemic, climate change and other global problems (the black elephants), the UN’s SDGs as a global benchmark for assessing projects, and what the PM profession has been doing recently in response. In part 2, I have suggested that project management organizations and professionals have a social responsibility to contribute to society, and certainly not to harm others. Mission and vision

⁴³ <https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/public-corruption>

⁴⁴ <https://pmworldlibrary.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/pmwj30-Jan2015-Pells-Guiding-Principles-second-edition.pdf>

⁴⁵ <https://pmworldlibrary.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/pmwj55-Feb2017-Pells-the-big-reverse-editorial.pdf>

⁴⁶ <https://www.westpointaog.org/netcommunity/document.doc?id=621>

statements are useful strategic concepts for advancing social responsibility, and certainly for communicating purpose to stakeholders.

I have also labeled the global scourge of corruption as another black elephant that must be addressed, one that I think the PM profession can actually do something about. My understanding of corruption includes such dishonest behavior as lying, cheating and stealing. I think cheating and stealing have always been considered corrupt; but I argue emphatically that lying must be included. The impact of lies and misinformation on civil society in the United States over the last four years has been painfully clear to me. The potential harm of lying and misinformation to programs and projects should be equally clear. Corruption in all of its forms should not be tolerated.

The next two editions of the PMWJ will include the remaining segments of my original editorial, with these topics:

- Part 3: The Future of the Planet, Civil Society, Doing the Right Projects, What about Governance, and the Power of Why
- Part 4: The Future of Project Management, Some Questions, Some Suggestions, First Things First, and What's it to Be?

I think project management needs a higher purpose. This editorial, now in four parts, is my attempt to explain why and what we might be able to achieve going forward. If you would rather not wait and are willing to read the long original version, you can find it at <https://pmworldlibrary.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/pmwj101-Jan2021-Pells-project-management-needs-a-higher-purpose-editorial-January-complete2.pdf>

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