

The Everlasting Importance of a Common Project Management Language ¹

by Massimo Pirozzi

In each community, the use of a common language is not only a technical aspect that is needed in order to establish a common communication domain, but is, more generally, a common value of belonging, the knowledge and the proper use of which are required to be considered a fully-fledged member of the community itself. In fact, each community recognizes itself in its own language: therefore, the choices of common languages and communication formats are bold decisions, which correspond to deep bonds in terms of identification, affiliation, and efficient practice (Pirozzi, 2019). Definitively, a common language represents a deep sense of identification and of membership, and this is in general valid in all the diverse cases, e.g. for the natural languages and dialects, for the business and/or social languages that are used within the organizations, and for the professional languages that are adopted by the diverse communities of practice. Therefore, the learning of a new language is never a casual event-driven automatism, but is always the result of a personal strategic decision that implies the determination of becoming a member of the correspondent community. Moreover, an effective communication – and an interactive communication itself – is possible only if people, organizations, and communities find some mutual understanding of their diverse languages, and, then, succeed to set up, maintain, and improve a common communication domain.

In addition, each language is “alive”, and has its own life cycle. Its evolutionary survival is evidently a metric of success relevant to the community that identifies with it, while, on the contrary, a language that diverges in different “dialects” – each one of them most of the times is convinced of representing the “true” language – may cause the fragmentation, and the consequent impoverishment, of its original community. In today’s globalized world, both the continuous availability of new – especially social – media and the increasing importance of different “influencers” determine emergent levels of languages contamination, which tend to distinguish the members of the diverse communities with respect to the outsiders, by recognizing immediately the “holders” of a common language and, then, by discriminating the others.

Ultimately, in a professional community, the capability of preserving and upgrading a common professional language is foundational for the maintaining and for the development of the discipline, which definitively corresponds to the mission and the vision of the community itself. In the case of the project management, there are several key factors that determined its success, including efficacy, efficiency, universal applicability, and the capability of facing complexity, but the spread in the world of the discipline was evidently made possible by the existence, the use and the development of a common professional language, which, by the way, still guarantees the great added

¹ How to cite this paper: Pirozzi, M. (2021), The Everlasting Importance of a Common Project Management Language, *PM World Journal*, Vol. X, Issue IX, September.

value of enabling an immediate content sharing among the project team – and this is an efficiency aspect that is considered worldwide of primary importance by multidisciplinary teams. On its side, the success of the project management common language was, and still is, due to its “practical” nature, which of course derives from the fact that project management discipline itself is based on good practices. Then, project management practitioners have the opportunity to adopt a common professional language that is based on evidence-based practices, and that, therefore, do not oblige them to a preliminary – and often resigned! – acceptance of specific theories, or even of alternative and/or complementary approaches.

Indeed, project management community survived and prospered even if for almost 25 years the two major International Project Management Organizations had different alternative/complementary perspectives (PMI was process-based, IPMA still is competence-based), as well as diverse National PM Organizations lived and still live easily based on one of the two approaches, or even on a combination of both. Every month, tens of project management Authors and tens of thousands of project management Readers process project management papers, which they recognize are written in a common language, totally regardless of eventual diverse perspectives (maybe diversity and/or independence from standards is even appreciated as a positive value?).

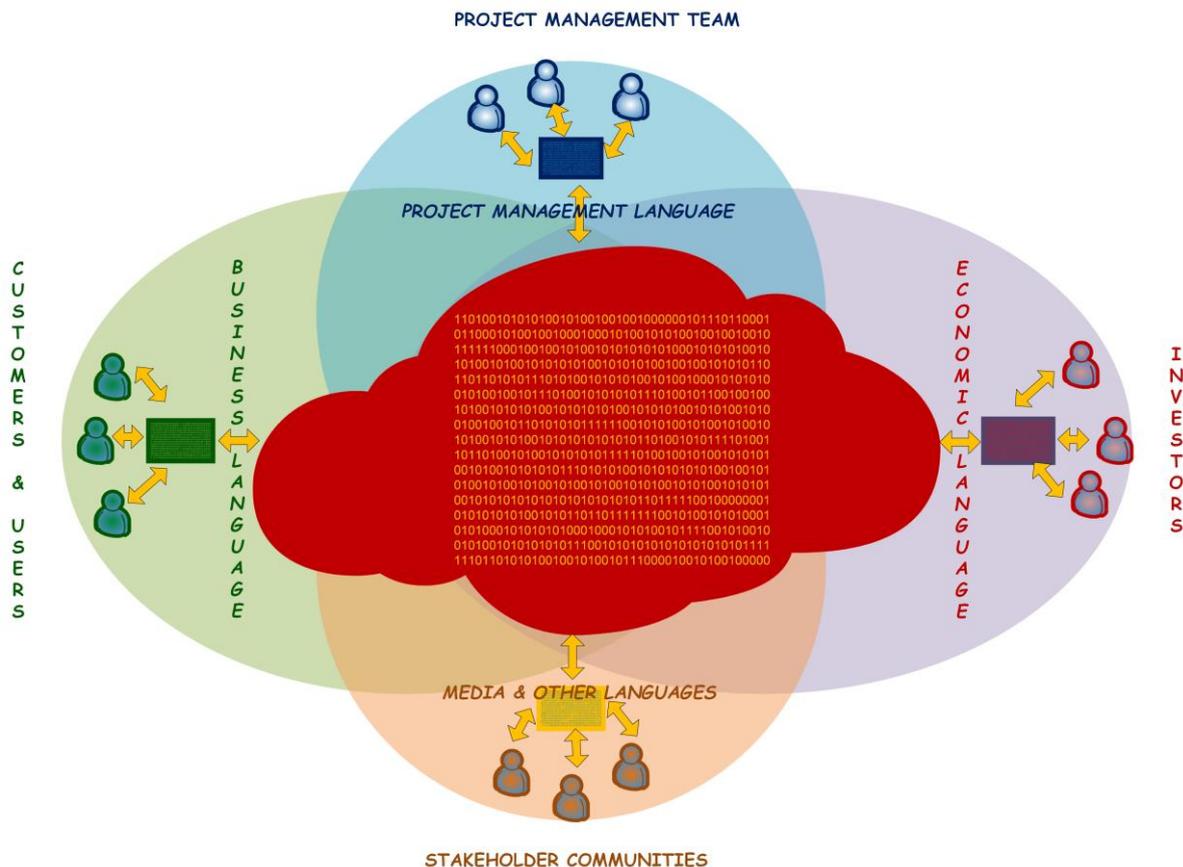


Fig.1 – The “Tower of Babel” of the Project Stakeholder Network

The project management common language has been created by great Authors and Pioneers, like Russell Archibald, Max Wideman, Alan Stretton, Harold Kerzner, and, then, developed by them and by a large variety of Authors with the key support of their Editors and Publishers, and, of course, with the satisfaction de facto of their Readers.

In this scenario, international and national standards usually acted as contributors, rather than as supporters: in fact, after the publication of the PMBOK (Project Management Institute, 1987), PMI and IPMA proceeded independently with their own guides (Project Management Institute, 1996, and International Project Management Association, 1997), both starting from late 90s, and so other National Associations did too. Only for a limited period of time the standards acted as supporters of a common project management language: in fact, after the publication of International Standard ISO 21500 (International Organization for Standardization, 2012), both PMI's PMBOK 5th Edition (Project Management Institute, 2013) and IPMA's ICB 4.0 (International Project Management Association, 2015) claimed their "coherency" with it.

Today, unfortunately, this desirable scenario is over, since ISO 21502:2020 (International Organization for Standardization, 2020) replaced ISO 21500:2012, and in the new PMBOK Guide 7th Edition, no direct reference is made to it: in addition, to put it delicately, coherency between them – and also between each of them and their previous editions – is not immediately evident. Indeed, while ISO 21500: 2012 was based on process groups and subject groups (that were almost identical to PMI's knowledge areas), the new ISO 21502:2020 – which, by the way, cancelled the subject groups – is based on practices (i.e. both integrated project management practices and practices for project management). Although practices have a correspondence with processes (made explicit just in the Standard's Annex...), they are in fact a brand new concept, which, then, introduces a new language proposal.

In addition, in the very recent PMBOK Guide 7th Edition (Project Management Institute, 2021), the process groups have been replaced by the project management principles, and the knowledge areas by project performance domains. It is a bit impressive that in this Edition the process groups, after 25 years, are relegated to less than one page as a secondary project team development model (?) and that the knowledge areas are just listed once; however, in this case too, it is evident that the proposed language drastically changed. Indeed, in the present situation, since both of these standards introduced a significant discontinuity in terms of their proposed language, the eventual future recovering of a formal coherence among standards seems to be uncertain and a quite difficult to reach objective, which, in any case, would require a "good will" effort that does not seem at all to be anymore a high priority of the diverse Organizations for Standardization.

In any case, each language needs, in order to survive properly, its "keepers", who have to preserve and update it properly; but who are the keepers today of project management language? Since, as we saw previously, the standards just missed their chance to continue to be identified as the keepers of a common /coherent language, the answer is actually that the keepers are the members of the project management community themselves, who today can share their knowledge and exchange their opinions continuously because of the existence of dedicated supports, preferably open-access, as for example PM World Journal is.

Ultimately, therefore, the worldwide web acts as a powerful enabler of a coherent project management language, and the online communication – often under evaluated by project management literature, may be because wrongly considered “unprofessional” – assumes a primary role, not only in supporting effective project management by enhancing the project delivered value (Pirozzi and Pirozzi, 2021), but also in preserving and upgrading a common professional project management language.

REFERENCES

International Organization for Standardization, 2012, *International Standard ISO 21500 - Guidance on project management (Lignes directrices sur le management de projet)*, International Organization for Standardization.

International Organization for Standardization, 2020, *International Standard ISO 21502 - Project, programme and portfolio management — Guidance on project management (Management de projets, programmes et portefeuilles — Recommandations sur le management de projets)*, International Organization for Standardization.

International Project Management Association, 1997, *Individual Competence Baseline version 1.0 (ICB 1.0)*, International Project Management Association

International Project Management Association, 2015, *Individual Competence Baseline version 4.0 (ICB 4.0)*, International Project Management Association

Pirozzi M. and Pirozzi M., 2021, [Online Communication to Increase Project Value by Enhancing Stakeholder Engagement](#), *PM World Journal*, Vol. X, Issue V, May.

Pirozzi M., 2019, *The Stakeholder Perspective: Relationship Management to Increase Value and Success Rates of Projects*, CRC Press, Taylor & Francis Group.

Project Management Institute, 1987, *Project Management Book of Knowledge (PMBOK)*, Project Management Institute

Project Management Institute, 1996, *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide)*, First Edition, Project Management Institute.

Project Management Institute, 2013, *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide)*, Fifth Edition, Project Management Institute.

Project Management Institute, 2021, *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide)*, Seventh Edition, Project Management Institute.

About the Author



Massimo Pirozzi

Rome, Italy



Massimo Pirozzi, MSc cum laude, Electronic Engineering, University of Rome “La Sapienza”, Principal Consultant, Project Manager, and Educator. He is a Member of the Executive Board and of the Scientific Committee, and an Accredited Master Teacher, of the Istituto Italiano di Project Management (Italian Institute of Project Management). He is certified as a Professional Project Manager, as an Information Security Management Systems Lead Auditor, and as an International Mediator. He is a Researcher, a Lecturer, and an Author about Stakeholder Management, Relationship Management, and Complex Projects Management, and his papers have been published in U.S.A., in Italy, and also in Russia; in particular, he is the Author of the innovative Book “[*The Stakeholder Perspective: Relationship Management to enhance Project value and Success*](#)”, CRC Press, Taylor & Francis Group, Boca Raton (FL), U.S.A., October 2019. Due to the acknowledgement of his comments on stakeholder-related issues contained in Exposure Draft of The Standard for Project Management - 7th Edition, he has been recognized as one of the *Contributors and Reviewers of The PMBOK® Guide - Seventh Edition*, and he received the *Certificate of Appreciation for Excellence for his volunteer contributions to the Project Management Institute and the project management profession in 2020*.

Massimo Pirozzi has a wide experience in managing large and complex projects, programs, and portfolios in national and international contexts, and in managing business relations with public and private organizations, including multinational companies, small and medium-sized enterprises, research institutes, and non-profit organizations. He worked successfully in several sectors, including Defense, Security, Health, Education, Engineering, Logistics, Cultural Heritage, Transport, Gaming, Services to Citizens, Consulting, and Web. He was also, for many years, a Top Manager in ICT Industry, and an Adjunct Professor in Organizational Psychology. He is registered as an Expert both of the European Commission, and of Italian Public Administrations.

Massimo Pirozzi is an Accomplished Author and an International Editorial Advisor of *PM World Journal*. He received three 2020 PM World Journal Editor’s Choice Awards for his featured paper “[*Project Management for Evidence Based Medicine*](#)” (co-authored with Dr. Lidia Strigari), for his Article “[*Project communications 1.0 and 2.0: from information to interactivity*](#)” and for his report from Italy titled “[*The fight against Coronavirus disease*](#)”

[\(COVID-19\) from the perspectives of projects and of project management](#)". He received also two 2019 *PM World Journal Editor's Choice Awards* for his featured paper "[Stakeholders, Who Are They?](#)", and for his report from Italy titled "[PM Expo® and PM Maturity Model ISIPM-Prado®](#)", and a 2018 *PM World Journal Editor's Choice Award* for his featured paper "[The Stakeholder Management Perspective to Increase the Success Rate of Complex Projects](#)".

Massimo can be contacted at max.pirozzi@gmail.com.