

UK Project Management Round Up¹



By Miles Shepherd
Executive Advisor & International Correspondent
Salisbury, England, UK

INTRODUCTION

The last month proved to be quite remarkable here in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. We have come to the end of the Silly Season as the ladies and gentlemen of the Fifth Estate find novel and contentious things to report while the Great British Public (GBP) have witnessed events both sad and joyous. I will make brief mention of events you may have noted in your daily newspaper before passing on to consider issues of project finance, innovative projects, a couple of problem projects and ponder the future of project management. I try to keep the same headings each month so you can test yourself by working out which of the items I just mentioned fit into the usual headlines.

GOOD NEWS

Starting with the weather, as we usually do in these parts, greetings from a sunny UK. I say sunny because where I live has been in the grip of a drought for about a year and we had wonderfully blue skies for weeks on end. That in itself can be considered good news but even better, our illustrious government has actually noticed and declared it officially. Sharp as a rubber bucket as ever, some wonder whether this glance away from their collective navels in Westminster is the result of Our Illustrious Leader, known to all in the project world as OIL to avoid confusing him with a Project Manager (PM), departing Downing Street to allow our third woman Prime Minister to take up occupation. Some see no connection between these events and others view this as unmitigated good news so I leave you to take your pick.

^{1 1} How to cite this report: Shepherd, M. (2022). UK Project Management Roundup, *PM World Journal*, Vol. XI, Issue X, October.

CHANGE MANAGEMENT

OK, I know, this is a new headline but the story did not fit any of the old ones – so I was forced to add this. September is a month of change in the northern hemisphere and despite rumours to the contrary, we do embrace change here. I've already mentioned the change of OIL (not to be confused with servicing of motor cars) but far more significant was the transfer of the Monarchy. As the world knows only too well, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II died at Balmoral Castle on 8 September. We were all taken aback and mightily cheered by the outpouring of grief and expressions of sympathy from around the world. The Beatles summed it all up in one of the four songs they wrote that mentioned her.

As one chapter in our history closed, another opened and this was marked by a programme of projects that had long been planned.



Leaving Scotland

Image AP & Daily Mail

First, the Queen returned from Scotland to London, with a long drive in convoy through the southern part of the Highlands to Edinburg and a night of repose at St Giles Cathedral.

After a flight south and a remarkable journey from RAF Northolt to Buckingham Palace for a last night. The journey saw traffic on the route stop in the pouring rain to allow people to line the roads to pay their respects to the Monarch.

The next project, the lying in state in Westminster Hall, a part of the Palace of Westminster, followed, marked by queues stretching at times for up to 5 miles as the more than a quarter of a million people filed past the coffin.



HM The Queen lies in State

Image: Daily Telegraph

The final project was the State Funeral. Televised to an audience around the world, this was a spectacular event with some 6,000 military personnel taking part, all members of the Royal Family and countless thousands of the general public.



Funeral Cortège

Image AFP

Having been a participant at the last State Funeral way back in 1965, I have a good understanding of the planning and rehearsals involved. The pall bearers returned from operational duties in Iraq, gun teams practiced in the small hours of the morning, traffic

was diverted and the public awaited events. That it all went smoothly was due entirely to good contingency planning. The base plan was drawn up more than 30 years ago and revised annually to take account of changes in traffic, troop availability and in the light of other major events. The programme manager, although he probably would not recognise the term, was the Earl Marshal of England, the 8th Duke of Norfolk.

This has been a somber time in UK but we can be pleased with the manner of the funeral and all the events leading up to it. The attention to detail was amazing, from plans to manage the staggering quantity of floral tributes left at the various palaces to looking after those queuing to view the coffin, nothing had been left to chance. It demonstrates the power of projects, planning, joined up thinking and above all, respect and affection

NOT SO GOOD NEWS

AS has been said many times before, reporting failed IT projects is like shooting fish in a barrel. The latest fish is the much-criticized Common Platform that is supposed to support the criminal justice and court system in England. The aim of the project was to create a cloud-based system to allow judges, prosecutors, police and the prison service to find case details in one place. Now we have a senior judge claiming that the new fangled system has a mind of its own and does all sorts of things that add even more time to the lengthy process of getting cases into the courtroom. Without seeing the system in use, it is hard to claim this as a project failure but it sounds like the design did not fully anticipate how the very wide range of users actually use the system. One wonders if this is another Agile Project?

Another reported problem project is the delay to a power station start up. Apparently a delay of 2 months is expected. And no, this is not a nuclear power station! Instead,



Keadby2 Power station

Image: Alamy

we learn that Keadby 2, in north Lincolnshire was supposed to come online at the start of this month. However, undisclosed events that meant the commissioning had not been completed on time have forced the owners, SSE, to delay the new gas-fired power plant until mid-December. According to press reports, this puts even more pressure on Britain's energy supplies. This is understandable as Keadby 2 is supposed to generate enough electricity to supply some 840,000 homes, and National Grid had been assuming it would be operating from next month to help keep the lights on. Had they read these pages over the last 5 years, they would have known about problems keeping lights on!

National Grid's "base case" analysis for this winter — under which the lights will stay on — assumes that all plants with capacity market contracts deliver as planned, expected, although there is some contingency built into the plan for unexpected outages. SSE are in a bit of a hard place as they won a contract estimated at around £60 million to complete Keadby 2 from October under the government's capacity market scheme. This scheme is designed to guarantee security of supply. Seems a little optimistic – perhaps they hadn't heard of the 3 Envelope Methodology, Stage 1 is "Blame your Predecessor" and who better to blame than OIL!

GOOD NEWS

➤ **Covid**

I'm not sure this is project related but I'll tell you anyway – the Boffins at the Covid-19 Genomics initiative reckon that Omicron has outlasted all those that came before — and with its longevity comes some hope that the coronavirus may be settling down. The first Coronavirus was replaced by the Alpha variant and only a few months later it, too was supplanted by the Delta variant. The Alpha variety was from a wholly different branch of the coronavirus evolutionary tree and made the original variety extinct. Similarly, Delta was eliminated by Omicron.

Press interviews with staff at the University of Cambridge based Virus Genomics group said that the reason for optimism is the successes of vaccines. Noting the short gestation for the most virulent versions on Covid 19, had we designed and tested a vaccine specific to Delta, by the time it could be deployed, there would have been no Delta infections for it to repel as Omicron had taken over and is still here. We have Omicron-specific vaccines ready.

Leader of the Virus Genomics group, **Charlotte Houldcroft**, said "The variants we are getting now are the children of previous variants rather than the second cousin," she said. "We would eventually expect most of the seasonal variation to come from incremental changes to what we've already got, and to get really new variants less often." The pharmaceutical record is pretty good so let's all hope she is right.

INNOVATIVE PROJECTS

➤ **Bio-Medical Projects**

You have probably heard that project management can be an accidental profession. Well have you heard of the accidental project? If not, here is one that caught my eye. An engineering firm, Quanta Dialysis Technologies, had intended to make a somewhat more efficient orange juice dispenser but came up with a revolutionary compact kidney dialysis system.

John Milad, the Quanta boss, said “When you go into, say, a McDonald’s and order an orange juice, behind the scenes there’s a machine that’s taking water and combining that with an orange juice concentrate, dispensing that very quickly.” Colleagues working on such a device realised that the job was not that dissimilar to the one performed by a dialysis machine. The resulting device is an order of magnitude smaller than a traditional dialysis machine and so is easier to maintain and to use. They won the prestigious MacRobert Award, awarded annually by the Royal Academy of Engineering with support from the Worshipful Company of Engineers. The new machine is already in service with the NHS

A second bio-medical project has resulted in a brain scanner that it is hoped will reduce brain injuries in Rugby players. Currently under trial at three lower-tier rugby clubs, the device is intended to detect possible head injuries. The WAVi scanner maps electrical activity in a player’s brain, producing a coloured map that can be compared with preseason maps in much the same way as a fingerprint can be compared. This allows players to be tested in about 6 minutes at the side of the pitch and a quick decision taken on whether it is safe for the player to return to the game. Brain injuries are a major concern in many contact sports with top players seen to be affected by injury induced trauma such as motor neurone disease. This looks to be another step in the right direction but will need some cultural changes in the players, young and old, to make it a real success.

➤ **Artificial Intelligence**

AI seems to be cropping up in all sorts of places these days. First I read that DeepMind, the UK based AI company owned by Google Inc, has used machine learning to tackle one of the trickier impediments to realising the promise of clean and plentiful energy — controlling plasma generated in nuclear fusion. matter hotter than the majority of the sun. This will a critical part of bringing the process used by the Sun to generate power with little, if any, waste of= contamination.

Then comes news that DeepMind has been used to predict the three-dimensional shape of over 200 million proteins — those from every creature,

plant or microbe that has had its DNA sequenced. According to press reports, researchers have achieved a breakthrough that promises to transform our understanding of how life works and might accelerate the discovery of new drugs. This result is part of a range of important scientific research projects. Nobel prize-winning chemist Professor Venki Ramakrishnan said: “This computational work represents a stunning advance on the protein-folding problem, a 50-year-old grand challenge in biology.” DeepMind results are being made freely available through an online database. DeepMind data are already being used at Oxford University to develop a new vaccine for malaria. Other projects include work on enzymes that can digest plastic pollution, and on antibodies that are thought to be implicated in Parkinson’s disease.

PROJECT FINANCE

And now a topic dear to us all – financing your project. In these uncertain times, the life of the Project Manager (PM not OIL) is complicated by matters of finance. Where does the money come from, how do you get it in sufficient quantity to deliver your project and what do you do when it all turns pear shaped? I can’t answer the last one, except to suggest using the 3 envelopes methodology but the others have been in the News recently, at least here in UK.

Maintaining finance for existing projects is always problematic as owners’ needs change, opinions on the Board can interfere or external influences intervene. For really large projects, there is always the prospect of changes of regime to contend with, so our nuclear programme in UK is always at risk. Some will see the current energy crisis as a boost since anything that brings more power to the people will tend to keep its funding. That does put more pressure on the timeliness of the project so delays are not just financially significant, they also risk losing support and then funding as the solution the project is delivering comes too late to be effective.

- **Hinkley C.** Back in the summer, EDF were encountering staffing issues at Hinkley Point. Stuart Crooks, managing director of Hinkley Point C, says “It’s challenging to get the right people with the right skills to work on the project.” About 7,500 people are on site but EDF is short of 250 steel fixers. EDF has asked the government to help smooth the way for more workers from overseas.
- **Sizewell C.** Problems at one site can lead to improvement at another and it is clear the estimating issues at Hinkley will not be repeated at Sizewell. However EDF need a Government investment of some £1.7 Billion for Sizewell C so any further significant delay at Hinkley could be fatal.

Finance for projects hitting critical points can become a problem, particularly when scaling up to move into production is concerned. This is an issue for ZeroAvia, a start-up that is developing hydrogen planes. They were looking for investment of \$200 million a few months ago. That was about \$166 million but now is about \$176.5 million so the exchange rate works in their favour but if they actually needed the dollars, it would be costing them more. For project managers, this can be important, particularly

if you are invoicing in one currency but paying salaries and materials in other currencies, as I know from my own project experience.

Our new Prime Minister seems to want to encourage projects by changing some of the environmental factors, particularly around planning. *The Times* reported that plans to block new North Sea oil and gas projects if they are incompatible with Britain's climate goals have quietly been ditched, prompting accusations that ministers are watering down their climate change policies.



Image: Andy Buchanan/Reuters

Activists claim that these changes make the climate compatibility checkpoint scheme unworkable and will allow the business secretary to approve more than 100 new oil and gas licences. The scheme emerged in the run up to COP 26 as a middle ground that stopped short of blocking oil and gas licences entirely but reflected the need to curb carbon emissions from new production. Clearly it did not

anticipate the current energy crisis.

The New Prime Minister has also promised “lower, simpler taxes in the UK to incentivise investment”. The Chancellor of the Exchequer responded by announcing that the government is in talks with 38 local authorities about creating new “investment zones” which would be “hubs for growth”. To encourage this investment, tax cuts for businesses that ministers hope would boost investment in shopping centres, restaurants, offices and homes. Looser planning rules in these zones would include removing height restrictions on the development of housing and commercial sites. Councils would no longer need to negotiate with developers over the number of affordable houses they build. Instead there would be a fixed percentage of the affordable homes required.

Not sure many Councils will appreciate the difference! There are also plans to encourage house building but as usual with Government ideas, there is lots of smoke but not too many mirrors so apart from claims that our planning system is a mess, which most people know, all we heard was reform is needed. We await the promised planning and infrastructure bill with considerable interest.

Of more significance is the lifting of restrictions on the construction of onshore wind farms. Rules in place for the past 7 years are to be scrapped. New planning policy on these wind farms is to be brought “in line with other infrastructure to allow it to be deployed more easily in England”. No wind farms have been built in England since 2015 when the then Prime minister required developers to prove they had “fully addressed local concerns. According to pressure group RenewableUK, only 90 turbines are in development, with many projects either abandoned or rejected. Scotland has already changed rules allowing more wind farms to be built in its wild areas.



Image: Monty Rakusen/Getty Images

CLOSING REMARKS

One snippet of really astounding news – A new Head of Corporate Risk has been appointed at the House of Commons! Few UK citizens have realised that there are corporate risks in Parliament but we must all be delighted that they are being addressed seriously.

Many readers will be unaware that the Pine Martin is a very rare beast seen in only a few remote areas in Scotland and Northern Ireland. They are on the UK Red List of critically endangered species so it was quite a surprise when one was spotted in a wooded area of south east London in early September. A camera trap deployed as part of the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) London HogWatch project, which aims to monitor and conserve London’s hedgehog population captured images of a Pine Martin. ZSL report that they do not know how the animal reached the urban woodland, with the nearest known population living over 70 miles away in the New Forest in Hampshire. The conservationists have considered that a private or unofficial release could be a possibility. Still, grounds for celebration!

And finally, I bring you a note on the internationalism of Project Management. The eldest son of my next door neighbour is married to a Japanese lady and lives outside Tokyo. He is a project manager for a Japanese construction company deployed in Mongolia. During the Queen’s funeral, he was sitting in a tent along with English speaking Mongolians watching the TV coverage of the events in London.

About the Author



Miles Shepherd

Salisbury, UK



Miles Shepherd is an executive editorial advisor and international correspondent for PM World Journal in the United Kingdom. He is also managing director for MS Projects Ltd, a consulting company supporting various UK and overseas Government agencies, nuclear industry organisations and other businesses. Miles has over 30 years' experience on a variety of projects in UK, Eastern Europe and Russia. His PM experience includes defence, major IT projects, decommissioning of nuclear reactors, nuclear security, rail and business projects for the UK Government and EU. His consulting work has taken him to Japan, Taiwan, USA and Russia. Past Chair and Fellow of the Association for Project Management (APM), Miles is also past president and chair and a Fellow of the International Project Management Association (IPMA). He was, for seven years, a Director for PMI's Global Accreditation Centre and is immediate past Chair of the ISO committee developing new international standards for Project Management and for Program/Portfolio Management. He is currently Chairman of the British Standards Institute project management committee. He was involved in setting up APM's team developing guidelines for project management oversight and governance. Miles is based in Salisbury, England and can be contacted at miles.shepherd@msp-ltd.co.uk.