

UK Project Management Round Up



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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to another year! We have managed to stagger around our Sun and surprisingly, we are back where we started from, more or less. OK, I know that astronomically we're slightly off last year's precise start point (and now we can measure the difference with much more precision, thanks to a spectacular project) but close enough for Government work.

My reports are usually retrospective and occasionally reflective. I bring together stories about projects and try to link themes and see if we Project Managers (the real PMs) can either learn something or improve our understanding. Just for a change, I'm going to look forward, rather like *Back to the Future*, to see what we might have in store for some of the major project domains such as Pharma and themes such as future technology. You might notice some cinematic themes, too.

So – what does the New Year hold for the Project World in 2023?

GOVERNANCE

Top Level Governance; Let's start with probably the most fundamental aspect of good PM – governance. Clearly this topic is not unique to project management and perhaps we forget that there is a well-established national governance framework. It's called the legal system. In UK this starts with the establishment of the State itself and its personification in the Crown. Many readers in the wider world will have noticed the transfer of power from Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II to her son, King Charles III. This was not a project as such, more a programme that began with Her Majesty's



Image: Danny Lawson Pool Photo via AP

funeral that started with the royal funeral and will end in May when the Coronation takes place. The ceremonial aspects were clearly planned as a collection of related projects with a flexible date range but a set sequence. Detailed plans were made for each project, taking account of locations, time of the year and other specific factors. These plans were updated regularly – classic examples of contingency planning. The next project in the programme is the Coronation, planned for early May.

This will be a high-profile event with many visiting Heads of State, complex ceremonials and extensive media coverage. One of the early tasks has been the re-sizing of the crowns. I understand that dress hire is not possible so physical modification of St Edward's Crown began at the start of December last year. A version of this crown has been part of the coronations of English and British monarchs since the 13th Century. This version was made in 1661 for King Charles II, replacing the medieval crown that was melted down after the execution of his father, Charles 1 in 1649.



St Edward's Crown Image: Getty Images

Domain Governance: or the rules established to manage particular aspects of commercial life are set up by the UK Government and we have had some interesting developments as 2022 closed. First, all laws established in compliance with European Union legislation will automatically be rescinded. Many laws will be retained, particularly those relating to specific products such as motor cars. Others, such as those relating to pension funds and some financial products remain challenging, particularly as compliance may be linked to unresolved political problems such as the Irish Border, the Good Friday Agreement and commercial interests. Some of these may be managed in the so-called BREXIT bill which has been rescheduled several times, the most recent last month, to allow for negotiations to complete. The bill is due to be presented in the House of Lords but no date has been set. The bill is thought to enable unilateral abrogation of some aspects of the Northern Ireland Protocol such as border check, long regarded as excessive. The Bill is controversial both within UK and Europe.

Financial Governance: Less controversial politically but bedeviled by sharply contrasting views of practicality and effectiveness are tangled in attempts by the Treasury to develop a digital tax reporting regime. One major concern is the ability of the Treasury to develop the necessary platform for declarations. As HM Revenue & Customs has been working digitisation, which would have forced 4.2 million self-employed workers and small businesses to file tax returns multiple times a year, this is a major blow to the department. I would prefer to regard this as an example of good governance as industry comments were less than enthusiastic, as reported by *The Times*, quoting **Caroline Miskin**, at the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales, the industry body, called for the Treasury to carry out a complete rethink of the scheme. **Tim Stovold**, head of tax at the accountants Moore Kingston Smith, said: *“This is a significant kicking of the can down the street, but a move which will alleviate the chaos of individual taxpayers and software providers simply not being ready.”* More significantly from a project perspective, **Nimesh Shah**, chief executive of the accountant Blick Rothenberg, said: *“Given the project will be more than ten years late, there are serious questions over the future viability.”*

PHARMA AND MEDICAL PROJECTS

It is all too easy to forget that the pharmaceutical industry is entirely project based. Drug development follows a well-structured programme formulation. This could be seen in the development of families of treatments for COVID when new drugs were developed in record breaking timescales. Good management allowed reduction in timescales at critical points in the development and licencing cycles.

There have been other successes in the development process with encouraging results reported in trials of new drugs to combat the spread of the most common forms of breast cancer. Results of a research project carried out by the Institute for Cancer Research (ICR) found that new targeted drug, capivasertib, could double the time before the advanced cancer spreads. This comes as news of another new drug that offers women with incurable breast cancer precious extra months of life thanks to a breakthrough drug approved for NHS use. Last year was particularly encouraging as there were many other reports of successful trials and technical developments in connection with breast cancer.

We are more used to news of gene editing in the improvement of agricultural products such as grain and vegetables, but this technique has been successfully applied to humans, too. I hasten to report we are NOT talking of Frankenstein type experiments but a method of turning on some genes known to improve cancer fighting capacity. Compared to adding a postcode to a Sat Nav, this approach is said to allow doctors to make highly specific interventions by inserting a precise piece of ribonucleic acid into living cells. At the end of last year came news that gene editing had cured one young girl suffering from a form of leukaemia. Although this was only one example, it is hoped the techniques developed will enable other interventions in diseases such as sickle cell anaemia.

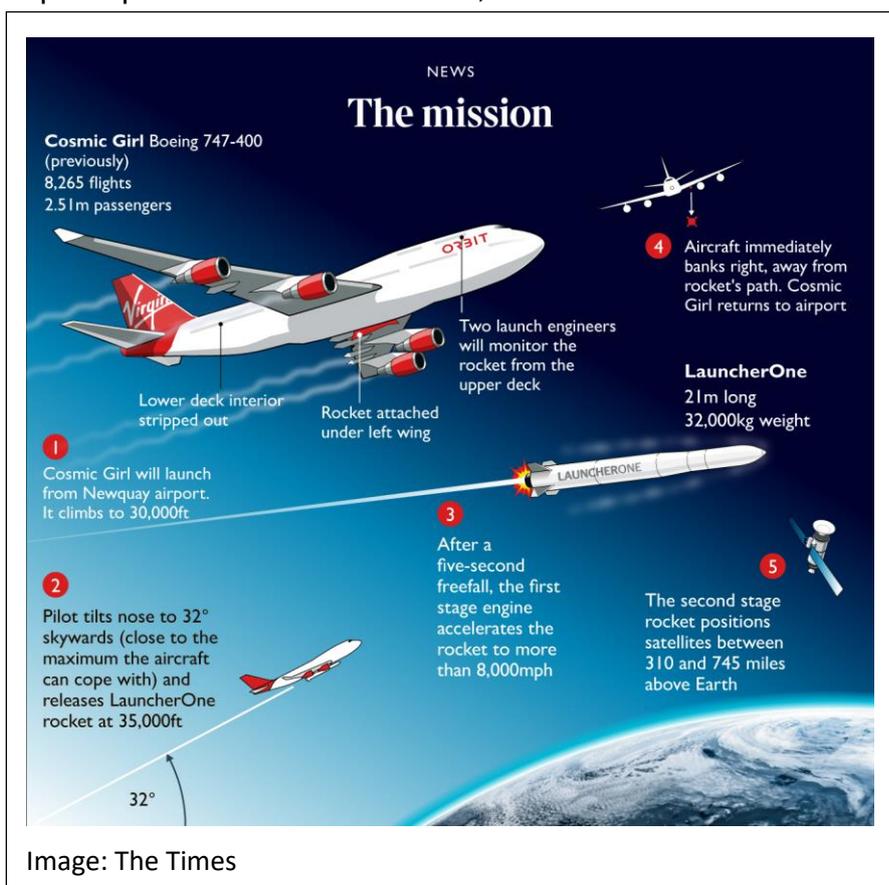
In other ICR research, we hear that the first system that can predict a man's future risk of prostate cancer based on his family history and his genetics. The tool, developed by the University of Cambridge and the Institute of Cancer Research in London, examines hundreds of gene variants, combining the results with information on the man's family history of cancer to provide a personalised risk score. This indicates the likelihood of developing prostate cancer over the next decade and could be used to help decide whether further testing is needed.

Encouraging as these and other drug and treatment successes are, they need to be seen against other less successful programmes such as the National Genomics Information System (NGIS). Press reports claim that the project for the NHS to sequence 500,000 patient genomes had descended into chaos. Reports released by NHS England after a 15-month transparency battle reveal that the NGIS suffered a litany of failures. Relations between staff collaborating on the project broke down so much that they were swearing at each other on internal messaging platforms. The review that followed found that Genomics England and the NHS had failed to work together, with teams "operating in silos". The project is not a total failure as "To date, the service has sequenced more than 30,000 whole genomes, helping NHS clinicians to transform the lives of thousands of families, delivering faster and more accurate diagnoses for patients with life-threatening conditions including cancer and

rare genetic disorders, and enhancing England’s status as a world-leading centre for life sciences.”

AEROSPACE

Space News: Technology, this time in the form of testing satellite launches, figures largely in UK these days. Regular readers will recollect that we have several potential “space ports” in the British Isles, from the Shetlands in the north to Cornwall in the



South-West. We have been awaiting final clearance from the Civil Aviation Authority to allow Sir Richard Branson’s Virgin Orbit to launch. The award last month hailed as “another major milestone” towards the first orbital space mission from UK soil. The mission, summarised in the graphic at left, is called Start Me Up in a tribute to the Rolling Stones.

A flight to launch the first satellites into

orbit is expected in the near future, The satellites themselves still require CAA licences, but these are understood to be imminent. Satellites produced in the UK, considered by many to be among the best for quality and design, have previously been sent to spaceports overseas to be launched. **Dan Hart**, the chief executive of Virgin Orbit, said the licences “take us one step closer to the first satellite launch take-off from UK soil. This is a major milestone and represents the successful completion of an enormous effort.”

Aircraft Program: Another forward looking project has been reported in the last month. Team Tempest a consortium of The UK's sovereign industry partners is to support a truly international programme, with a shared ambition to develop a next generation fighter aircraft under a new Global Combat Air Programme (GCAP). The announcement by the Governments of the UK, Japan and Italy, highlights the close government, military and industrial links between the nations and



Image: BAE Systems/Business Wire

reinforces the UK's international commitment to future combat air. The programme will build on the substantial progress already made in the UK by BAE Systems, Leonardo UK, MBDA UK, Rolls-Royce and the UK Ministry of Defence who have been working in partnership since 2018 as Team Tempest to research, evaluate and develop a host of next generation future combat air systems capabilities.

The UK's combat air industry not only supports national defence and security, but the £6bn-a-year sector also delivers substantial economic and social value. The GCAP could secure or create thousands of UK jobs while keeping irreplaceable combat air engineering skills onshore for another generation. A report published last year by analysts at PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) concluded that should the UK take a core role in a next generation fighter jet programme, it could expect to support an average of 21,000 jobs a year and contribution an estimated £26.2bn to the economy by 2050.

TERRAFORMING

I'm touching my hat to the science fiction authors of half a century ago in this heading but it is curiously appropriate. Those with long memories will recall the capabilities of inter-stellar explorers to transform potential new home planets to resemble our own planet, calling it terraforming. Based on examples over the last few years, we are starting to get our act together in this area; not by developing techniques to transform planet in other galaxies but sorting out our own past sins of omission and commission.

The good news is that after acrimonious negotiations at COP15 in Montreal, nearly 200 countries signed up to the United Nations biodiversity accord.. The so-called Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework commits the world to halting and reversing biodiversity loss by 2030. UK Ministers, always quick to recognise a globally significant deal, described this deal as having the power to "turn the tide on nature destruction". Countries have signed up to 23 targets to stem the loss of wildlife, plants and habitats. These include making 30 per cent of Earth's land and oceans a protected area, such as the national nature reserve and marine protected area designations in the UK, by 2030.



UK has begun several of the “new” targets in the re-wilding schemes in various parts of the country such as Wild Ken Hill in Norfolk, and Beddington Farmlands in London that have attracted a lot of attention. In the last month another major scheme was announced in the Solent, the channel leading to Southampton, to restore seagrass meadows, oyster reefs, saltmarsh and seabird nesting habitat.

A group of ten organisations working in the Solent area have secured a \$5m (£4.07m) grant for this work. In addition to physically restoring areas of these four key habitat types, the Solent Seascape Project will also work with landowners and regulators to improve the protection and management of existing Solent habitats. The project is set to run for 5 years managed by Louise MacCallum, Solent Project Manager at Blue Marine Foundation. Louise explained that the exciting multi-million-dollar ‘Solent Seascape Project’ will be the first of its kind in the UK to restore a seascape scale marine habitat (credit: Louise MacCallum).

The worm turns: A few years ago, we learned that earthworms could lead the race to Mars. Worms had been born in simulated Martian soil for the first time at a laboratory in the Netherlands, raising the prospect that “wormonauts” could be despatched to the red planet, or to the moon, alongside humans to help to establish farms. Charles Darwin claimed that earthworms were deaf but strong vibrations disturbed them in his book on the humble creature. Darwin called them nature’s ploughs and claimed they played “so important part in the history of the world”, improving fertility, influence drainage and improve plant productivity. Now we learn that in UK we suffer from a dearth of these important creatures. This does not appear to be the result of an excess of low frequency but strong vibrations but the British Trust for Ornithology report that more than 100 small studies found a decline in earthworms, showing that possibly one third of our worms have been lost in the last 25 years. The lesson is clear – if we wish to populate new worlds, especially those that require terraforming, we must improve conditions for earthworms. Let the cry ring out – What do we want? And the response “Earthworms” When do we want them – Now!



About the Author



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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 recently handed over as 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.