
The Program Way¹

By Dr. Harold Kerzner
and
Dr. Al Zeitoun

Introduction

A program is generally defined as a grouping of projects that can be managed consecutively or concurrently or a combination of both. There are numerous challenges facing the program manager that quite often make it difficult to achieve all or even part of the strategic goals and objectives established by senior management. The larger and more complex the program, the more difficult it will be to overcome the challenges.

Many of the challenges are common to both projects and programs. However, the risks due to the challenges may have a much greater impact on programs than projects. When projects are challenged, some companies simply let the project fail and the team moves on to their next project assignment. When programs are challenged, the cost of terminating a program can be quite large and might have a serious impact on the organization's competitiveness and future success.

Projects generally have a finite time duration. Most programs, because of their strategic nature and impact on the success of the organization, are much longer in duration and are susceptible to more challenges, risks, and negative impact on the business.

In the early years of project management, most PMs had engineering backgrounds, many with advance degrees in technical disciplines. Project sponsors were assigned from the senior most levels of management, mainly to make all of the necessary business-related and strategic decisions. Many companies did not trust project managers to make business or strategic decisions. Even companies that had programs and program managers, there were still governance personnel assigned to ensure linkages to strategic business objectives.

Project management today is more than just a traditional career path for workers. It is now treated as a strategic competency which means it is one of the 4 or 5 most important career paths in the company in order for the firm to have a viable and successful future.

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Part of the strategic competency requires that senior management give up the idea that information is power and clearly share strategic information with project managers. Today's project managers and program managers are managing strategic opportunities for companies and making strategic decisions. This forms the shift to the **Program Way**, *running project and programs with the proper strategic clarity and full authorization to make the necessary business strategic value decisions, a true business strategist way.*

The program business case must articulate the expected benefits and business value. The business case also provides the boundaries for many of the decisions that will have to be made. The challenge will be in the preparation of a business case such that all program team members clearly understand what is expected of them.

Program management is more closely aligned to strategic decisions than project management activities that focus on traditional projects. As such, over the next decade, we can expect to see a significant growth in the "**Program Way**" with program managers becoming experts in strategic planning.

Several years ago, IBM wanted all of their project managers to become dual certified: certified by PMI on project management and certified internally by IBM in the use of IBM's forms, guidelines, templates and checklists for making strategic decisions at IBM. IBM discovered the importance of having their 46,000 PMs qualified and trained in making business decisions on projects and programs.

Other companies have followed IBM's lead and created internal training and internal certification programs more closely aligned to business strategy. Even without utilizing the words, this expansion of capability building towards business strategy linkages, most certainly confirms that companies have been shifting focus to expand and make use of the "**Program Way**."

The Program Way

Program stakeholders are the people that ultimately decide whether a program is successful. There can be significantly more stakeholders on programs than projects. Failing to meet program stakeholder expectations can result in a significant loss of business. Given the long-time frame of many programs, managing the changes in stakeholders over the lifecycle of the program and addressing their changing expectations, this **Program Way** muscle is critical to develop.

To support this **Program Way**, dedicated program personnel would likely be required, such as:

- Program office manager: This can include handling administrative paperwork, meeting scheduling and making sure that program activities are aligned to company standards and expectations.
- Reports manager: This person is responsible for the preparation and distribution of all reports and handouts. The person is usually not involved in the actual writing of the reports. Naturally there is an opportunity here to exploit the power of Artificial Intelligence for these first two roles.
- Risk manager: This person monitors the VUCA environment, and the enterprise environment factors. Additional responsibilities include risk identification, analysis, and response to all risks that can impact program success.
- Business analyst: This person works closely with the risk manager and activities may include identification of business opportunities and threats. The analyst may monitor compliance to customer requirements and verification of the program's deliverables.
- Change manager: Some large programs may clearly indicate that changes in the firm's business model will be necessary. The change manager prepares the organization for the expected change. The change may just be in some of the processes or the way that the firm conducts its business rather than a significant change to the business model.

The Program Way Letter to Future Program Managers _____

There are both concerns and equally a level of excitement about the future of the **program way** with the amount of disruption and the anticipated changing environmental and business dynamics. As a program manager you are in the right place at the center of leading through chaos and of creating opportunities. This brief letter to future program managers is intended to highlight some of the key anticipated shifts ahead, be aware of them, prepare for them, and ultimately put that readiness to good use in creating meaningful strategic impact.

The changing nature of your role and possibly title. Whether program manager remains as a title, or it get replaced with some elements of leading, collaborating, strategizing, integrating, coaching, or driving, it is all about creating impact. There is a dominant need

for servant or social leadership, where the program leader is able to adapt between being the coach or becoming the one carrying the program team across obstacles.

Your future role is shaping to be the true organizational connector. Your role will continue to balance technology and strategy as your key enablers. Program managers have to have their voice in working across the business boundaries and continually breaking down actual and mental silos in the organization.

Future program managers are connectors.

Readiness for that future also has growth and people components. The open window for continual learning is a feature that is strengthened by technology and artificial intelligence. This requires developing an appetite for your growth and for equally growing other key stakeholders around you. A more mature and developed stakeholder community directly contributes to making your future role most effective.

In the future, program managers will also have a vital impact on sustaining the growth of business and people. With the norm shifting to program managers being more aligned with the executive teams, being part of the most critical strategic dialogues and decisions, and having the right seat at the table, the value of program management continues to become more evident. This makes your role even more clearly strategic in terms of impact driving and effecting the future of organizations.

The Program Way's Future Conductor

Describing the role of the program manager could take many forms. One of the favorites could be the orchestra conductor. The anticipated ***program way's*** integration emphasis played in the role of the program manager and the need to align across a diverse set of stakeholders make the conductor analogy a strong fitting designation.

One of the experiences worth discovering, would be to get the opportunity to go deep in understanding the role of the orchestra conductor and see that although it is such a critical role, the quality of the outcome of that musical piece's delivery ultimately rests with the orchestra itself, its training, and its achieved harmony.

- The role of a Conductor is to unify a large group of musicians into a core sound instead of a wild bunch of different sounds surging out
- The program becomes similar to the nicely played piece like the one we enjoy going to the theatre for
- Sees what good looks like
- Stepping back and seeing the cross dynamics
- Bringing the team towards benefits and strategic outcomes

The Holistic View of the Program Way

An analogy that relates to the importance of the strategic and holistic view of the **program way** is being on the balcony versus being on the dance floor, as illustrated by Figure.1. Leaders realize the important of this. This contributes to the adaptable mindset that program managers should possess.

Program managers tend to be more successful when they have the ability to create the distance and see better where some of the gaps might be in what is happening in front of their eyes on the dance floor, or in the deep work the program team is involved with. They should also have the ability to roll up the sleeves and jump right back into it and be in the trenches with their program team colleagues.



Figure 1. The Holistic View

THE PATH FORWARD

Shifts in how we work and how deliver value, require developing a sensible and holistic new program muscle. The *Program Way* is about excelling in building the links between initiatives and the strategic imperatives behind those initiatives. Executives need to understand and demonstrate the shift to this way of working and entrust their program managers to drive the achievement of outcomes from their most significant business initiatives.

The *Program Way* requires the creation of an intentionally strategic culture. Just like PMI and other global organizations have been directing the attention towards focus on benefits and value, businesses should be ready to support the shift needed to growing the business in the buckets of programs that fully align to clear *Strategic Focus Areas*. This is our opportunity to raise the bar around the practices of project and program management and ensure that the right organizational champions provide the proper attention to growing the *Next Gen* of program leaders to take the helm of the most critical future transformational changes and the associated organizational leadership roles.

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About the Authors



Harold Kerzner, Ph.D., MS, M.B.A

Senior Executive Director for Project Management
International Institute of Learning
New York & Florida, USA



Dr. Harold Kerzner is Senior Executive Director for Project Management for the International Institute for Learning (IIL). He has an MS and Ph.D. in Aeronautical and Astronautical Engineering from the University of Illinois and an MBA from Utah State University. He is a prior Air Force Officer and spent several years at Morton-Thiokol in project management. He taught engineering at the University of Illinois and business administration at Utah State University, and for 38 years taught project management at Baldwin-Wallace University. He has published or presented numerous engineering and business papers and has had published more than 60 college textbooks/workbooks on project management, including later editions. Some of his books are (1) Project Management: A Systems Approach to Planning, Scheduling and Controlling; (2) Project Management Metrics, KPIs and Dashboards, (3) Project Management Case Studies, (4) Project Management Best Practices: Achieving Global Excellence, (5) PM 2.0: The Future of Project Management, (6) Using the Project Management Maturity Model, and (7) Innovation Project Management.

He is a charter member of the Northeast Ohio PMI Chapter.

Dr. Kerzner has traveled around the world conducting project management lectures for PMI Chapters and companies in Japan, China, Russia, Brazil, Singapore, Korea, South Africa, Canada, Ireland, Germany, Spain, Belgium, Poland, Croatia, Mexico, Trinidad, Barbados, The Netherlands, Sweden, Finland, Venezuela, Columbia, United Arab Emirates, France, Italy, England, and Switzerland. He delivered a keynote speech at a PMI Global Congress on the future of project management.

His recognitions include:

- The University of Illinois granted Dr. Kerzner a Distinguished Recent Alumni Award in 1981 for his contributions to the field of project management.

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- Utah State University provided Dr. Kerzner with the 1998 Distinguished Service Award for his contributions to the field of project management.
 - The Northeast Ohio Chapter of the Project Management Institute gives out the Kerzner Award once a year to one project manager in Northeast Ohio that has demonstrated excellence in project management. They also give out a second Kerzner Award for project of the year in Northeast Ohio.
 - The Project Management Institute (National Organization) in cooperation with IIL has initiated the Kerzner International Project Manager of the Year Award given to one project manager yearly anywhere in the world that demonstrated excellence in project management.
 - The Project Management Institute also gives out four scholarships each year in Dr. Kerzner's name for graduate studies in project management.
 - Baldwin-Wallace University has instituted the Kerzner Distinguished Lecturer Series in project management.
 - The Italian Institute of Project Management presented Dr. Kerzner with the 2019 International ISIPM Award for his contributions to the field of project management.

Dr. Harold Kerzner can be contacted at hkerzner@hotmail.com



Dr. Al Zeitoun, PgMP, PMI Fellow

Global Future of Work Executive
Siemens DI SW
Ohio & Maryland USA



Dr. Al Zeitoun is a Future of Work, business optimization, and operational performance excellence thought leader with global experiences in strategy execution. His experiences encompass leading organizations; delivering their Enterprise Digital and Business Transformation; guiding fitting frameworks implementations; and using his

empathy, engineering insights, and collaboration strengths to successfully envision new business models and execute complex missions across diverse cultures globally.

In his current role with Siemens, he is a Senior Director of Strategy responsible for driving the global program management practices, Masterplan governance, and enabling the Strategy Transformation portfolio processes and priorities.

In his position, as the Executive Director for Emirates Nuclear Energy Corporation, Abu Dhabi, UAE, he was responsible for creating the strategy execution framework, achieving transformation benefits, governance excellence, and creating the data analytics discipline necessary for delivering on the complex country energy mission roadmap.

At the McLean, USA HQ of Booz Allen Hamilton, Dr. Zeitoun strategically envisioned and customized digitally enabled EPMO advisory, mapped playbooks, and capability development for clients' Billions of Dollars strategic initiatives. Furthermore, he led the firm's Middle East North Africa Portfolio Management and Agile Governance Solutions.

With the International Institute of Learning, Dr. Zeitoun played a senior leader and global trainer and coach. He was instrumental in driving its global expansions, thought leadership, and operational excellence methodology to sense and shape dynamic ways of working across organizations worldwide. He speaks English, Arabic, and German and enjoys good food, travel, and volunteering. Dr. Al Zeitoun can be contacted at zeitounstrategy@gmail.com