

A personal recollection and reflection on a failed global project management initiative in the 1990s ¹

By Alan Stretton

INTRODUCTION

This short article is a personal recollection of a mid-1990s initiative undertaken within the global project management community, which was concerned with possibilities for forming an international federation of project management, or a broadly equivalent global body. This was a serious initiative which was supported by the most substantial project management representative bodies of the time. However, after over a year's work, it eventually failed.

This initiative received little publicity, and I know of only one article in the literature which mentions it. That article was in South Africa's *ProjectPro*, under the heading of *International Federation of Project Management?* (ProjectPro 1995). However, its main discussion covered only one meeting of the several undertaken during this initiative. Other meetings, and the initiation and fate of the global initiative, were not covered.

The purpose of this short article is to briefly present a broader coverage of the origins, meetings and fate of this global initiative, to help round out the picture for any future researchers or others who might be interested. I do not have any of the original documentation, so am relying partly on my own memory, partly on a broader personal chronicle which I maintain, and partly on ProjectPro 1995.

HOW THIS GLOBAL INITIATIVE ORIGINATED

I did not attend the June 1994 INTERNET [now the International Project Management Association – IPMA] World Congress in Oslo, but many Australians were there, including the president of the Australian Institute of Project Management (AIPM), Brian Kooyman. Brian told me that he was invited to join the inter-society meeting between the Project Management Institute (PMI) and INTERNET which was held at every major seminar/ conference. At this particular meeting, PMI stated its desire to repudiate existing anti-poaching agreements – in particular, it wanted to set up PMI chapters in Europe. Rather naturally, INTERNET objected very strongly, and heated arguments ensued.

As a neutral party, Brian was asked to contribute. He pointed out that this confrontation was absurd, as each organisation had the same aims, which were basically to promote project management. They should therefore be looking towards cooperation rather than confrontation. Later on, this led to the notion of forming a global project management

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organisation, and it was agreed that preliminary discussions on possibilities would be held at the PMI Seminar/Symposium in Vancouver in October 1994.

SUBSEQUENT WORKING MEETINGS

Brian Kooyman and I both went to Vancouver and found several groups talking about cooperation and global initiatives. Immediately after the formal part of the conference, Brian and I met with three PMI, two INTERNET and one WAPMA representative, and we formally agreed to pursue possibilities of forming a global body without delay.

The first of the ensuing meetings was held in Philadelphia in early December 1994. The participants were the Chair and the Ex-Officio Chair of PMI [Rodney Dawson and John Adams, assisted by Debbie Bigelow], the President and the Certification Chair of INTERNET [Klaus Pannenbacker and Richard Pharro], with Brian Kooyman and myself representing AIPM. This meeting concluded that a global project management body was both feasible and desirable, and formed a steering group, plus working groups to pursue four specific issues – namely a Core Body of Knowledge; Accreditation/Qualification; Funding; and Future Organisation.

I was nominated as chairperson of the Core Body of Knowledge working group. We held our first meeting in Boston in March 1995. A draft document eventually emerged from our efforts, but it was essentially still very exploratory, with many unanswered questions on a wide variety of issues. But at least it was a start. I have no information on the meetings of the other three working groups.

A second meeting of the steering group was held in Sydney in April 1995, with Klaus Pannenbacker representing INTERNET, Kent Crawford representing PMI, and Brian Kooyman and myself representing AIPM. We also had input from others, including Rodney Turner from the UK. Some aspects of this meeting were discussed in ProjectPro 1995. This meeting led to an agenda being drafted for the ensuing Global Forum day at the New Orleans PMI Seminar/Symposium on 15 October 1995.

STEERING GROUP AGENDA/SUBMISSIONS IGNORED AT PMI GLOBAL FORUM

The impending fate of the above initiative was signalled on the first day of its 1995 Seminar/Symposium, when PMI announced that it was going to proceed with setting up PMI chapters in Europe and elsewhere, irrespective of whether or not other project management associations/institutes already existed in those regions. This was, of course, contrary to the expectation which underlay the formation of this particular global initiative.

The PMI position was comprehensively confirmed on the Global Forum day², when its organisers completely ignored the proposed agenda of the global steering committee. Instead, PMI insisted on following its own agenda, and in doing so effectively torpedoed the global initiative. This rejection was totally unexpected – certainly by me, and I believe by all the other participants in this global initiative, including its own PMI representatives.

SOME PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

After all the work that had been put in, it was something of a shock that PMI had reversed its position without any giving any prior warning that I was aware of. This, and thence PMI's decision to ignore our draft agenda, effectively put an end to this global PM initiative.

It was evident that PMI's interests were much more with building up its own specific influence as an institute, as opposed to promoting the advancement of project management via non-intrusive cooperation with other project management representative bodies in the world at large.

PMI's decision to open its own chapters in regions and countries which already had their own project management associations/institutes was seen by many as being grossly insensitive to, and unconcerned with, the position and interests of these bodies. These types of concerns were articulated by several attendees, including particularly Peter Morris, if I remember correctly. They also reflected my own viewpoint at the time.

However, all this happened over thirty years ago, and viewpoints formed at the time have little, if any, relevance to the situation today. In the broader context, this initiative was a relatively minor occurrence in the overall development of project management. However, from my personal point of view, it was certainly interesting, and at times rather exciting, to have been involved in it.

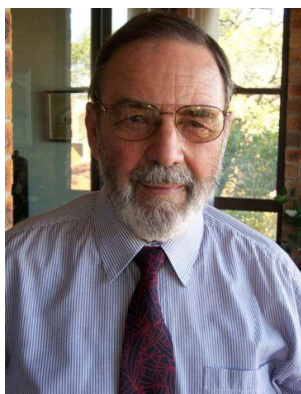
Finally, it is again emphasised that the above are basically my own personal recollections. Others involved in this initiative may well have seen certain events somewhat differently. But hopefully this short contribution might be found useful by some future historian, or other interested party.

REFERENCE

ProjectPro (1995). International Federation of Project Management? *ProjectPro*, July. pp. 35-36

² Editor's note: As a member of the PMI Board of Directors at the time, I was the initiator and moderator for the Global Forum day (Global PM Forum) that Alan mentions in this article. At the time, I knew nothing about this earlier global federation initiative that Alan describes (apparently a communication failure of PMI leaders). The 1995 Global PM Forum (all day meeting) was not intended to derail any international cooperation but was rather simply a friendly meeting of delegates from various countries attending the PM 1995 Seminars/Symposium. About 20 countries were represented that day, including some of the people mentioned in this article. David Pells.

About the Author



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Alan Stretton is one of the pioneers of modern project management. He is currently a member of the Faculty Corps for the University of Management & Technology (UMT), USA. In 2006 he retired from a position as Adjunct Professor of Project Management in the Faculty of Design, Architecture and Building at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS), Australia, which he joined in 1988 to develop and deliver a Master of Project Management program. Prior to joining UTS, Mr. Stretton worked in the building and construction industries in Australia, New Zealand and the USA for some 38 years, which included the project management of construction, R&D, introduction of information and control systems, internal management education programs and organizational change projects. He has degrees in Civil Engineering (BE, Tasmania) and Mathematics (MA, Oxford), and an honorary PhD in strategy, programme and project management (ESC, Lille, France). Alan was Chairman of the Standards (PMBOK) Committee of the Project Management Institute (PMI®) from late 1989 to early 1992. He held a similar position with the Australian Institute of Project Management (AIPM) and was elected a Life Fellow of AIPM in 1996. He was a member of the Core Working Group in the development of the Australian National Competency Standards for Project Management. He has published over 280 professional articles and papers. Alan can be contacted at alanailene@bigpond.com

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