

Project Manager Musings on PM Paradigm Shifts

By Dr. Bill Moylan

Back in ancient history [circa 1991], the bestselling book in business circles was *Paradigm Shift: The New Promise of Information Technology* by Don Tapscott and Art Caston. The book's premise of old, unresponsive bureaucratic organizations needing to reinvent themselves to deal with the upcoming volatile, open, global business environment of the 1990's. The *Paradigm Shift* was music to this newly certified PMP's ears. For the previous decade, my professional PM work efforts in three distinctly different industries [petrochemical facility construction, academia, automotive] attempted to leverage computer information systems to address these business issues with mixed results. The new era of information technology enabling the transition to the new enterprise and business success purported by the authors became my roadmap and mantra.

When attending my first PMI Symposium held in Dallas, Texas, in September 1991, the paradigm shift for project management revealed itself. The gurus of PMI of Drs. John Adams, David Clelland and J. Davidson Frame talked about the paradigm shift from "*management by function*" to "*management by project*". Project Management would serve as the complementary organizational framework to implement the necessary transitions from unresponsive bureaucracy to the lean IT-based business machine. My professional mission as PM consultant, trainer and graduate school instructor became clear – spread the gospel of Project Management to help save American industry from itself.

Jumping ahead 15 years to the Summer of 2006, my next PM paradigm shift occurred. The PMI Educational Foundation co-hosted a PM Education Summit in San Rafael, California, with the Partnership for 21st Century Skills [P21]. A rather eclectic group. PMI was represented by Jim Snyder (founder of PMI and), Diane Fromme, Kim Liegal and me. The opening remarks by Jim Snyder addressed the need to infuse teaching project management in K-12 education. Bernie Trilling of the Oracle Education Foundation (a key leader of P21) spoke on preparing young people for the new world of work using the constructivist pedagogy called Project-Based Learning [PBL] to teach the critical life skills. Becoming a bit confused, I asked "Is our collective goal to teach Project Management to young people, or are we using Project Management to teach?" To say the least, Jim Snyder expressed his displeasure with me for stating something that was obvious. "We are here to put Project Management to be taught in all K-12 schools across the country..." At the same time, Bernie piped in on how PBL organizes students into learning-teams tasked with solving challenging projects. *Oops!* Was this PM Education Summit going to be a complete bust? The basic premises of P21 and PMI, although our terminology sounded similar, were not connecting. The two distinct cultures of K-12 Educator versus Project Management Professional became quite evident. Then my Epiphany, and my second PM paradigm shift, emerged. *Learning by Project* is the pathway for young people to learn the critical C-skills of Communication, Collaboration, Creativity and Critical Thinking through their participation in team projects. The 2-day Summit was a success. The Project Learning Partnership between P21 and PMI-EF was formed, and project management became a key learning construct for K-12 education.

Now in 2021, another PM paradigm shift is quite evident -- *Leading by Project*. The upcoming PMIGLC panel discussion on Integrated Project Delivery [IPD] to be held via ZOOM on Tuesday 29 June 2021 is highly recommended. Not wanting to take away from the august panel members' thunder, will hold my thoughts on this PM paradigm shift till then.

As always, your questions, comments and criticisms are welcome.

Best regards, Dr. Bill

William A. Moylan, PhD, PMP, FESD, DTM

Professor Emeritus – Eastern Michigan University; email: wmoylan@emich.edu

Principal, WA Moylan & Associates; email: wamoylan@aol.com