



Managing Across Cultures

PMI Atlanta Professional Development Day 2008

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Learning Objectives

- Identify the challenges of "managing across cultures" and define the specific parameters that lead to those challenges (e.g., age, gender, language, customs, etc.)
- Present case studies regarding specific situations commonly encountered by project managers with global, virtual teams, and explore the various options for resolving the situation in the most productive and amicable manner.
- Summarize the learnings from the case studies, and present some general "rules of the road" for managing global, culturally-diverse project teams.

0. Informal poll

How many of you have:

- worked on a “global” project (i.e., at least one team member was based outside the US)?
- worked outside the US on a project? NA?
- worked on a project while based physically outside the US? NA?
- worked on a project where some team members could not speak the same language? where the main language was not English?
- worked on a project where you were the only US-based and/or native English speaker?

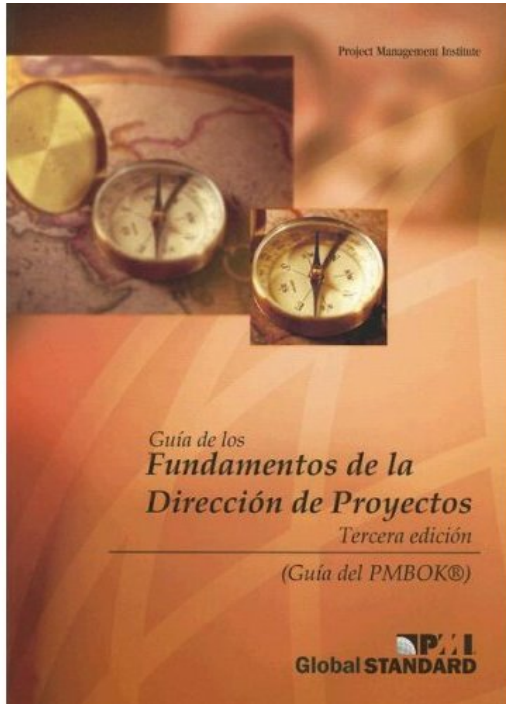
Presentation Outline

1. Introduction
2. What is “authority”?
3. Cultural framework for analyzing authority in projects
4. Four authority scenarios (case studies)
5. General observations and real-world application (“rules of the road”)
6. Summary

1. Introduction: why is “managing across cultures” important?

- Financing alone cannot make a project succeed
- Technology alone cannot make a project succeed
- People (management and labor) working together **can** make a project succeed
- Cultural challenges to be overcome:
 - Language
 - Customs
 - Food/Drink
 - Weather/seasons
 - Religion/traditions
 - Caste/social hierarchy

PMBOK (3rd Edition, 2006)



- 266 individuals from all over the world collaborated
- 52 different industries and government agencies participated
- 29 countries represented
- 10 different languages into which the PMBOK had been officially translated:
 - Spanish, Brazilian Portuguese
 - French, German, Italian, Russian
 - Japanese, Korean, Chinese (simplified)
 - Arabic
- 7 other languages with PMI licensed “unofficial” translations
 - Dutch, Swedish, Norwegian, Polish
 - Greek, Hebrew, Hungarian (new)

**Source: *PMI Today*
Supplement, 2/07, p. 1**

The evolving PM environment

- Global
- Virtual
- Outsourced

“Technology enabled but socially disabled”

2. What is “authority”?

au·thor·i·ty—*noun*

1. the power to determine, adjudicate, or otherwise settle issues or disputes; jurisdiction; the right to control, command, or determine.
2. a power or right delegated or given; authorization: *Who has the authority to grant permission?*
3. a person or body of persons in whom authority is vested, as a governmental agency.

...plus 10 other definitions!

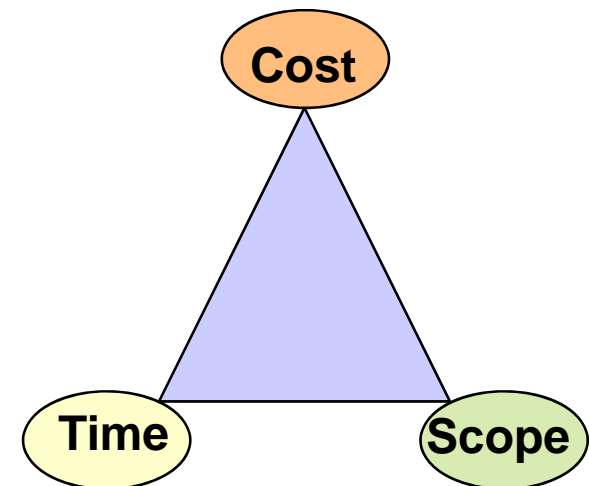
Source:

www.dictionary.com

(Random House, 2006)

What does the PMBOK say about “authority”?

- 28 separate references
- “**Authority**. The right to apply *project resources*, expend *funds*, make decisions, or give *approvals*” (Glossary, p. 352)
- In other words: time, cost, scope
- “Understanding the Project Environment” (Sec. 1.5.3, p. 14)
 - Cultural and social
 - International and political
 - Physical



Understanding the Project Environment

- **International and political environment.**
Some team members may need to be familiar with applicable *international, national, regional, and local laws and customs, as well as the political climate* that could affect the project. Other international factors to consider are time-zone differences, national and regional holidays, travel requirements for face-to-face meetings, and the logistics of teleconferencing
– PMBOK, Sec. 1.5.3 (p. 14)—*bold italics* mine

Understanding the Project Environment

- **Physical Environment.**

If the project will affect its physical surroundings, some team members should be knowledgeable about the ***local ecology and physical geography*** that could affect the project or be affected by the project.

– PMBOK, Sec. 1.5.3 (p. 14)—***bold italics*** mine

What's “authority” got to do with it?

- Authority is required to manage the “triple constraint” of time, cost, scope (quality).
- Wielding of authority is not a given for PMs.
- PMs must understand the project environment, which implies sensitivity to many different factors, including:
 - Cultural
 - International
 - Physical
 - Social
 - Political
 - Demographic

The “authority” thesis

1. Understanding the project environment means understanding different cultures.
2. Different cultures perceive authority and its dimensions differently.
3. In order to “manage across cultures” effectively, PMs must exercise their authority in an appropriate and culturally-sensitive manner.

3. Cultural framework for analyzing authority in projects

- Authority Dimensions
 - Organization
 - Geography
 - Experience
 - Age
 - Gender
- “Traditional” Model
- “Modern” Model



Cultural framework for analyzing authority in projects (Traditional)

Authority Dimension	Traditional Authorizer	Traditional Authorizee
Organization	Customer	Vendor/Supplier
Geography	West (US, UK)	East (India, China)
Experience	Longer	Shorter
Age	Elder	Younger
Gender	Male	Female

Fallacies of Traditional Authority Models/Roles

- “Customer is always right” → Partnership
- “God must be an Englishman” → Global village
- “Age and experience” → Technological obsolescence
- “Respect your elders” → Internet Time
- “The woman is smarter” → correct!

Cultural framework for analyzing authority in projects (Modern)

Authority Dimension	Modern Authorizer	Modern Authorizee
Organization	Project Sponsor	PM/Project Team
Geography	Customer (virtual)	Vendor/Supplier
Experience	Longer (relevant)	Shorter (relevant)
Age	Irrelevant	Irrelevant
Gender	Irrelevant	Irrelevant

Have we moved from the “Traditional” to the “Modern”?

- ☑ “Customer is always right” → Partnership
- ☑ “God must be an Englishman” → Global village
- ☑ “Age and experience” → Technological obsolescence
- ☒ “*Respect your elders*” → *Internet Time*
- ☒ “*The woman is smarter*” → *correct!*

4. Four Authority Scenarios (case studies)

- Age related:
 - Older authorizer and younger authorizee (#A-1)
 - Younger authorizer and older authorizee (#A-2)
- Gender related:
 - Male authorizer and female authorizee (#G-1)
 - Female authorizer and male authorizee (#G-2)

Four Authority Scenarios (cont'd)

- Age and gender have been correlated with authority in cultures worldwide for thousands of years—this will not completely cease to be the case anytime soon (possibly ever in certain cases).
- “Authorizer/Authorizee” pairs:
 - Project sponsor/PM
 - PM/project resource
 - Customer/vendor



Authority Scenario #A-1

- Older authorizer and younger authorizee
 - Typically the case—e.g., in order for project sponsor to have authority, they are typically very senior in the sponsoring organization
 - Usually not an issue in any culture, with the possible exception of youth-oriented Western societies and technology sub-cultures (e.g., hackers, video gamers)

Authority Scenario #A-2

- Younger authorizer and older authorizee
 - Increasingly common, with authority being given more on the basis of relevant skills, knowledge, and experience, but not age.
 - Can be problematic in certain cases, especially when the authorizee's native culture is more traditional (e.g., Asian cultures) and age itself invests authority.

Authority Scenario #G-1

- Male authorizer and female authorizee
 - Traditionally the case (e.g., historical boss/secretary or doctor/nurse relationship), although now with “Partnership”, the two roles are increasingly aligned and collaborative
 - Can be problematic in certain cases, especially when the authorizer’s native culture is more traditional (e.g., Asian cultures) and views the authorizee more as an “underling” than as an equal partner.

Authority Scenario #G-2

- Female authorizer and male authorizee
 - Increasingly common, with authority being given more on the basis of role and responsibility, but not gender.
 - Can be problematic in certain cases, especially when the authorizee's native culture is more traditional (e.g., Asian cultures) and does not consider the authorizer as the “real” authority, but rather as a proxy.

Authority Matrix

“Authorizer/ Authorizee” pairs	Male/Female (#G-1)	Female/Male (#G-2)
Older/ Younger (#A-1)	Most Traditional	Semi-Traditional
Younger/ Older (#A-2)	Semi-Traditional	Least Traditional

Introduction of Culture

- When different cultures (e.g., Western and Eastern) are introduced into the mix, the probability of tension regarding authority roles increases significantly
- Given that Traditional and Modern cultures gravitate towards opposite ends of the Authority Matrix, having the authorizer and authorizee come from different cultures potentially magnifies the effect.

Authority Matrix Commentary

- The more traditional the culture, there will be more tension with less traditional pairings (e.g., younger female authorizer, older male authorizee)
- The less traditional the culture, there will be more tension with more traditional pairings (e.g., older male authorizer, younger female authorizee)

Extreme Authority Scenarios

- Scenario #1 (“Least Traditional”: A-2/G-2)
 - Authorizer: younger female Westerner
 - Authorizee: older male Easterner
- Potential pitfalls:
 - Authorizer presumes authority.
 - Authorizee presumes authorizer does not have “real” authority
 - Authorizer is frustrated that her wishes are not carried out without questioning, and that authorizee is looking for authorization from another (male, older) authority.

Extreme Authority Scenarios (cont'd)

- Scenario #2 (“Most Traditional”: A-1/G-1)
 - Authorizer: older male Westerner
 - Authorizee: younger female Easterner
- Potential pitfalls:
 - Authorizer presumes authority.
 - Authorizee may feel that they are not empowered to speak out and may not “push back” when necessary.
 - Authorizee may feel that they are being patronized by the authorizer and may “push back” too much.

Role Play #1

- Scenario #1 (“Least Traditional”: A-2/G-2)
 - Authorizer: younger female Westerner
 - Authorizee: older male Easterner
- Authorizer makes a reasonable request
- Authorizee does not feel obligated to respond, since Authorizer in his mind lacks sufficient authority to make such a request
- Authorizer confronts Authorizee

Role Play #2a

- Scenario #2 (“Most Traditional”: A-1/G-1)
 - Authorizer: older male Westerner
 - Authorizee: younger female Easterner
- Authorizer makes an unreasonable request
- Authorizee doesn’t feel empowered to respond, since she feels she lacks sufficient authority to agree to such a request
- Authorizer confronts Authorizee

Role Play #2b

- Scenario #2 (“Most Traditional”: A-1/G-1)
 - Authorizer: older male Westerner
 - Authorizee: younger female Easterner
- Authorizer makes an unreasonable request
- Authorizee feels empowered to respond and pushes back since she feels that the Authorizer is taking advantage.
- Authorizer confronts Authorizee

5. General Observations and real world application (“rules for the road”)

- Role Play Discussion
- General Observations
- “Real World” Application

Role Play Discussion



General Observations

- Authority is in the eye of the beholder
- Authority is a variable, not a constant
- There is no universal consensus on authority—it is culture and situation specific
- No authority scenario is “black and white”—consider shades of grey
- Consider what is best for the *project*, not the project manager, regarding the use of authority

General Observations (cont'd)

- Managing across cultures (with global, virtual, outsourced project teams) introduces yet another level of complexity in projects
- Avoid stereotyping in advance—respond to actual behaviors, not imagined ones
- Use the project as an opportunity to educate project team members on best practices regarding authority and project execution

“Real World” Application

- Understand your position on the Authority Matrix, and use it to create a productive Authorizer-Authorizee relationships
- Avoid “Extreme Authority Scenarios” if possible, through the use of mitigating actions
- Realize that the dimensions of authority (including culture) all have their own logic, place, and historical rationale
- As we evolve from “Traditional” to “Modern” Authority models, some dimensions will change faster and more universally than others—this is reality.

6. Summary

1. Understanding the project environment means understanding different cultures.
2. Different cultures perceive authority and its dimensions differently.
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Learning Objectives

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Q&A

Thank you for your attention!

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