

10 EXPERTS TALK

WORDS OF WISDOM FROM TEN MANAGEMENT GURUS
TO HELP YOU IMPROVE YOUR PROJECTS



ELIZABETH HARRIN

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Introduction

I strongly believe that sharing experiences is a great way to learn and develop as an individual. Mentoring and coaching relationships provide this opportunity, but unfortunately not everyone has the chance to pair up with an experienced mentor and learn from them. Sometimes even teams of project managers are unable to make the time to share their stories and tips with each other. This means that often project managers don't have the connections or support network to learn from others in a way that supports their ongoing development and would improve the way they manage projects.

As the publisher of the blog [A Girl's Guide to Project Management](#), I've had the opportunity to interview many experts in project and general management. They have shared their experiences and expertise with me, and I have passed that on to my readers.

In the following pages you will find edited versions of interviews with ten experts, covering topics as diverse as networking, project financial management and managing change. I hope you find them as useful and inspiring as I did.

Elizabeth Harrin London, July 2010

1. How To Network

Heather White, CEO, Smarter Networking Ltd

Networking is often something we find especially hard to do. I mean, what's the point? It's all making small talk and having drinks with people you don't really know – much better to get out there and be excellent project managers and deliver stuff.

Unfortunately, building a successful career is as much about who you know (and who knows you) as it is about doing a good job. I spoke to Heather White, CEO of [Smarter Networking Ltd](#), a coaching, training and consultancy firm packed with experts in corporate and career networking. Here's what she had to say on the subject.



So Heather, why should we care about networking?

Tell you what, before we get started let's do away with the word networking and replace it with something like, your developing your career or developing key relationshipswell any relationship come to that. So why should you care about networking? Well, because I assume you care about your career and the people you need to be connected to.

The art of networking is nothing more than simply keeping people informed of what you do, what you are good at and how you can help them. It is a two-way street, your boss and others need to know about you... but more than just doing a good job.

What's the value of long term relationships?

Would you agree everyone has a career journey which spans over 40 years? Most people spend about 80% of their careers in the same field e.g. project management which means you will end up mixing in the same circles for most of your careers. Your reputation and theirs are on the same journey. Having the mindset of developing and nurturing long term relationships with these people will help your career no end. This is where trust, reputation and brand come from.

So we also need to network externally, not just with the people in our own companies. What's the difference between networking internally and networking externally?

The 'act' in itself, there is no difference. Your focus should be on what you want networking to do for you. All networking should include external networking, and never just internal networking. The balance is wrong. You need external contacts for your career development, personal development, profile, knowledge, competitor intelligence, customer intelligence etc.

A lot of relationship building takes place at events where there are lots of people. What's your top tip for working a room?

BIG question. To give you one top tip is a mighty ask. If I said for example, “be relaxed and enjoy yourself,” those of you who hate attending events will just laugh at me and say “yeah, right”. And those who are very skilled at networking have completely different needs.

OK. But in that case, can you tell me what’s wrong with just handing out business cards?

Nothing is wrong in the right context. Handing out your business card is absolutely the right thing to do. What you need to consider though is when *not* to do it. In short, never hand out your card if you haven’t established a positive or good connection between you and the other people in the group (or the person you are speaking to). Otherwise you might be seen as superficial, pushy or sales-like. What you must avoid is leaving the wrong impression with people. If you haven’t connected with them I can almost guarantee where your card and brand and reputation will end up...in the bin.

You obviously know how to do all this. How did you learn your networking skills?

Having been sacked from my last job in 1998 I had to learn how to network or starve. It was as simple as that. I had to get out there and find a way of making it work. I made heaps of mistakes but I am resilient and persistent, I never gave up...I still don’t. Because I realised the importance, I made networking my friend. I hate cold calling, I always have, and networking is a much softer way of developing good relationships. I engaged with the complexity of networking i.e. working with people, and I set up a system that works for me. You see, networking is unique to the person who decides they need to do this. You set your own rules and standards. What I did do is let go of my very negative preconceived ideas of networking and instead do it in a way that demonstrates my values and what I stand for. I realise that through people I get to hear, learn, discover, play and win stuff that I never knew existed.

What’s the best networking story, that you’ve come across?

Great question and there are lots of stories I could share. But this one sticks out in my mind. This chap comes to one of my networking training programmes and I could tell he was already pretty advanced at networking. You can often tell just by the confidence someone projects and the way the he was with people. Curious, helpful, interested, interesting etc. Anyhow, we both ‘connected’ and later we met up for a coffee and chat. He introduced me to a very influential network which lead on to a great connection with another person. A few months later he calls me and asks if I have any connections with Bill Gates. He never made any assumptions that his contacts would not be connected. Anyway I was flattered that he thought I might have a connection and of course it is always lovely to be asked to help someone. We got chatting on what he could do and I made a few suggestions. Later I found out he had gone round to all his contacts asking the same question...he was relentless. Then he struck rich. One of his contacts was about to fly out to a very senior event, a changing the world type of event, and Bill Gates was going to be there. He jumped on a plane that day, his contact did the networking for him, and he met Bill Gates. All this took place within 48 hours of his phone call to me.

What I love about this story is a couple of things. He took the time to ask, he was relentless, he took the time to build up long term relationships so that he became a trusted person and so that when it came to it his contacts had no hesitation to introduce him to the right person. Now that is great networking.

Wow. Is there a difference to how women and men network? Maybe courage is part of it...

The outcome for both men and women on when to use networking is the same. Our approach is of course different, it's bound to be as we are different people anyway. Just take the success of the books such as *Men are from Mars, and Women are from Venus* which illustrates this in bucket loads.

I don't try to compete with men's style, I focus on my own style instead – that's what makes me different, stand out, appear approachable and so on to that of my male counterparts. I would strongly suggest you don't worry about how men do it, focus instead on how you want to do it. What would work for you? Stay focused on what you want networking to do for you and just get on with it. Become very curious about the different approaches anyone has, see what works and then adapt that to your way of networking. In the end it all comes down to the same stuff – great results, great experiences.

2. How To Manage Fixed Date Projects

J. LeRoy Ward, EVP Product Strategy & Management, ESI International

Sometimes you just get handed the date for project delivery on a plate. No discussion. That's not the best way to manage project schedules, but unfortunately you don't always have a choice. I asked J. LeRoy Ward, PMP, PgMP, Executive Vice President Product Strategy & Management at [ESI International](#) for some advice in these situations.



What sort of projects have the delivery date fixed in advance?

Projects that have their delivery dates in advance can be found in every industry vertical and around the world. Key ones are projects that are required by law, such as new tax codes that take effect on at the beginning to the tax year, a court order, a regulation, or other governmental or judicial edict.

Many construction projects have fixed delivery dates if the project is being done in an area where the weather prohibits work before or after a certain date or 'season'. Think, Sweden, Antarctica, the Middle East or other places with extreme weather conditions which simply prohibit construction during certain seasons.

Many projects that launch new products will also have fixed dates to take advantage of seasonal activities, buying habits, the phase out of an old product for a new one to avoid overlap. Consider the announcement of iPad. Very carefully timed to coincide with a range of marketing and production moments in time.

Fixed delivery dates are found in any project whose end date is critical to revenue generation, service to a client, or maintaining operations. For example, many telecom projects have fixed end dates. In the case where the telecom 'switch' (the computer than runs the phone and data system for a large building or group of buildings) is being swapped out for a new switch, this is often done over the weekend. Outsourcing operations or functions are another good example here. When a company moves to outsource services such as payroll, there is a critical date when everything must be tested and ready to go live to ensure continuity of operations.

Quite frankly, most organisations, governmental and non- governmental alike, mandate that projects be done by a date certain. So, these days, project managers are faced with such demands and edicts on all projects.

What are the challenges of managing projects where the delivery date is fixed in advance?

The main challenge is resource availability and allocation in order to get the job done by the fixed end date. When a project's end date is fixed in advance, the project needs to be planned 'backwards'. In other words, the project manager takes the end date and develops a plan of action working backward in time to a start date. It is hoped that the start date is after the date the analysis is done. If the start date, based on the plan, falls earlier than the date on which the plan is constructed this means that the project is already late.

In this case, the project team needs to formulate a plan that will actually cause the project to be completed when required. In short, the project manager needs to compress the schedule to meet the end date if it is physically possible to do so.

In classic project management terms, schedule compression is achieved through two approaches:

- Fast-tracking, where project activities are done in parallel or with overlap to the greatest extent practicable; and,
- Crashing, where additional resources are allocated to those activities on the critical path, thus reducing time.

In many instances, the network diagram developed by the project team represents how the project should be done, based on best practice, experience, or desires of the team, rather than how it 'must' be done due to physical constraints. For example, it is obvious that you cannot build floor two of a building before floor one is built, but you don't always have to have the design of a building complete before you start its construction. It is rumoured that Burj Khalifa in Dubai had not completed its design until it was almost complete thus keeping people in suspense to the end as to how tall it actually was going to be.

In reality, and in very tough circumstances, an experienced project manager will employ both fast tracking and crashing simultaneously. Each approach has disadvantages: fast tracking increases risk because of doing more work concurrently rather than sequentially; crashing, on the other hand tends to increase cost.

Additionally, on certain types of projects, crashing can actually lengthen a schedule because adding more people increases the number of communication channels in a non-linear manner. This is expressed by the formula $(N^2 - N) / 2$, where N is the number of people. When adding more people a project manager must put into place a well thought out division of labour. Fred Brooks, father of OS 360 at IBM put it best when he said, "Adding people to a late software project will only make it later."

What are your tips for getting these projects right?

The key to success lies in the project manager's ability to negotiate for the key resources that are going to be required to meet the schedule and making sure they are available when needed. Additionally, project managers need to practice micro-management more than they otherwise would, or would want to, to make sure they know what the team is doing on a daily basis. Keeping a close eye on progress and problems is of paramount importance in order to meet the completion date.

How can you convince management to extend the timescale, especially when the date is arbitrary?

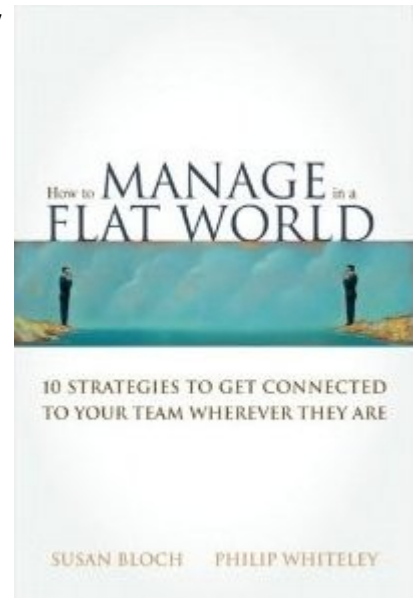
The best way to do this is by showing management how much more it will cost to do it by a date certain, as opposed to how much it will cost if planned based on available resources. The question to management is this: Is the time saved worth the cost? With money in seemingly short supply these days, an analysis like this can have a great impact.

You can also show the level of risk introduced by completing on the date that may not exist, or exist to a much lesser extent, if done according to a more realistic plan. Taken together, costs and risks can make a powerful argument for doing things rationally.

3. How To Manage A Flat, Dispersed Project Team

Susan Bloch and Philip Whiteley, authors of *How to Manage in a Flat World: 10 Strategies to Get Connected to Your Team Wherever They Are*

Are you finding that you don't have to wade through layers of hierarchy any longer? One of the side-effects of the global financial crisis has been stripping out middle management and a shift towards flat structures. Project managers are also having to find more coherent approaches to managing dispersed teams, so I spoke to Susan Bloch and Philip Whiteley, authors of *How to Manage in a Flat World: 10 Strategies to Get Connected to Your Team Wherever They Are*, which deals with exactly these subjects.



What has happened to business that has made teams flatter?

Most CEOs realise that they need to be fitter, leaner and faster. Only a flatter structure avoids long and tedious decision making, endless meetings (virtual or face to face) and encourages adaptiveness and new ways of doing things. In a hierarchical layered organisation, decisions, and discussions have to be escalated, debated and then cascaded (often with poor communication).

The growth of specialisation and high skills requires more partnerships and less hierarchical organisational arrangements. Managers may belong to many different teams, sometimes including people from outside consultancies and outsourced contractors. Together, these developments make for a very different world from the top-down, 'colonial', if you like, set-ups of the last century.

That sounds exactly like a project team. As project managers, we often don't have direct line management responsibility over our teams. Does this make any difference to how we should connect with dispersed team members?

In project management teams the same processes need to be set in place to ensure effective teamworking:

- Clarity of vision and objective of the project
- Understanding one another's strengths and weaknesses
- Norms of behaviour and communication
- Knowing who is accountable for what and by when
- Recognising time zones
- Understanding cultural differences

You have to earn trust and respect as leaders. It's probably true, but it's especially so in a flat team that's geographically dispersed. You have to work hard through multi-media to communicate, and to engage people as well as get tasks done. Almost all our interviewees said that without trust, you can't achieve what you want.

As you say, teams don't just happen, so what's a good starting point for building a team and getting that trust? Especially one that starts life as a group of people in a room for a project kick-off meeting?

What the people we interviewed found was that a blend of business and social contact helps to form a team; working on vision and practical objectives, and socialising after the formal meeting. This can create a bedrock of trust and shared understanding.

Good project management skills are critical for the continuing success of every organisation. All project leaders should be formally trained as to how to be a project leader. This should include planning, budgeting, numeracy and conceptual thinking. In addition interpersonal skills, communication, clarity, accuracy, accountability, setting norms of behaviour and principles of cross-cultural working in the flat world should be clearly articulated and hopefully everyone has had a say in these.

It's way to easy for all those things – interpersonal skills, clarity etc – to go out the window when people use email. Why do you think people rely so heavily on email? Isn't it easier and more connected to pick up the phone?

Email is particularly helpful when working across time zones. No one wants to be woken up on their cell phone at midnight. It is also sometimes useful to clarify discussions so there are no misunderstandings. But the more people are able to connect personally by phone, video conference or face to face the better. This is not always possible on a regular basis. But a little from time to time is better than nothing.

Means of communication may depend on personal preferences. In *How to Manage in a Flat World* we draw attention to the fact that different professions, as well as nations, have a 'culture'. Software developers are more likely to be introverted than sales-people, and may be more comfortable with email than phone conversations. However, what's more important is to marry the type of medium used to the purpose: broadly speaking, the more sensitive the information, the more you should prefer voice and face-to-face. For more factual exchanges, email is fine.

You talk in the book about the way people carry information and call it the human internet. What do you mean by that and how can we make use of it?

The human internet is the characteristics, skills and capability of people who work with others in virtual teams. It includes learning the technological skills to use video conference, webinars, e-learning, teleconferences, podcasts etc. Understanding cross-cultural habits, values and cultural in general avoiding the usual stereotypes. It is about empathy, listening, questioning, coaching, supporting and aligning people, while equally treating everyone with respect, and humility.

One other dimension is that, for all its challenges, diversity is good: diversity of nationality, background, professional discipline, gender and so on can create challenges in terms of developing a shared vision and understanding, but huge opportunities by harnessing many different skills and perspectives.

Organisations really consist of thousands of relationships, not structures. When we put as much energy and thought into improving these as we do into technology, the results are transformational.

What's the top strategy from your book that you have put into practice in your working lives?

Sue says: I have initiated many programmes on global managers including our next piece of research. Living and working in India has been a major learning piece from me... so here I am supporting mainly locals and some western expats to manage in a flat world.

Philip says: My favourite quote was from the venture capitalist who said: “I’ve never seen a company succeed on one person’s vision. It’s usually three or four critical people ... [who] interact online all the time. They are good team players. They meet often. They develop a culture.” That has definitely influenced the way I work in teams. It isn’t always easy, because some people don’t want to communicate. But this advice really helps.

4. How To Manage Change Positively

Roxanne Emmerich, author of *Thank God it's Monday! How to Create a Workplace You and Your Customers Love*

What do you do to make change stick and to create a positive environment in your project teams? I spoke to Roxanne Emmerich, author of *Thank God it's Monday! How to Create a Workplace You and Your Customers Love*, about making our projects more inspiring. One of the key things in the TGIM mentality is thinking positive and changing your own attitude, which helps those around you change as well.



Roxanne, I can understand how an attitudinal change will make yourself feel better and approach work more positively. But how can you make this change spread to the point where everyone on the project team feels the same?

That's why an intervention is helpful. When you get an entire group together at the same time and say, "Hey, we could be having much more fun. Let's make some agreements to decide to bring levity to our days and celebrate successes. Let's also agree to stop whining and have a code when someone breaks that rule that requires us all to stop whining and use advancing language. Let's also agree we won't gossip or give excuses. Are you all in agreement that we're going to do that?" ...that can change everything. When people give their word to stop being energy vampires, everything changes for the better.

What's your top tip for making change stick? How do you stop people going back to their old ways?

It's called 'calling it tight.' People seem to believe that only managers should say something when someone breaks a code of how to treat customers or each other but that's archaic, ineffective, and way too slow. Instead, every person should own the power that they can, and in fact, are required to, do exactly that.

With a cross-cultural team it's hard to be inclusive with celebrations. For example, I have worked with disabled colleagues who couldn't join in certain events, and people whose religious beliefs prevented them from coming to the pub for a drink after work. How can project leaders make sure that when they celebrate success, everyone is included?

A little forethought and sensitivity goes a long way...but people don't get offended when they know you have the best of intentions. That's why a culture shift is necessary so that people don't make mountains out of mole hills.

What's the most common cause of conflict in teams and how should project managers address this?

For project managers, the biggest problem has to be excuses – "I didn't get it done on time because..." One of the best things a project manager can say is, "Don't tell me about the labour pains...show me the baby." Ask that if a person is running late, they let you know *before* missing a deadline *and* tell you the corrective action plan. Let them know that an excuse does not, and never will, equal a result.

Project managers often need to learn quickly: we are never experts in a subject when the project starts. How can we build credibility to help foster those principles of business that you cite: values, accountability, trust?

People will walk through walls for you when they know you are a good human and that you care about them. Always start there. Let them know your agreements about how you will treat them and ask for agreements about how they will treat you. It feels better already, doesn't it. Being up front makes a huge difference.

Not everyone loves projects and the change they bring. When you are trying to create change, how can you deal with the unhelpful attitudes, for example people who withhold information because they think it helps them be more powerful?

Call the 'baditude' for what it is. And try 'the conversation'. Any person can have that conversation that says, "I'm really excited about where this team is going and my sense is you don't share that excitement... and that's okay. But if this isn't your thing, you need to go find your thing!" Let them make a decision and let them know you care about them to make a decision.

Let it be known that withholding information is career limiting, if not ending. Any person who is willing to hurt their team to push themselves ahead is a ticking time bomb.

Project managers understand 'beingship' – leadership without the position authority. It's about getting people to leap over tall buildings in a single bound just because you asked. If you allow crazy and dysfunctional behaviour, you won't be able to make great things happen and life will get a big miserable and fast. Take a stand and bring out into the open all the messes to clean them up or they will be the death of you.

5. How Careers Evolve: From Physics To Projects

Dr. Sophie Kain, Director, Prior Kain Ltd

Choosing to be a project manager isn't always the decision we first take. Dr. Sophie Kain started out as a quantum physicist before moving into project work and setting up [Prior Kain Ltd](#), a company that delivers technologies to overcome substantial communication and information handling problems, by providing information management, exploitation, communication and visualisation solutions. I spoke to Sophie about her role, the challenges she faces and her tips for project managers.



Your current role is quite different from being a quantum physicist. How did you get from that to what you do now?

Several factors have taken me from physicist to managing my own business. Firstly I would admit to not being a natural born researcher, i.e. I just felt that academic research was essentially making small steps in a large field, and frankly the institutional nature of Universities didn't suit me, so I thought I would be better off in industry.

It was about a week after I started at Thales Research that they picked up on the fact that I was better off leading than programming and put me in charge of an information management and exploitation project (incidentally in most large companies they confuse leadership and management – I would think I am fab at the former and not so great at the latter!). I then took the initiative to set up a pan-European lab in Cognitive Systems and was finally put in charge of a laboratory at the University of Surrey looking at Remote Collaboration Systems. As is the way of these things, having established that there were simply no customers for our pursuits, I made my position untenable by highlighting this which was particularly unpolitical (very probably the best thing to happen to me).

I then started at General Dynamics United Kingdom Ltd again managing an information management project and I was also Exploitation Lead for the Data Information Fusion Defence Technology Centre. This second job proved very interesting in the sense that it was very clear that there was an enormous gulf between the language the academics in the Centre were speaking and what the end customer wanted... and so began my belief that there was a need for a business to close this gap. It also became apparent that carrying our research in large companies is somewhat stymied by the amount of policy and process that is required to try anything.

Around this time I found myself on The Apprentice [a UK TV show] and learnt many things, not the least of which was the fact that it is actually easy to make money and the only way to truly be rich is to work for yourself (I might add that money is only a driver for my future more philanthropic projects I wish to run). It was at that point my business partner, David Prior, and I set up Prior Kain Ltd and we are now becoming relatively successful.

Tell us a bit about what you do as director of Prior Kain.

As we are a small company my job as director of Prior Kain involves everything from running day to day operations, to delivering the programmes and developing the business for the future. We currently work with project-based subcontractors so as far as the core company is concerned I literally do everything from making the coffee, to filling in VAT returns to writing bids for future work. I am also currently setting up a joint venture research and innovation business entitled PKG Technologies with a view to picking up slightly more random research businesses.

We have several prime business drivers to differentiate us from other government suppliers:

- we are not tied to any proprietary systems and therefore we can tailor our solutions to the exact needs of the customer (a rarity in larger MoD suppliers!);
- we adopt an agile development approach to tailor our systems to meet customer needs in an iterative fashion;
- we build strategic partnerships but are not tied into any third party agreements and can therefore remain technology agnostic;
- we create virtual teams to keep our overheads to a minimum and offer cost effective solutions;
- we use open standards and open source software to deliver flexible, extensible, and cost-effective solutions to technology requirements.

You've been involved in many projects. Which has been the most memorable and why?

Wow! That is a question. Even though I have generally been in a management role (leadership role) I have always been sufficiently technical to be most interested in projects that I really believe are potentially landscape changing. The project I ran at General Dynamics in information management, OSIRIS, I thought could well be landscape changing but unfortunately the current climate for large defence contractors, both economically and in respect of an increased Government focus on the use of SMEs, has led to that project being cancelled.

Having learnt from my background in Thales I understood what was needed to be done in this arena so I think we started ahead of the game, aside from that I think the team all got on and brought good innovative ideas to the table. The project had excellent technical guidance from David Prior and with greater investment I think the project would have culminated in a capability which would have seriously overcome many information exploitation issues in the Ministry of Defence.

That said we are now exploring related avenues in our own venture. Aside from that I ran the whole gamut of personnel issues within this project from the underperformer to the over achiever who never went home to the person who really wanted my job but simply wasn't up to it – which proved challenging. I also had to deal with a couple of Universities in this project which introduced me to the ridiculousness of working with suppliers and the amount of politics involved in such collaborations.

One of the biggest issues for programme managers (well, for me) is the transient nature of a team over the lifecycle of work, especially when a programme stretches over several years and multiple key members leave. How can knowledge management solutions help?

So this is an interesting one. I have actually been extremely lucky – or I would like to think sufficiently inspiring – that I have rarely had key members of projects leave the team. That said, knowledge management and in fact information management is essential for the future of any project. At Prior Kain we actually produce tailored solutions to these problems as one problem is never the same as another. I think we still live in a world where we can't find, or remember where we put most of our own information, let

alone the information of other team members and whilst there are supposed solutions out there these are often time consuming and difficult to use. We like to think that with the right thinking we can ease the process of finding the right information and not have to repeat work, and in fact get sufficient visibility of what other team members are up to.

One of our primary drivers in focusing Prior Kain Ltd on information handling and knowledge management is that we have experienced the exact problem you outline. From a business developer leaving, and taking the personal relationships with 'their' clients with them, to a key technology member who takes away the implicit knowledge that is key to the project, I think we have all observed that most organisations handle this badly or, at best, inadequately.

At the same time, you cannot mandate that everybody shares everything: it is just not human nature to want to share what is perceived as the source of your value or power. As such, knowledge management systems need to be unobtrusive and yet be able to capture the intangible aspects – the social dynamics, the casual observation, the personal relationship with the customer – that which is immediately relevant to the project. To achieve this, it is not enough to simply archive every document in a so-called 'Shared Working Environment'. For knowledge management to be truly useful, it must capture the ebb and flow of the project – everything from emails to snippets of useful news to data held within the CRM system and so on. For knowledge management to be truly effective, however, all of the material held within a knowledge management solution must be intuitively searchable and capable of being presented in the way most useful to the user conducting that search.

That sounds complicated to make happen in practice. What role does a digital conference space have to play in managing project teams that cross borders or time zones?

I think this completely depends on the project i.e. how technology savvy the team members are and how used they are to using this type of medium for document sharing, blogging, conversations etc. It seems that the younger generation technologists almost prefer this type of medium to actually talking but those of a more traditional persuasion take a lot of convincing to use this method. Interestingly we actually have produced software that wraps any series of real-world conferences with a digital space that is focused around the delegate. In that software, delegates are members of one or more real-world conferences, allowing interactions and information sharing with like minds – from across different events, companies, and geographies – to take place across the entire scope of their interests. This is not so much about project management but more about maintaining and inspiring conversations after real-world conferences come to an end.

Personally I think digital conferences spaces will be used more and more as the world moves towards a virtual teaming approach to projects i.e. the team will grow around the project, based on expertise and independent of location.

At this time, there is no real digital 'conference' space solution in the market. In part, that is because no-one is entirely sure what that sort of thing looks like. In equal part, there is an understandable reserve in most organisations about allowing 'their' information – which most still see as proprietary and essential to their competitive advantage – to flow across a shared space that leverages the public networks. There is an argument for saying that a digital conference space resembles the offspring of Facebook, LinkedIn, Flickr, Google, Google Maps, WebEx, and the online office suite of your choice. After all, these are the tools and services that most employees are using on a daily basis and are thus sufficiently familiar with as to not suffer a learning curve when similar systems are introduced into the organisation.

Sadly, the counter-argument remains that most organisations would prefer to spend millions of pounds on an ERP solution that must be tailored to their needs rather than explore ways in which some of the best business enabling technologies of the last five years might help tailor their operations towards improving effectiveness, efficiency, customer engagement, and staff morale.

What do you think is the emerging technology that will best support business strategy this year?

I think it is less about any one emerging technology *per se* and much more about understanding how the collection of technologies that have emerged and matured over the last few years may be embraced by business. Business strategy is, to my mind, going to be very much focused on doing more with less: making sales at a lower cost of sales, increasing efficiencies with less spend, networking and business development with less travel, and – sad to say, but we have to admit it – more work with less people. This will increase scrutiny on the business benefits of technology adoption and, in my opinion, will force large-scale technology programmes to the right of the schedule.

It is perhaps the right time to start considering whether or not large-scale, proprietary technology programmes are the right way to achieve business advantage. From observation, we would suggest that almost every organisation is imbued with the culture that technology programmes need to be big and scary! David Prior, with observations drawn from a multi-sector background, notes wryly that this is perhaps because there is a predilection to make technology look like a dark art as it preserves the jobs of technologists!

Hmm, project managers do that too!

Although there may be some truth in that, a more likely reason may stem from the belief that risk can be more easily managed and mitigated by bundling a lot of smaller technology activities into a larger Statement of Work and handing the whole thing to a single Prime Contractor who is responsible for delivery and who adopts the risk. For example, in my discussion of what a digital conference space might look like, I referred to several functional aspects. Rather than manage several implementation projects, most organisations would prefer to bundle the strands into a single project, award that to one of the usual Prime Contracting suspects, and then sit back and wait for delivery. In most cases, and the performance of large contracts in general bears this out, that this approach leads to cost and schedule overruns, scope creep, and the final delivery of an 80% solution. In most cases, it also leads to the awarding organisation paying over the odds for the capability as layers of Prime Contractor programme and quality management fees are liberally applied to the bid!

Prior Kain Ltd contends that the maturity and ‘in-the-field’ qualification of most emerging and recently emerged technologies means that applying those technologies within a business is no longer a primarily technical problem but is, instead, a question of policy and process. This shift means that organisations must develop a position as an intelligent customer – understanding what each new technology does and how it may be exploited within, or leveraged to create additional, business strategy. Organisations should also develop an awareness of ways in which specific technologies, from different providers and sometimes not even hosted on their own networks, can be integrated through the use of open standards and protocols.

Technology solutions should be evaluated and selected against the dimensions of flexibility, extensibility, and ‘open-ness’ as well as the functionality provided. Careful selection, driven by an awareness of the technology landscape and a complete understanding of the current and desired business strategy, will help

to provide a loosely-coupled suite of technologies that can be orchestrated in support of business strategies that, as a result of market conditions, flex and change direction as opportunities arise. We would argue that the best support to this new type of business strategy is an evolutionary approach to technology adoption that embraces rather than abhors change.

6. How To Manage Your Personal Brand

Salma Shah, Founder and Director, Beyond

If a visitor came into your office looking for you, and asked a colleague to point you out, what would they say? The short, messy one? The busy one?

If a colleague was describing you to someone from another department, how would they sum you up? A good project manager, but never replies to emails? Great with the technical stuff but lacking in people skills? Lovely to work with but a bit of an airhead?

This is Brand You: how people see you in the workplace (and out of it) and therefore how they form opinions and judgements of you. You could be more effective at work if you knew more about the impression you make and how to improve it. I spoke to Salma Shah, Founder of [Beyond](#). She's an expert in personal branding, leadership, communication and conflict resolution.



Salma, what is a personal brand?

A personal brand is your 'reputation': how do people describe you? It's the emotional fingerprint you leave on others. Successful, leader and trustworthy or are you someone who is described as creative, disorganised and unassuming? Body language, posture, clothes, facial expression, accessories are all part of the package. The key to developing a successful personal brand is authenticity and self-awareness. How we are judged by others is based on a whole host of subconscious decisions. Most of us are highly attuned to picking up fake behaviour. So faking it is a massive brand saboteur. You have to be true to your real self and then apply skills to make a better impression.

Oh, so I have a personal brand already?

Everyone already has a reputation and therefore a brand. The question is, are you in control of your brand? Colleagues and acquaintances already sum you up in a few words. Your emotional fingerprint is also your 'reputation'. Are you aware of how others describe you? Or are you sabotaging your personal brand through ignorance or naivety? If you were a supermarket – what kind of supermarket would you be? Lidl or Waitrose?

OK. I want to be Waitrose. Or even the John Lewis Food Hall on Oxford Street. Can I improve my personal brand?

Yes, of course you can work on your brand. The question to ask yourself is, what is the motivation behind your public personal brand? Is there a pressure for you to be like everyone else? Is there an internal disconnection between the real you and how others perceive you? Do you need to work on your external image? If you want to be perceived as someone who is successful, a leader and a professional do you look, sound and behave this way? Perhaps the changes you need to make are on the inside, working on your confidence and communication skills.

Making changes on the inside sounds difficult. How does it work when you run courses?

My experience of running personal brand workshops falls into two camps. The already converted arrive to pick up hints and tips on separating themselves from the herd. Then there are the sceptics – their dominant argument is, “Why do I have to behave differently or dress a certain way? I am an expert at what I do and what is on the inside that counts. Others should see my natural brilliance.” At some stage during the workshop the sceptics will moan about how they keep getting passed over for promotion and how they feel undervalued by their boss.

So personal branding has a lot to do with how others see us, but that depends on what we show them. I’m different at work to how I am with my friends, so is that part of it?

Those with a good personal brand typically have a well developed sense of what their private and public values are. Where possible their public and private value systems are aligned giving them clarity, positivity and purposeful confidence in all aspects of life choices.

A key aspect of personal branding is to portray your key messages clearly and consistently in your appearance. Visual triggers dominate in humans so reflecting your personal brand values consistently in your presentation creates a powerful and winning package. Dress, grooming, body language or facial expression. These shout volumes about you without you speaking a word, so make sure they say the right thing. Achieve a good balance in your image between ‘standing out’ and ‘fitting in’. You aim to ‘stand out’ because you consistently project your strengths and not because you look awkwardly out of place. You ‘fit in’ because your dress and grooming always create an appropriate professional appearance in context with the situation. Add your individual style choices that signal your qualities and brand values. Personal image is comprised of many details that together create a holistic picture. Ask yourself if all the details in your picture are working towards creating a true and positive impression? Does your image help you to stand out for all the right reasons by clearly reflecting your unique personal brand?

7. How To Make A Good Impression

Kat Griffin, Publisher, Corporette

What kind of image do you present at work? It doesn't have to cost a lot to present a top quality impression, but it is worth making some investment. I was really pleased to have the opportunity to interview Kat Griffin, publisher of workstyle blog [Corporette](#), about how what you spend on yourself and your appearance makes a difference at work. Yes, there's a lot to be said for matching your heel height to the length of your trouser suit. But listen up, guys, this is about you too...



Spending money on yourself is an investment. Why should you bother buying expensive clothes?

Clothes affect both the way that you're perceived and the way that you feel about yourself. From a personal standpoint, better made clothes feel better – for example, better fabrics are often softer, from wool to cashmere. Furthermore, clothes you actively like can elevate your mood – whether it's a tie or a dress or a great pair of shoes, putting them on in the morning gives you a little bit more confidence, and makes it a bit more fun to go to work. From a perception point of view, people who recognise bad clothes realise you're probably not very invested in your career.

What about accessories? What does a cheap bag/briefcase say about you?

A no-name bag that's well-made is better than a knockoff. And logo bags, no matter how high end, should really be considered carefully before you wear it, because a lot of people think of them as tacky. Ultimately, just look for a well-made, functional bag of a good leather, without obvious defects in the stitching or hardware.

Are the rules for contractors or consultants different from permanent employees i.e. do consultants have to pay more attention to this sort of thing and spend more (or at least look as if they have)?

I think it depends on the situation. On the theory that the contractor/consultant is constantly seeking more work, more business contacts, or even a permanent job, though, professionalism certainly matters – which means yes, looking polished matters tremendously.

Trappings aside, what about investing in your appearance through hair and nails? Have you noticed a trend where men are getting their nails done or having facials?

Not really. In some workplaces, an overly-manicured appearance can even work against you, signifying that you have a lot of free time to go and get such services done, which could mean that you're not working very hard.

What are the business and personal benefits of doing all this?

Looking polished and put together helps your message be heard without distractions. It isn't about being the best-dressed person in the room, but it is *very* much about not being the worst-dressed person in the room. And in terms of personal benefits, there's a tremendous toll that dressing poorly (or even dressing in a uniform, without creativity – such as women who wear nothing but polyester suits and sensible pumps every day) can take on your psyche. You want to feel good about what you're wearing – and that confidence will be conveyed to others.

8. How To Work Your Executive Skills

Chuck Martin, author of *Work Your Strengths*

Is there something you find difficult about project management? Perhaps you struggle with project financial management. With practise, you can improve the way you manage project finances and get better at the processes required for project accounting (or any aspect of project management). But if it feels like whatever you do you just can't get your head around project budgets, maybe you have come up against your Executive Skills.

I spoke to Chuck Martin, author of *Work Your Strengths: A Scientific Process to Identify Your Skills and Match Them to the Best Career for You* and *Smarts: Are We Hardwired for Success?* about how you can capitalise on your strengths in your project role.

Would you clarify the meaning of the term 'Executive Skills'? How do they help people get on the right career track and be successful?



The term Executive Skills, which have nothing to do with skills of executives, were named by psychologists because they help people execute tasks. These are not skills that can be learned since they're cognitive functions hardwired into the brain from birth. The use of the term in neuropsychology dates back decades.

Everyone has a set of strongest and weakest of these cognitive functions in their make-up. They typically have two or three that are their strongest and two or three that are their weakest. In *Work Your Strengths* we focus on the three strongest and the three weakest of the Executive Skills across all high performers. Everyone has this personal combination of strengths and weaknesses, and the mix varies from person to person. By matching your strengths to those of the high performers in our study, a person can see where people with the same strengths have been successful.

What are the different Executive Skills then?

They are:

1. **Response Inhibition:** The ability to think before you act.
2. **Working Memory:** The ability to hold information in memory while performing complex tasks
3. **Emotional Control:** The ability to manage emotions in order to achieve goals, complete tasks, or control and direct behaviour.
4. **Sustained Attention:** The capacity to maintain attention to a situation or task in spite of distractibility, fatigue, or boredom.
5. **Task Initiation:** The ability to begin projects or tasks without undue procrastination.

6. **Planning/Prioritisation:** The capacity to develop a road map to arrive at a destination or goal, and knowing which are the most important signposts along the way.
7. **Organisation:** The ability to arrange or place according to a system.
8. **Time Management:** The capacity to estimate how much time one has, to allocate it effectively.
9. **Goal-Directed Persistence:** The capacity to have a goal and follow through to the completion of the goal.
10. **Flexibility:** The ability to revise plans in the face of obstacles, setbacks and new information.
11. **Metacognition:** The capacity to stand back and take a bird's-eye view of yourself.
12. **Stress Tolerance:** The ability to thrive in stressful situations.

OK, and there's more detail about those [on your website](#). I understand that you can't change your strengths. However, what can you do when you are faced with an area where you are not naturally strong?

When faced with tasks that require your Executive Skills weakness, there are a few options. The best is to avoid the task, if possible. Another solution is to seek the help or delegate the task to someone whose strength matches the task, which means the task would be much more natural and easier for them. When there is absolutely no other option but to do the task yourself, then it is best to do it as soon as possible, while still fresh in the day, for example, since the task will be more challenging than those that play to the person's inherent strengths.

Did you ever look at project managers as a specific group within your profiling?

Our study for did not specifically ask about project management, but Planning/Prioritisation would be a logical strength required, since that would allow a person to very naturally sequence items within a complex project.

9. How To Handle Project Finances

J. LeRoy Ward, EVP Product Strategy & Management, ESI International

Managing money on projects is one of the things many novice project managers are most worried about. Being responsible for all that money – capital, operational expenditure, cash flow – is a big challenge. There are ways to make it easier. I spoke to J. LeRoy Ward, PMP, PgMP, Executive Vice President Product Strategy & Management at [ESI International](#) for his top tips for project managers handling project finances.



What's the one top thing project managers should bear in mind when handling project finances?

Regardless of what people claim, money is ultimately the most important element on a project. Even if the schedule is more important from a project objective point of view (in other words, the company is willing to pay more to get the job done earlier), being able to account for all the funds and where they were spent is the thing in which the organisation – and its auditors – is most interested.

So, you need to know how much was actually budgeted to the project, and you need to keep accurate, comprehensive, and detailed records of all actual (i.e. expenses and payments) costs. This may not be as simple as it sounds. Many organisations don't do project accounting; they have systems for general accounting. You need to sort out how your organisation does it first; thereafter, you can make adjustments accordingly. In addition, as a project manager you probably won't be able to be the project financial controller at the same time you're managing every aspect of the project, so hire someone capable and trustworthy for that job.

That's a good tip. Project accounting can be a lot of work.

It is no accident that in many organisations the CFO/Controller has his office right next to the CEO's. Take a page from their playbook. Have your project financial controller always by your side, and always know the financial status of your project. In other words, always know what you have spent and how much you have left and what the unfinished work is going to cost. This way, you'll know if you need more money well in advance of asking for it.

What advice do you have for budgeting properly so you don't have to ask for more money later?

Simply put, you need to figure out how you are going to allocate your money across the project's components. When Emaar Properties developed Burj Khalifa in Dubai (the world's tallest building) I doubt the project manager and developers just said to everyone, "We have a lot of money, so let's start working."

The budget was broken down and allocated to 'pieces' of the work. Therefore, each element of that project

had a budget, there was someone responsible for each element, and it was their job to monitor and control their piece of the budget. Project financial information was then collected and aggregated so the project manager and developers could see the big picture and then were able to make certain decisions across the board for the good of the project. So, for example, if one element of the project, buying and installing windows was ahead of budget, but the HVAC [heating, ventilating and air conditioning] piece was over budget, the project manager could take some of the money from the windows piece and reallocate it to the HVAC.

I see. So splitting up the budget into manageable chunks is the best way to do it?

It is simply impossible, and ill-advisable, to try to manage a budget at the highest level without having the lowest level budgeting and monitoring taking place on components of work. Of course, if the project is small, this can be done, but I would suspect most people reading this don't work on projects that are that simple; rather, they work on complex undertakings that are comprised of many pieces. To be sure, the best way to approach financial management is to have a thorough and complete work breakdown structure (WBS). By using a WBS, each major deliverable, at the very least, has its own budget to be monitored.

If you are new to handling project finances what are the pitfalls you should be looking out for?

One pitfall is not knowing what your 'burn rate' is. The burn rate can be defined as the amount of cash you are spending (or burning through, thus the name) on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis based on personnel and materials. When you know your burn rate, you can look out into the future, calculate the time periods left, multiply that by your burn rate and come within a reasonable estimate of what you are going to be spending.

The second pitfall is not getting weekly information about expenditures. You need to see this weekly 'spend' report if possible. While your organisation may not support project budgeting because the project is being supported by the organisation's monthly accounting system, you need to create your own 'set of books' to keep track of things.

The third and final point I'll mention is to the ability to 'authorise' spending. Don't let just anyone have the authority because it is best when you give the final OK to incur costs if it is feasible to do so (especially if they're external costs such as contractors). My old boss would tell me, "LeRoy, you are the only one to sign the checks. Don't let anyone else do that. This way, you actually see 'what's going out the door.'"

That's really important. I think there are some project managers who are expected to manage project finances but don't have the ability to sign checks (or cheques, as we would write over here). That must make doing the financial reporting really difficult. Do you have any other advice for project managers starting a project and getting the finances in order?

Meet with your organisation's financial and accounting folks before getting started. Make sure you understand how the organisation's accounting and P&L [profit and loss] statements work and how your project funding and spending get reported in the 'system.' Lay down the ground rules at the beginning of the project as to who needs to authorise spending and how financial reporting will be done. Also, if you're working across funding departments in your organisation, like I do, there will be 'internal' transfers of funds. A lot of money gets 'lost' in these internal transfers so it's wise to keep a close eye on these.

Oftentimes, such transfers don't happen right away but can be posted two or three months after the spending has been done. Remember, you don't need to be a CPA or Chartered Accountant to be good at the project financials; however, you do need a fundamental understanding of how your organisation accounts for project spending so that, when all is said and done and the auditors are seated across the table from you, you will be able to answer all their questions.

That's great advice if you are just starting out. What about people who are further on in their careers and who are facing the challenges of handling budgets on international projects? What are the biggest things to be aware of?

Control is the main concern. As a project manager you need to know who is spending on what part of the project regardless of where in the world that money is being spent. Keep track of things weekly if possible and conduct project financial reviews often. Make sure that you are the one to approve all spending; if that's not possible, make sure that you approve spending above a certain amount. Also, make sure no other project is using your project account for their activities.

It is critical that when you receive a report of funds spent from around the world, you are clear about what currency should be used for the reports and how the currency conversion rates, if any, should be determined. I have seen project managers receiving reports citing four different currencies, but because the currency was not stated on the report itself things got confusing. Of course, the greater the difference in currency exchange rates between your project budget currency and another currency, you easily can see the discrepancy, but when the currency exchange rate is close, it's not so easy to tell. For example, if my project funding is in U.S. dollars but I'm receiving reports in Indian rupees, the difference is great enough that I'll notice something odd on the report. On the other hand, if my project funding is in Euros and I receive a report in Sterling (Great Britain Pounds) I may not notice it right away because the difference between one pound and one euro is not that great.

10. How To Use Social Media Tools With Dispersed Teams

Elizabeth Harrin, Author, *Social Media for Project Managers*

This isn't me interviewing myself! It's based on a presentation I gave about using social media as a tool to manage dispersed project teams, where I was in conversation with the session organiser. There has been a lot written about using social media to drive customer engagement and external communications programmes, but not a lot about using the same techniques to harness efficiency benefits within teams. I think that's something we can definitely do, hence my book, *Social Media for Project Managers*, which explores this in more detail.



What is social media?

OK, here's a quick overview of what I mean by social media.

Social media in a business environment is collaboration and communication with purpose. There is a belief that the internet is a space that can foster interaction and conversation. That belief came first, and the technology followed to meet the needs of internet users.

If you think back to how the internet looked six or seven years ago, a lot of web pages were flat, and non-interactive. That's been called brochure-ware, and it stems from the idea that the internet was a big research tool of static content. That has now changed, and this shift away from brochure-ware provided the opportunity to get more personal, and to provide a platform for interactions between people – promoting conversations.

Team managers today are primarily focused on creating participation in the work effort, and because of this it is important to know how to engage people. Harnessing the power of social media technologies is one way to do this.

What tools are available?

There are ten main tools that I think are useful for project management purposes:

1. Blogs
2. Collaboration tools
3. Instant messaging
4. Micro-blogs
5. Podcasts
6. RSS
7. Social networks
8. Vodcasts
9. Webinars
10. Wikis

How can social media help manage virtual teams?

Being able to manage a team is an essential trait these days if you want to succeed at work and many teams are virtual. That is, virtual in geography, so they are not co-located. There are also a lot of matrix teams, where team members don't all have the same line manager. It's not easy to manage a team, especially when they don't work directly for you, or you are having to compete with their other commitments.

Tell me more about the challenges of managing dispersed teams.

Teams that are not co-located can present a number of different challenges for a project manager. How will you know that they actually are working on what you want them to? How will you get in touch with them? Your dispersed team could also be spread over several time zones. How will you conduct real-time team meetings? Who is going to be the person who gets up in the middle of the night for a call with the Australian development team to go through the testing results?

Managers also have a role to play in protecting the interests of the team back at 'base'. An executive who doesn't appreciate that you have just spent half the night on a web conference with the manufacturing supplier in Japan will criticise a team that then goes home at 2pm. Managers with international responsibilities not only have to educate team members in how to work well together, but also have to manage upwards and ensure that the executive team understand the constraints of this type of work.

So how can social media help this type of team?

Research done by the U.S. Civil Engineering Research Foundation shows that co-location contributes to effective decision making, attention to detail and helps the team form a partnership. Projects where the team was not based together suffered from poor communication, procurement problems and lack of direction.

In a modern business environment it is not often possible to have the whole team working in the same locality. People work from home, or different offices, or even half way around the world. Social media tools can help address this by providing a virtual team location where everything happens. A team blog or wiki can bring people together online, fostering discussion where previously the team members would have had to wait to the weekly conference call, or just interact one-to-one with others via email.

Instant messaging and web conferencing allow synchronous communication, but asynchronous communication also has its place in building a successful international team. You could opt for something as simple as a shared online calendar, where team meetings and project milestones are recorded for everyone to see. When you connect from a computer configured to a different time zone, the calendar will automatically show the meeting at the correct time where you are.

Web conferencing tools or collaborative working tools that enable teams to work on the same document often have the ability to record the presentation or meeting. This means they can be played back afterwards, which is useful for colleagues who are participating in a meeting not held in their native language so they have another chance to go over any details they missed.

What about if you have part-time team members on your project team?

Part-time team members are the most flexible resources in your team, and social media tools are a flexible way of communicating with them. As micro-blogging tools offer short status updates, they can keep half an eye with what is going on even if they are scheduled to be working on something else.

A team blog or wiki will keep a record of project activity. This can be a useful tool for the part-time team member to review in order to catch up on what has happened during the week while they have been away working on other things.

So if you use social media tools to manage a dispersed team, can you do away with face-to-face meetings completely?

Not at all! Social media tools might improve the situation for dispersed teams, but they don't negate the need for getting together at key points during the year. If your budget will stretch, you should bring the team together at critical points to help build the relationships that social media tools will continue when everyone returns to their locations. Face-to-face meetings, where possible, are still a great way (and probably the best way) to get things done and ensure common understanding of the project goals.

With that in mind, remember, social media tools alone will not drastically improve your projects. The use of social media tools will enable better, more timely communication and more effective knowledge sharing in a dispersed team. They can help you spend less time looking for documents and can make it easier for you to collaborate on paperwork across time zones. But if you are managing a team that fails to work together at the moment, giving them a whole load of social media tools won't address those underlying issues. If your team is not working effectively together off-line the chances are that they won't work effectively together online either. On the other hand, they may work together better if they don't have to see each other every day!

About the author

Elizabeth Harrin is a career project and programme manager and an award-winning blogger. She has been named one of the [top project management thinkers today](#). Elizabeth is the author of two books on project management: *Project Management in the Real World* and *Social Media for Project Managers*.

Elizabeth writes and publishes [A Girl's Guide to Project Management](#), an irreverent look at the world of project management which aims to help project managers stay on time, on budget and on scope while delivering excellent value to their stakeholders.

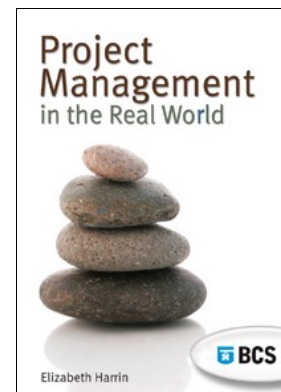
Elizabeth has a background in financial services and healthcare, and an interest in international teams, having spent two years working in Paris, France. She is a PRINCE2 Practitioner and she trained as a Six Sigma Black Belt.

Elizabeth is also CEO of [The Otobos Group](#), a business writing practice specialising in topics relating to project management and women in business. The Otobos Group can create and edit templates, articles, blog content, website copy trade journal articles to appear under your byline, and much more.



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A GIRL'S GUIDE TO PROJECT MANAGEMENT



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