



Project
Management
Institute.
Sydney, Australia

The Critical Path

November 2023



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Editor's Note

Himadri Chowdhury

It's almost the end of the year, a time for reflections, family and friends, correspondences, relaxation, and recharging oneself for the next big thing in the new year. This year has been significant – inflation, rate rises, rental pressure, successive World Cups, new and old conflicts, ending of pandemic restrictions, rise of generative AI models, new space explorations – the list continues and is fascinating. In our personal corners, the stories have been varied as well, we have moulded ourselves with the times, made decisions that brought us joy, also made ones we regretted. The last month of the year is the right time to let go of the cobwebs and clear our minds for the joys that await us.



I was reflecting on the several things we have achieved together in the last 11 months. Starting on a high after our 25 Anniversary celebrations in 2022 and following it up with a Strategy Session with the Canberra Chapter in February 2023, we have done great things with our membership, volunteering and events. Our outreach to the community has been excellent, as proven by the volunteer events, the PMDoS and the PMDOK events, the mentoring program and the university programs in association with PMI. Our events got bigger and better and several fantastic speakers became associated with us over the year. However, this doesn't end here, and we are looking to bring you several new updates in 2024.

The Marketing team has been working all through the year to bring you great content through The Critical Path. We have had amazing contributors – Ibrahim Dani, Leo Coco, Jess Tayel, Louis Taborda, Steve Tompkins, and the whole PM-Partners team. There were special contributions, interviews, event briefs and also articles from the PMI Sydney Chapter Board. We provided the readership content from all areas of project management and leadership, mental wellbeing, change management, education, and so much more.

It's been a pleasure to bring you this newsletter in 2023. This is going to be the last issue of 2023 and I want to thank my team for the amazing work they did through the year: Malong Dong, Rory Wilson, Kristy Dong, Emily Liaw and Farah Hiari. We couldn't have done this without you.

In this last issue of the year, we have articles from Leo Coco, Louis Taborda, Steve Tompkins, My Tran Le, along with Chapter News and updates, covering all areas of project management. I hope the articles bring you the same joy as they did me. We will have more amazing content next year and will spend the next two months planning and strategising for the same and take some well-deserved down-time. On behalf of the team, I wish you Happy Holidays and a great start to the New Year!

Please connect with us at newsletter@pmisidney.org or marketing@pmisidney.org.

Best,
Himadri Sekhar Chowdhury
Editor, The Critical Path

PM Jobs Guide

Steve Tompkins

Should you be looking for a new role?

As another year draws to an end, we start looking forward to everything that comes with the Christmas holidays. Once the presents are unwrapped, the turkey leftovers are depleted, hangovers are gone, it's normal to enter a period of reflection. Nothing is more optimistic than the New Years Resolution.

Promises to self that “this year I am going to.....” No wonder resignations are typically higher in December and January. There is some logic behind this desire for change. January can be a good time to hunt for jobs – some companies after all receive new hiring budgets in January, which can drive an uptick in Job ads as they plan for the year ahead.

So should you be looking for a new role? There are countless articles on this topic, endless blogs and no doubt the same amount of advice when seeking friends and relatives' opinions. I find this topic can be even more complex when talking to those in Project Management. It's usually engrained in the seasoned Project Manager to see a project through no matter what. I've always thought of a PM as the captain of a ship – but should the captain go down with his ship? A PM is not just leaving a job and company, but sometimes a project in flight and a team they have built and care about. While only you can make the decision if 2024 is the time for a new challenge, here are some of the main reasons I hear from people in the industry that have made the decision to move on.

“My budgets/team was slashed to the point I could not deliver”

While cost cutting is rife at the moment there is a difference between running leaner and running on empty. If budgets are getting slashed across the board does the organisation still value your project? Is delivery still possible? Have the deliverables and schedule changed in line with the new budget? In short, are you still set up for success?

Cost cutting can also impact salaries, bonuses, contract rate and so on. Some government agencies have implemented a 2-year tenure rule for their contingent workforce (of which PMs are a big part) to try to generate some cost savings. Not only can this impact the PM if he has been contracting for a while – but it will also impact your team if they have been there close to 24 months. You may be doing more hiring than you



Steve Tompkins has over 20 years' experience in the Recruitment Industry in Sydney and the UK, nearly a decade of which was spent in leadership positions. He is the NSW Government Client Relationship Manager for Talent International in Sydney and has enjoyed working closely with the PMI for the last decade. His main area of specialisation in recruitment is in sourcing, delivery and support of Project Managers, delivery teams and Project resources.

anticipated, which again will impact deadlines... so if that's not something you signed up for, it could be time to move.

“My Stakeholder was not committed to the project”

Project Managers are an essential part of achieving a Stakeholder's goal. But Stakeholder's goals can change, executive leadership teams in organisations change their expectations on Stakeholders, and the value placed on PMs can increase or decrease in a company over time. It can be tempting to look for another opportunity due to the variations. However, a behavioural interview question favourite is “tell me about a time when you have dealt with a difficult stakeholder”. If you haven't got a good answer to this question and you are moving again, then I hate to say that maybe Project Management is not for you.

“There was no work life balance”

Your needs can change as much as the demands and needs of your role. It's important to check in on your priorities – and a good time of year to do it. A few things can be resolved with open communication (a partner's new role for example can inject new demands on the family unit). However if an agreement cannot be made, it may be time to start updating your resume.

“I was offered more money / bigger projects”

This is a common reason to move. You may not be looking and you get a call out of the blue about a job opportunity that sounds amazing. Make sure you have a clear understanding of what the new responsibilities are. If it sounds amazing and right for you – it could be!

“I was so bored!”

If you feel bored, complacency usually follows. Lots of PM's are also motivated by challenge and a genuine appetite for bigger more complex projects. Does the current organisation have these projects or is your future here more of the same?

If you feel like you're in Groundhog day and this doesn't look like changing – it could be time to look on Seek...

“I just wasn't happy”

Stress, anxiety, poor mental health..... If the Monday morning dreads are creeping into Sunday nights and the weekend, it might be time to apply for new roles. This can be a very difficult time as we have financial commitments and families that depend on us but the hardest part of this is realising why you are unhappy and unfulfilled. This can be hard to pinpoint – is it the role?, the project, the organisation, your manager or something else? If you can recognise this you can avoid repeating it in the future. This is an important part of your planning for your next move. Obviously try to avoid leaving before you have secured your next role, but again always balance your role and anxiety level against your longer-term mental health. Talk to people you trust and try to come up with a plan. We've all been there! Even executing the plan can help alleviate some of the unhappiness you might be going through. Even changing your LinkedIn profile to “open to work” can help.

In conclusion, sometimes it feels clear when you need to quit your job, but most of the time it's more uncertain. To progress your career, you need to work through the challenges you are facing, rather than quitting and moving on. Talk to a trusted recruiter

about the market and what opportunities and rates are like at the moment before you make the leap.

Wishing everyone a safe and happy holiday, a merry Christmas and a prosperous new year!

Coco's Corner

Leo Coco

5 Tips for Increased Productivity While Working Remotely in Project Management

Different studies indicate that remote workers can be and are highly productive. So, what makes them get more done while at home, the diner, or the library? They fundamentally understand that being productive outside of the typical office environment requires some proactive steps on their part. They don't have their manager or team leader physically checking in to ensure they are getting their work done.

If you work off site regularly now, in places such as your home (which is the case for many of us), you will quickly learn that staying productive can be **hard**. You will have distractions around you, like that stack of dirty dishes from last night that are still sitting in the sink or the kids that now suddenly think you're having a day off at home.

So, How You Can Increase Your Productivity While Working Remotely?

Let's be clear here, that ALL the productivity hacks in the world will not work if you don't implement them.

Here are **FIVE** steps you can take to not only maintain your productivity but also increase it:

- 1. Establish Priorities:** Start by having a discussion with your manager or team leader. You might believe completing a specific task is the most important, but your manager may think differently. Once you know what is expected, then you can be sure to get the right task done.
- 2. Determine Your Best Work Time:** To be clear here as this is the likely elephant in the room I believe.... This includes balancing the night-owl versus morning person concept. Working remotely means you have a level of greater flexibility. If you focus better at 8 PM when your kids are in bed (yeah I know right, as if they are in bed by 8pm!), do it. It is the same idea for morning lovers. You don't have to wait until 9 AM to get going. The goal is to find large blocks of quiet time for those tasks and project work that requires your concentration.
- 3. Set a Timer and Do PRIORITY Work:** Most of you have heard of "The Pomodoro Technique", which is a time management



Project Management Authority, Trainer, Entrepreneur and Speaker, there are many facets to [Leo Coco](#), our PMISC Director. He has seen it all – from fast-paced corporate environments, to public enterprises touching millions. Decades of experience have given him an almost uncanny ability to home in on the latest trends in the market and predict changes that are coming. In this column, Leo gives our readers a ringside view of how the world of Project Management is changing around us.

method normally based on 25-minute stretches of focused work broken by five-minute breaks. In this case, to get your priority task done, it will be much easier if you set a timer for 45 minutes and focus on that ONE task. After the timer goes off, get up and walk around the house, grab some water, and stretch for 15 minutes. Then if you need to do another round to get the priority work done.

4. **Set Boundaries:** If you have others in the house when you work, you could and likely will continually get interrupted. Start by setting physical boundaries, such as working from a different room or putting up a room partition around your desk area. Next, talk with your partner, roommates, family, and kids about how important it is not to disrupt you when you are “**at work.**”
5. **Overcommunicate:** It may seem counterintuitive to spend extra time communicating when sending both emails and instant messages, but the TEXT can be misconstrued. This can cause frustration and might slow the progress of your task or project activity. Ensure you continually communicate with your team/s and set up frequent video calls to clarify any miscommunication and more importantly staying connected and relevant with the requirements of your tasks at hand.

There is an opportunity for you to really **IMPRESS** your teammates and your manager when you take productivity to a NEW level. Soon, you will be the STAR of the show and continue to enjoy all the perks of working remotely.

I hope these insights provide you with some focus which you will need to take ACTION on, and also assist you in further becoming **Exceptional Leaders in Project Management!** Remember to help your teams to maintain or set a NEW standard of productivity while working remotely by sharing these tips with them as well.

To Your Success!
Leo Coco

Projectize Me!

Louis Taborda

The Dark Art of Sponsor Sign-off

One of the most problematic aspects of project management must be getting someone to approve and sign-off a milestone deliverable. No amount of consultation, review meetings, team workshops or one-on-one briefings can guarantee to get the required sign-off as no one really wants to have their name on a risky decision that could come back to haunt them.

I know this from personal experience as my business aspirations were severely limited. A newly minted change manager decided to try to get virtually the whole IT department to come to a consensus decision on the purchase of a software tool that I was representing at the time. Suffice to say that I would be living in a much bigger house if that piece of theatre had resulted in the right decision instead of the group opting for the status quo.

I suggest it is a universal experience that getting even a simple sign-off requires an amount of groveling and negotiation on the part of the individual requiring the approval. It is essentially a power play between two parties that has its basis in the contractual origins of our disciplines. After all, the project perspective is essentially that of an external contractor providing a solution for a customer – originally the government. This two-party, customer-supplier relationship is also the basis of Quality Management Systems, so this perspective runs deep and is at the heart of most traditional project management lifecycles.

The natural consequence of this contractual view is the sign-off that is required to get through each stage-gate from approval of the requirements to eventual acceptance of the solution – the project is forced to ask the client or internal customer for their signature – or an emailed approval. This is of course a transfer of risk because now the project (supplier) can say that they were following the instruction of the sponsor (customer).

In reality, the sponsor has it pretty tough. They do not always understand what they are signing off on, or they are not completely sure of the requirements themselves, or they might not be ready to commit and want to keep their options open – all possible reactions to a black and white decision that is a sign-off. An executive sponsor once put the situation to me bluntly: They drop a large document that has taken a few months to write and then they want me to sign it off over the weekend – not happening!



[Dr Louis Taborda](#) is a project professional and passionate educator at the School of Project Management, University of Sydney. He is also founder of [Projectize.Me](#) a start-up Social Enterprise. All the views expressed here are his own.

So what is the trick to getting sign-off? Like many things, it helps to put yourself in the other person's shoes and mitigating the risk to them. It is a dark art because it involves understanding the psychology of what can appear a simple ask – just sign this off please!

I'm sure that many of you out there may have some interesting ideas and so I have [posted the question here on LinkedIn](#). But it would be unfair to not identify a few basic steps to manage the negotiation that is achieving sign-off:

- First, recognize the risk that we are asking the signatory to assume. It is no small matter and there are possible recriminations if things go wrong so respect the weight of the request and address the psychological implications.
- Second, reduce the individual risk but having a transparent process that shows there are others in the decision chain that have done the due diligence. Senior sponsors are unlikely to be technical so make visible the intermediate, more technical approvals so it is not just one signature on the page.
- Next, don't spring the need for a sign-off on the approver; be sure you bring the approver along for the ride. Give them ample notice, offer to demonstrate features, arrange a guided page-by-page walkthrough, so they do not feel alone in the approval process.
- Reduce the risk of the approval. It is standard practice in Test Management to have defects ranked by severity with clear acceptance criteria as to how many defects of a particular severity are permissible in a release. This effectively takes the decision away from the individual as it becomes a question of categorisation and policy – not reliant on an individual.
- Have an agreed way to address approvals that wind up being problematic. Again, in testing there is usually a warranty period within which time any problems have to be fixed. In contracts there is the Latents Defects clause giving the customer assurance that things will not fall apart after the delivery is accepted.

Finally, we might challenge the whole idea of a sign-off as being a little bit outdated. Which is pretty much what Agile Methods like Scrum look to do by asking the sponsor (now more the Product Owner) to not be separated from the solution development team and having the end-customer make the decisions: on what is needed or if it offers them sufficient value. Taking away these key decisions from the sponsor (sorry, Product Owner) means they do not have to be a proxy for the somewhat fickle marketplace. Sadly, you cannot always ask, or even find, customers to make these project decisions – so I guess project managers will continue to negotiate classic approval scenarios and have to master the psychological dark arts necessary to get that sign-off!

Chapter News – November 2023

International Volunteer Day

International Volunteer Day (IVD) is a global celebration of the invaluable contributions of volunteers, promoting the spirit of volunteerism and inspiring communities to engage in activities that contribute to the betterment of society.

At the core of the PMI Sydney Chapter (PMISC) are our dedicated volunteers. In honour of International Volunteer Day, we celebrated their invaluable contributions with a special event on Saturday, 18th November 2023, exclusively for our volunteers.

Our PMISC Volunteering Engagement team put together an amazing event, 'Team Dynamics: Connect, Communicate, Succeed,' marking International Volunteers Day 2023 with grandeur. We were privileged to have Dr. Elysabeth Leigh, a distinguished educator with a global reputation, took the helm, orchestrating a captivating session tailored for the discerning minds of project management professionals.

Dr. Leigh's session delved into two pivotal concepts: 'The Belbin Team Role Preferences' and 'The Cynefin Framework'. These insights provided our volunteers with essential tools for enhancing communication and fostering stronger team bonds. The session was brought to life through two interactive games, demonstrating teamwork principles in a fun and engaging manner. The atmosphere was filled with laughter and learning, and time flew by so quickly that we wished we had more.

This event also featured a series of lucky door raffles, and as a token of our gratitude, each volunteer received a custom-made PMI Sydney Chapter cap, perfect for the Sydney summer.

The post-event survey received praise from over 90% of volunteers who attended, citing the event's interactive elements. Many participants expressed a desire for more engaging sessions in the future, underscoring the effectiveness and popularity of interactive learning and team-building exercises.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to all the volunteers and board members who joined us for this memorable weekend. Your participation and enthusiasm contributed significantly to the growth and nurturing of our volunteer community at the PMI Sydney Chapter.



Our updates on volunteering this month are provided by My Tran Le, PMI Sydney Chapter Board Director – Volunteering and Special Projects.

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PMI's Sydney Chapter Volunteers.

Chapter News – November 2023

Project Management Day of Service (PMDOS)

Launched in 2015, the Project Management Day of Service (PMDoS) started out as a one-day community service event in a single location in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. PMDoS events provided not-for-profit organisations with pro bono (free, professional) project management services to help them address their most difficult challenges.

Project Management Day of Service (PMDoS), 9th November 2023

PLUMTREE
WHERE CHILDREN FLOURISH
Registered provider
Libraries as community connectors

OLDER WOMEN'S NETWORK NSW
Encourage employers to hire older women
Promoting the rights, dignity and wellbeing

BEEHIVE INDUSTRIES
BUSINESS WITH PURPOSE
SWOT analysis for target state
New avenues for income generation

AUSTRALIAN CANCER RESEARCH FOUNDATION
Increase awareness and income generation
Framework to handle ongoing critical projects

Testimonials

- "Well organised and valuable use of time"
- "Giving back and adding value to a charity"
- "Great collaboration with consultants"
- "Working with multiple viewpoints"
- "Contributing to an organisation's success"
- "Great vibe of the event"

Event Partners: **ATLASSIAN FOUNDATION** and **Stellar Elements** (An Amdocs Company)

Created by: **Stellar Elements** (An Amdocs Company)

Having successfully launched PMDoS at PMI Sydney Chapter from 2018 to 2020, the PMDoS returned to Sydney on Thursday, 9th November, rekindling its mission to foster collaboration between charities and skilled consultants. The event served as a catalyst for problem-solving, with a focus on transforming challenges into meaningful outcomes.

The charities and not-for-profits at the forefront of this collaborative effort included Older Women's Network, Beehive Industries, Plumtree children's services and Australian Cancer Research Foundation, each receiving dedicated attention from a diverse group of consultants. These consultant professionals, hailing from various domains and skill levels, generously donated their expertise to drive positive change.

Crucial to the success of this initiative were our esteemed event partners, Atlassian Foundation and Stellar Elements, who played a pivotal role in amplifying the impact of the PMDoS. Their commitment to social responsibility underscored the collective effort to create lasting change in our communities.

My heartfelt acknowledgement goes to our dedicated PMI Sydney Chapter team of volunteers who meticulously planned and executed the PMDoS. Thank you to Humera, Akhil, Amol, Eran, George, Harish, Kiran, Michelle and Rosemarie. Your passion, commitment, and tireless efforts were instrumental in bringing together charities, consultants, and partners for a day of collaboration and social impact.

Chapter News – November 2023

As we reflect on this year's PMI Sydney Chapter PMDoS, we celebrate the spirit of unity, expertise, and compassion that defines our not-for-profit sector. The collaborative energy generated during this event reinforces our shared commitment to making a positive difference in the world.



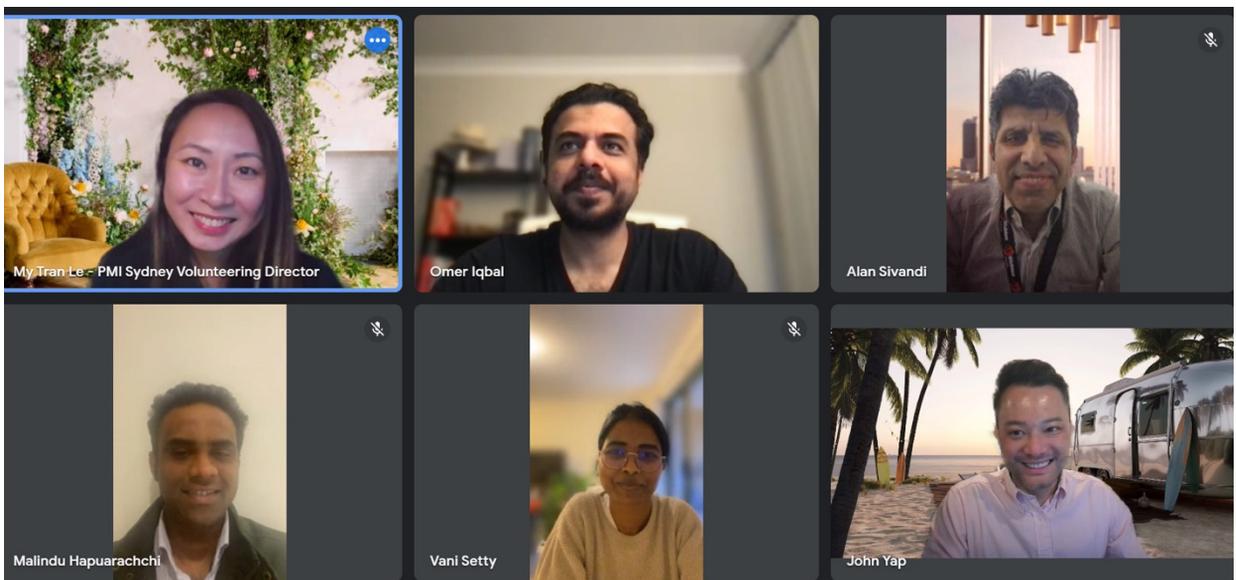
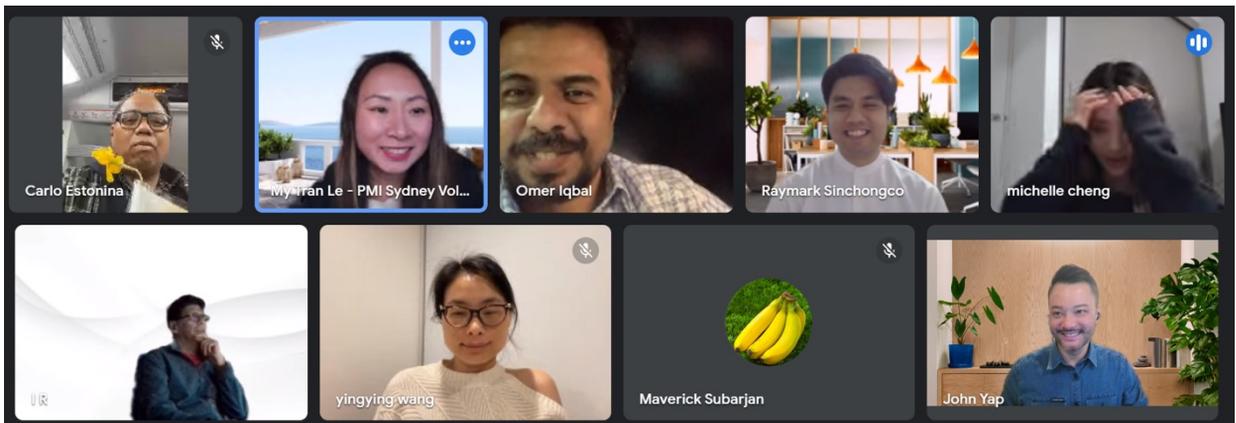
Chapter News – November 2023

PMI Sydney Chapter Welcomes Our New Volunteers with a Special Orientation session

The PMI Sydney Chapter (PMISC) values collaboration and the spirit of community. We are so proud of the thorough orientation and induction programme our committed Volunteering engagement team has developed for all our newest PMISC volunteers. We have grown from 6 volunteers (in 2022) to 75 volunteers today!

Over the last three months, the PMISC Volunteering engagement team have relaunched the orientation program. Omer, John and I had the pleasure of conducting a number of online orientations; welcoming our new volunteers into PMI and the PMI Sydney Chapter community. The excitement and energy in the (virtual) room was contagious. We will be continuing this into the new year as the 2024 strategy formalises, so please watch your inbox for upcoming sessions.

If you are enthusiastic about making a difference and want to be part of a community of volunteers across the PMI Sydney chapter; please contact myself (My), Director of Volunteering at volunteering@pmisydney.org. We can't wait to meet you and support you on your journey with the PMI Sydney chapter!



Chapter News – November 2023

Women in Projects Australia

Another amazing evening celebrating 5 years of Women in Projects Australia (WIPA). WIPA has now grown to 1,600+ members.

Thank you to Jen Dolden and Renai Platts for spearheading this initiative and growing this community. It's great to meet and hear from the diverse members who have joined this community.

PMI Sydney Chapter is proud to be sponsoring and supporting Women in Projects Australia.



Photo of the Month

Rory Wilson



About the image

The gray painted steel of the monolithic Sydney Harbour Bridge from its northern end, under a typical gray summer afternoon Sydney storm cloud.