

**THE  
PEOPLE  
FACTOR**

# THE PEOPLE FACTOR

The Next Leap in  
Project Management



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**Madison + Park**  
A Global Branding Agency

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*To my parents, Mariska & Paul, who  
instilled in me a curiosity for life and its wonder. Who,  
without judgment, walked alongside me during every  
adventure I have been on. I could not have done it  
without you.*

#familyiseverything #curiosityforlife

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# FOREWORD

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**H**ow can you translate the business strategy to your team if management is unclear about the objective? How can you ensure a client of an on-time delivery six months from now if you don't even know what tomorrow will bring? How can you deal with a new conflict in your team if you haven't dealt with one like it before?

These examples are more fact than fiction for the ever-growing collective of project managers in the world today. Each day, these managers make a conscious decision to step into the ambiguity of the project arena, which is turning progressively more complex. In projects, everything is connected with everything else, and predictions made today can be worthless by tonight. It takes the right intentions and attitude to keep working toward the achievement of the goal, over and over again.

Project management methods today deal mostly with the whats and hows of projects. Rational and tangible aspects, such as the budget, schedule and risk management, are well-researched and form the curricula of dozens of project-management courses and programs worldwide. Yet, failure in projects is often not related to these factors but rather to the timeless principles of working with people.

The People Factor teaches project professionals the skills to deal with the whoms and whens of projects instead. These skills are

necessary to building connectivity and trust between people. This leads to a shared mindset in which successes are celebrated and frustrations and burdens are carried together. These skills establish a never-wavering commitment toward project success.

For the analytical project professional, this might take some effort to get used to. There's no dashboard or spreadsheet, but rather seven action-focused skills, like understand, adapt and know, that will help you influence your own attitude and behavior as well as those of others. Each skill has been thoroughly researched and enriched with suggestions and examples from a group of fifty practicing project professionals, who were brutally honest and vulnerable in relating their experiences.

I know it still might sound daunting. I hear you thinking, "Nothing is as fickle as human behavior." And that's true. However, it is increasingly clear that these clearly discernible disciplines are non-negotiable and mission-critical.

Without the incorporation of the seven skills of the People Factor even the best-designed project, with all the most-critical, traditional best practices applied, will stand less than a 30-percent<sup>1</sup> chance of achieving their goals. Figures by the Project Management Institute show \$122 million of every \$1 billion that companies spend on projects is wasted due to poor performance. This means the total waste on projects in the US alone is somewhere in the neighborhood of \$150 billion each year.

This book seeks to significantly decrease the over-70-percent probability of failed expectations, and increase the possibility of success, by incorporating the People Factor.

Seventy-three percent of schedules on Oil & Gas projects are delayed (EY, 2014).

Seventy percent of ICT projects are not a success (Standish Group, 1994, 1999, 2004, 2009).

Eight out of ten innovation projects are called 'a failure' (Harkema, 2003).

There is a 50- to 100-percent time and cost overrun in infrastructural projects (Hertogh & Westerveld, 2010).

Sixty-five percent of mega-projects don't achieve the purpose of the organization (Morrow, 2011).

Transportation projects have a 55-percent cost overrun. (INDOT, 2004)

*1. Failure figures on projects in technical industries.*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Driving home one Friday evening, I decided I'd had enough. With another weekend spent alone ahead of me, I knew that something needed to change. I was sick of feeling lonely. If I did not change something fast, my adventure abroad wouldn't last much longer. I'd been living in Norway for a little over nine months by then.

One year later, my life looked completely different. I was spending weekends in the mountains with colleagues and building a small but steady group of friends around me to hang out with. My adventure turned from misery into the best thing that's ever happened to



me. And as a by-product, I've become an increasingly more successful project manager as well.

My passion for projects started before I moved to Norway. I love the fast-paced, high-pressure arena of projects, the technical landscape of some of the sectors I've been working in, and project management as a discipline-originated from. I've accumulated over fifteen years of practical experience as a project professional. I've managed projects from client, contractor and supplier perspectives. I've led project departments. As an entrepreneur, I build up project organizations and standardized project processes. And most recently, I completed academic research into effectiveness amongst project managers. All of this led me to the profound and vital belief that projects are as much about people as they are about anything else.

Before anything else, we all strive to have an enjoyable life. For most of us in the Western world, this includes taking up a profession and spending the majority of our adult life at work. We hope that we can do something enjoyable that won't feel like a 'have-to' most of the time. I know that projects are demanding and ambiguous. But I promise you, there is still space for enjoying the rollercoaster ride together. Through this book, I will give you insights and tools to put some of the joy back in the projects you engage in. I will help you give purpose and meaning to the shared, epic quest that is a project. Enjoy!

*Sonja van Uden*

# INTRODUCTION

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It is almost impossible today to pick up a newspaper or business journal and not read something about projects. Organizations worldwide use projects for tactical or strategic reasons, to satisfy customer needs and drive business value. Millions of people around the world consider project management to be their main profession. We have become a project-oriented society.

Projects, in one form or another, have been around for as long as humans have been. Project-based endeavors were seen in the form of worship, engineering, and even nation-building, with the people controlling them being generals, priests or architects, each focusing on a specific calling. Most of these projects were successfully completed despite uncertainties that could have ensured their failure. Examples of great historic projects are the Great Wall of China, the silk route connecting Asia and Europe, and the Battle of Gettysburg, to name a few.

Around the 1950s, various technical industries came together to establish the first project-management methods. They build a toolbox of best practices, which was solely based on the idea that

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**“All of mankind’s greatest accomplishments— from building the great pyramids to discovering a cure for polio to putting a man on the moon—began as a project.”**

**—Project Management:  
The Managerial Process**

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the goal of a project was straightforward and clear at the very beginning. For example, “build a bridge over a river” or “build a factory according to certain requirements.”

Since then, all kinds of industries and disciplines have started calling all kinds of things projects: merger and acquisition, government tasks, start-up building, research, even change within organizations. All of these projects are executed using the same historical project management toolbox, which is dominated by tools for controlling the project based on the presumption the outcome is clear from the start. Various studies, however, show significant failure of projects across the board, independent of discipline or industry. The Oil and Gas industry, for example, shows 64-percent cost overruns and 73-percent schedule delays (EY, 2014). In the IT field, 70 percent of projects are unsuccessful (Standish Group, 2009). And these are only a few of the staggering failure figures out there ([see table on page xi](#)). Why? I wondered over and over again. Time to investigate.

## Organizations

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The engine of almost any organization in the world today runs on a combination of business-as-usual and projects. Business-as-usual signifies the execution of standard functional operations within the organization. These are the things that keep the lights on—they operate through cyclic work processes and have predefined budgets and targets. Examples of business-as-usual in organizations include administration, human resources and asset management. Projects, on the other hand, are specific endeavors to accomplish specific things. Although projects have long been a style of doing business in technical industries, nowadays projects have spread to all avenues of work. They are a means to get things done—anything from a

factory expansion to upgrading an information system or solving social problems. There are a number of additional significant differences between project work and business-as-usual:

A project is temporary. Each project has a distinct beginning and end, which is measured in time. The duration of a project might be three days, or it might span multiple years. Business-as-usual does not stop—it remains ongoing. It produces ongoing work with no foreseeable end date.

A project is unique or has one or more unique elements, which brings with it inevitable risk. In projects, this risk is managed to get to the best possible outcome. Business-as-usual seeks to mitigate all risk to reach operational excellence, with a goal of taking all uncertainty out of repeatable processes to reach organizational stability.

The design of project teams is hugely different from business-as-usual teams. Project teams consist of cross-functional experts who are put in positions with distinct responsibilities to deliver a particular output. Main roles in project teams include the project manager, customer, and supplier, as well as subject matter experts. Business-as-usual, on the other hand, consists of functional teams, experts in their own right who are grouped together in a division.

The distribution between business-as-usual and projects amongst organizations differs significantly. Some organizations depend largely on business-as-usual for revenue streams while only using projects for strategic purposes. Other organizations largely create revenue through projects and only use business-as-usual for overhead purposes. Still others are positioned somewhere in-between. For all, however, it is undeniable that stability and sustainability depend on the successful execution of both business-as-usual and projects.

## Projects

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Projects are ways to get things done and can be classified as either being strategic, operational or sales. Strategic projects are endeavors to maintain the competitive position of the organization. They can include purchasing a new company or developing a new product. Operational projects are endeavors to help the organization improve existing processes. Implementation of a new customer relations system or lean implementation are examples of operational projects. Sales projects are specific contracts with customers to produce a unique product or service. All three classes of projects are vitally important to an organization's sustainability.

Projects are run by project teams, which can take up various positions within a company structure. Project teams come in all shapes and sizes and consist of a number of vital roles, such as the project manager, the project coordinator, and subject matter experts. Project professionals aren't afraid to take on a challenge and bring to the table a mindset of getting things done.

The project manager is responsible for the joint effort of reaching the project objective. It isn't uncommon for a project manager to be responsible for a group of professionals they have never worked with before and have no hierarchical authority over. Together with the ambiguity and demand of a project, this is not a role for the timid, as you can imagine. Although everyone can develop skills to manage projects, there is something specific about having the right mixture of traits and temperament, aka nature, to effectively fulfill the requirements of the job. The most important aspects are:

- If you don't like working with others, managing projects is not for you. The success of a project depends on the commitment and joint effort of the entire team and is set up for failure without it.