

Multicultural project management & e-business

Kenneth David Strang, *Phd* in PM (RMIT), *MBA, BS, FLMI, CNA, PMP™* (PMI)

Professor & Phd/Doctorate supervisor in multidisciplinary topics.

Faculty of Business & Informatics, [Central Queensland University](http://www.cqu.edu.au).

Chair, Learning-in-Business & Researcher @ Andragogy IM PPC.

AGENDA

1.
Literature

2.
Gaps in research

3.
Analysis & discussion of current research

4.
References

K.Strang@syd.cqu.edu.au

Literature: selected pm findings & issues

Project management body of knowledge (PMBOK) impacting e-business

- Most if not all professional project managers would agree the PMBOK PMI(2009) and it's earlier editions dating back to the 1970's, provide a pretty good theory as a starting point for the 'technical' (structural) aspects needed in most endeavors that have a start, stop deadline, with scope, budget, resources, risks, and quality standards.
- Enhancements have been made to the global PMBOK, and possibly even better people-oriented roles, by the British Association of Project Management (APM). Morris (2001) pointed out three key issues that still face this profession: "BOKs can never be perfect", a "Global BOK" is needed, and "what competencies project manager's need" (p 29). AIPM, PMI, IPMA, APM (UK), and other associations, have continued to develop a global PMBOK.
- The underlying focus of this author's research is on competencies and interpersonal traits, whether the topic is leadership, team performance, learning, or something else... it always comes back to competency. A problem in assessing competency (besides there being many models and theories), is that of different perspectives (Strang, 2003), meaning that people will NOT always view the SAME 'fact' as being identical, over time or in new contexts.

Project manager (PM) leadership

- As a contribution into the foray of leadership research, several empirical studies of US-based business projects confirmed what we already knew – that being the good leadership skills equals good results and high sponsor satisfaction survey ratings (Strang, 2007a; 2005) – but this was a good opportunity to confirm bad PM = failures.
- Research was conducted on educational projects outside US, namely in Australia (Strang, 2007b) and for multinationals (Strang, 2008a; 2009d). These studies corroborated earlier ones, but they became 'culture-aware'.

Multicultural perspectives on the PMBOK and PM's in e-business

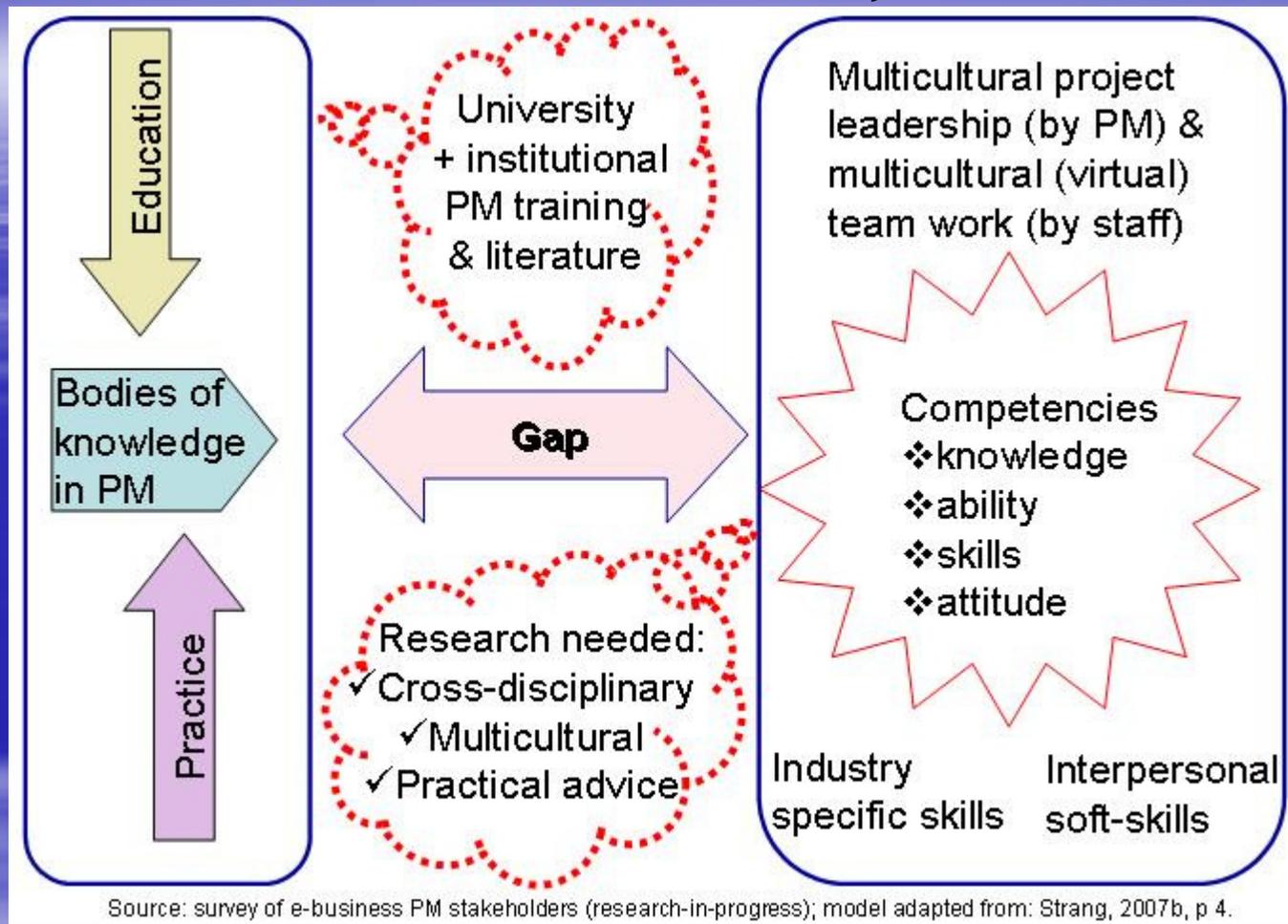
- The 'e-business' term emerged in management science (and some PMBOK literature) since many companies were running projects that required online collaboration. Studies often include dimensions such as learning and culture.
- Learning became a critical focus point for PMs as well as the team members, with ensuing research that investigated online MBA training for multicultural PMs/managers (Strang, 2009b; 2009c; 2009e; 2008b; 2006) – and those are just a few of the examples of such studies. The common goal was to improve learning methods, to allow busy professionals such as PM's, executives/sponsors, team members, etc., to improve their competencies.

Research methods for studying applied PMBOK and PM's

- There are some great theoretical papers (the PMBOK is one of them), but it takes skill to make meaningful contributions to the existing literature. Empirical studies (grounded, qualitative, quantitative, experimental, etc) aim to statistically identify the select few humans (or machines) that are doing something innovative (or different), and thus, develop new theory the rest can follow. To that end, empirical studies often try to find out what is working well in applied PMBOK (or other theories). It is useful to know how to design and implement empirical studies, using multi-method techniques and control to ensure the results are rational and replicable (Strang, 2009a; 2008c).

Gap: PMBOK too theoretical, not multicultural

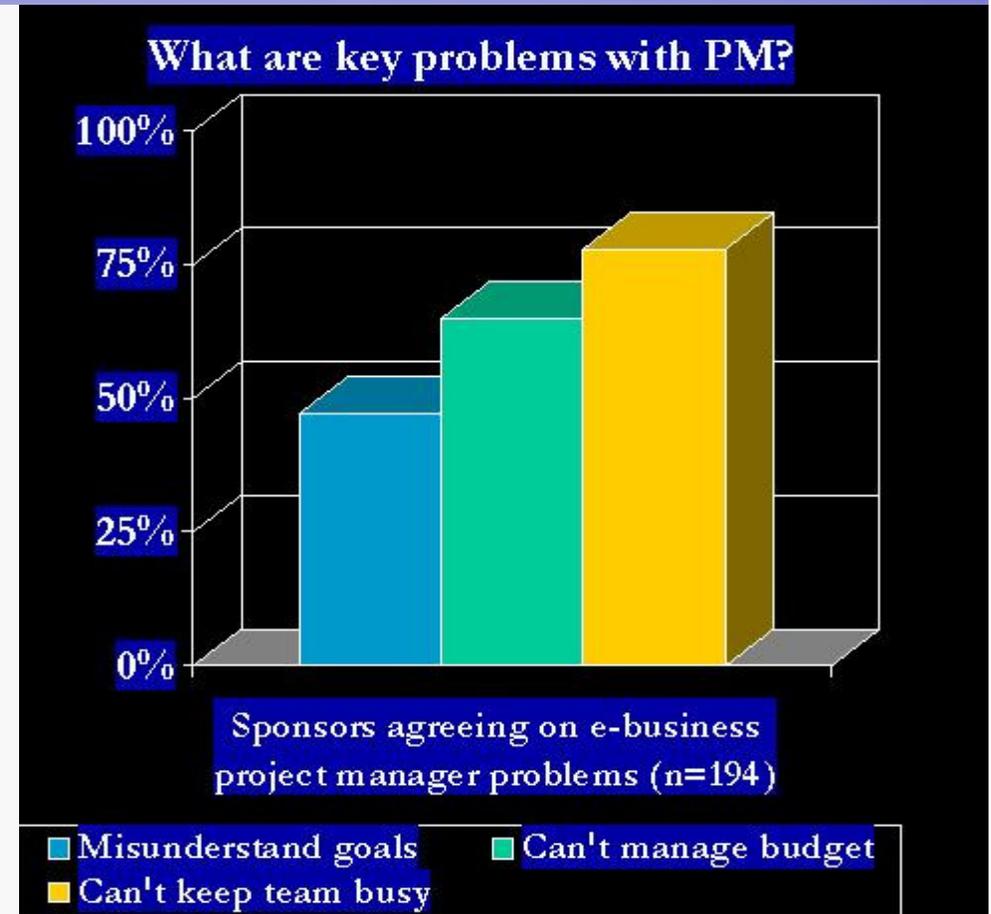
K.Strang@syd.cqu.edu.au



- Previous section reviewed PMBOK literature findings from mainly one author and is incomplete.
- Leadership studies suggest PM soft-skills are critical for good project performance (but this was in western oriented cultures, like US) – more research is needed in multicultural PM & beyond US/UK.
- Learning-related studies advocate multicultural awareness to improve international education.
- Learning-related studies state soft-skill training are much needed topics in business & e-business.

Sponsor perspective e-biz PM problems

- Survey of 194 executives (project sponsors) at four Australia-based multinational e-business projects (team staff in UK, US, India & NZ):
 - Team members idle too much
 - Mis-reading scope, maybe multicultural issue (PM misunderstanding sponsor)?
 - PM can't manage budget
 - Sponsors, team (and PM) are multicultural (they may have different expectations as compared with PM and PMBOK theories from western culture).



- NEW STUDY completed in Australia, focusing on examining how multinational companies use PMBOK in e-business projects (similar to Strang, 2008a in USA) – this reviews NEW key findings.
- Focus groups (meetings) and surveys were used with e-business (e-biz) sponsors, project leaders & team members; triangulated multi-method statistical techniques used for hypothesis testing.
- E-biz project team members & stakeholders need to collaborate & communicate in online contexts.
- Combination of multicultural sponsors and multicultural team members complicate e-biz projects.

Team perspective of e-biz PM problems

- **Survey of same project 2753 multicultural team members about leader:**
 - 25% don't trust PM decisions
 - Some confused about plan & scope, required clarifications
 - Staff claim they work well with other team members
 - Most staff are multicultural
 - Most staff have subject matter knowledge/expertise beyond PM; PM has leadership role.

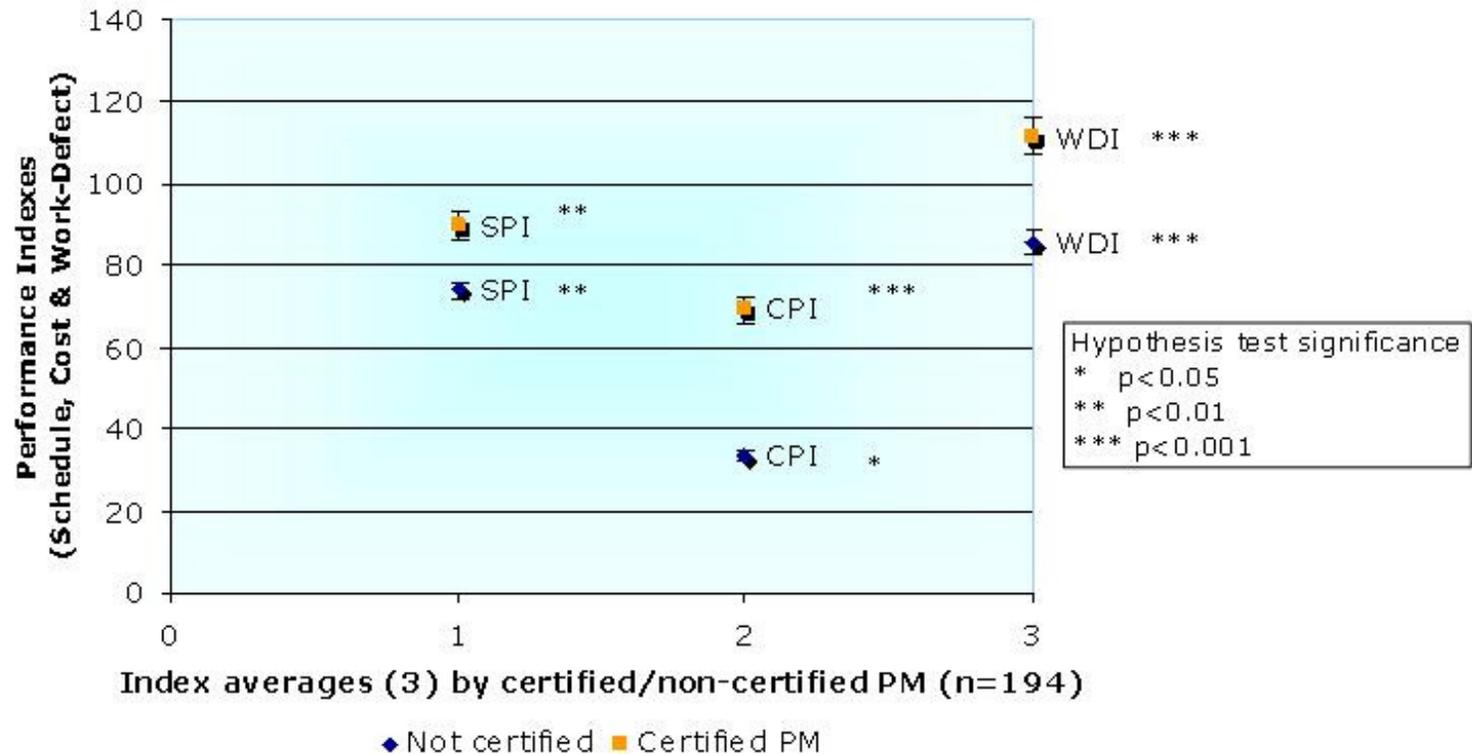
Percent of e-biz team members 'strongly agree' or 'agree' to survey items



- The multicultural team member perspective makes one feel as though we need to go back to square one with the PMBOK... likely these unexpected results have more to do with gaps between cultural expectations (Strang, 2009b), but it could be a social desirability bias (Strang, 2008c).
- Nevertheless, it is the PM's job to manage the team, so if 25% of staff do not believe in the PM's ability to make appropriate e-business decisions, that is a problem which sponsors want fixed.
- These results are quite different than similar US-based e-business studies (Strang, 2008a).

Performance effect of (un)certified e-biz PM

Effect of PM certification on e-business project performance



- The analysis shows certified PM's (AIPM, PMI, APM or otherwise) achieve better e-biz performance.
- These indexes show a planned versus actual ratio, with larger numbers being better. Two of them (Schedule Performance Index and Cost Performance Index) are from PMBOK (PMI, 2009), as implemented in Strang's (2009d; 2008a) e-business studies. The third is a new "Work Defects Index" derived from Strang (2009d; 2008a), factoring both quality and scope metrics. The purpose of the WDI was to capture the quality performance (this is not evident in schedule or cost data)

References

- Morris, PWG. (2001). Updating the project management bodies of knowledge. *Project Management Journal*, 32(3), 21-30.
- PMI [Strang, KD and many others as contributors]. (2009). *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK®)*, 4th Edition. Project Management Institute: Newton Square, NC.
- Strang, KD. (2009a). Using recursive regression to explore nonlinear relationships and interactions: A tutorial applied to a multicultural education study. *Journal of Practical Assessment Research and Evaluation*, 14(2), 11-34.
- Strang, KD. (2009b). Multicultural education: Student learning style and outcome across online courses. In H Song & T Kidd (eds) *Handbook of Research on Human Performance and Instructional Technology*. Idea Books: Hudson, NY.
- Strang, KD. (2009c). How multicultural learning approach impacts grade for international university students in a business [PM] course. *Journal of Intercultural Education*, (in-press).
- Strang, KD. (2009d). Team member perspectives on new product development performance in multicultural e-business projects: A model to assess soft skills. [recently submitted to a highly respected market research journal in US].
- Strang, KD. (2009e). Empirical test of multicultural student preference modes for doctorate supervision and structure. [recently submitted to a highly respected APA-controlled journal in US].
- Strang, KD. (2008a). Collaborative synergy and leadership in e-business. In J Salmons & L Wilson (eds), *Handbook of Research on Electronic Collaboration and Organizational Synergy*. IGI Global: Hershey, PA.
- Strang, KD. (2008b). Quantitative online student profiling to forecast academic outcome from learning styles using dendrogram decision models. *Multicultural Education & Technology Journal*, 2(4), 215-244.
- Strang, KD. (2008c). Interdisciplinary theories and statistical techniques underlying the collaborative-synergy-leadership-ebusiness model." In *Proceedings of the Conference on Studying Electronic Collaboration: Research, Theories and Methods*. Vision2Lead and OSSIA: Bolder, CO.
- Strang, KD. (2007a). Examining effective technology project leadership traits and behaviours. *Computers in Human Behaviour*, 23(1), 424-462.
- Strang, KD. (2007b). E-strategy first, e-technology free: Building an online university with open source software (Australian case study). In S Garren (ed), *Proceedings of the Innovation, Education, Technology, and You: Conference for Teaching & Learning*. Illinois University: Chicago, IL.
- Strang, KD. (2006). Advancing project management by applying learning goal theory in online professional education, *Digital Thesis and Dissertation Collections*. Proquest: Ann Arbor, MI.
- Strang, KD. (2005). Examining effective and ineffective transformational project leadership. *Journal of Team Performance Management*, 11(3/4), 68-103.
- Strang, KD. (2003). Achieving organizational learning across projects. In J Kardon (ed) *Proceedings of the PMI Global Congress*. Project Management Institute: Newton Square, NC.