

# PMI & IPMA: Differences & Synergies

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## Introduction

This paper explores some of the primary differences between International Project Management Association (IPMA) and the Project Management Institute (PMI), and how they approach projects. I have explored these differences, and some additional gaps, in my book *International Project Management: Leadership in Complex Environments*, and refer you there for a more complete rendition. Here the intention is to provide a general overview of the differences, and how an alliance could leverage the synergy between PMI and IPMA and enhance the global approach to Project Management.

For this paper we will look at the IPMA International Competence Baseline (ICB), and the *PMBOK® Guide* 4<sup>th</sup> edition. One fundamental difference between PMI and IPMA, is that IPMA has more of an emphasis on people skills, and PMI more of a focus on process skills. From personal experience, people skills are far more important to the success of projects than are process skills. But, people skills alone are simply not enough; process skills are required as well. The key is to achieve the right balance, for the specific team and project.

With that, let us look at three areas where IPMA and PMI differ, and how an alliance would benefit both in regards to international projects. The alliance would perhaps be greater than the sum of the individual parts.

## Ethics

Under the ethics section of the ICB it says that the “project manager should act according to accepted codes of professional conduct.” In 2007, the PMI issued a revised Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct<sup>1</sup> to better define the ethical standards for global project managers. It separates the standards into mandatory and aspirational, strive to achieve rather than be required to achieve, categories. A few excerpts are as follows:

- Responsibility, mandatory standards, Section 2.3.1 (Pg. 2): “We inform ourselves and uphold the policies, rules, regulations and laws that govern our work, professional, and volunteer activities.”
- Honesty, mandatory standards, Section 5.3.1 (Pg 5.): “We do not engage in or condone behavior that is designed to deceive others, including but not limited to making misleading or false statements, stating half-truths, providing information out of context or withholding information that, if known, would render our statements as misleading or incomplete.”
- Responsibility, aspirational standards, Section 2.2.1 (Pg.2): “We make decisions and take actions based on the best interests of society, public safety, and the environment.”
- Respect, aspirational standards, Section 3.2.1 (Pg.3): “We inform ourselves about the norms and customs of others and avoid engaging in behaviors they might consider disrespectful.”

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.pmi.org/PDF/ap\\_pmicodeofethics.pdf](http://www.pmi.org/PDF/ap_pmicodeofethics.pdf)

As you can see, the mandatory PMI standards provide a bit more guidance, especially on the issue of transparency and misleading statements. The PMI standard stops short of requiring PM's to act in the best interest of society and the environment. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) standards include being a good citizen, a good employer, good to the environment, and all the while making a profit.

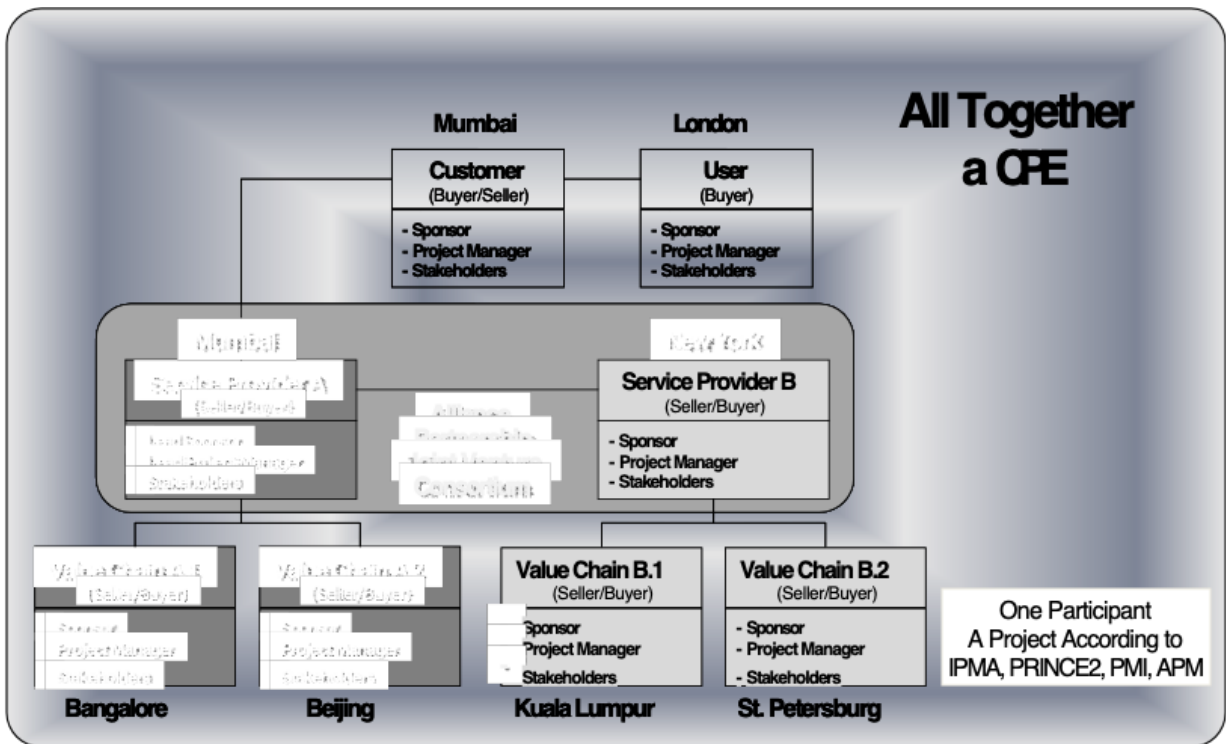
The IPMA description is simply much more vague. There are hundreds if not thousands of professional codes of ethics that vary between professional, and between countries. For example, neither the PMI, nor the IPMA, deal with the issue of bribes, which are common in many countries, and present in most. On international projects how is a project manager to deal with a local official who will not clear equipment through customs without a "tip"?

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century more companies are embracing CSR, and corporate governance at the board level. PMI definition provides more guidance than IPMA. In this case the alliance might produce a clearer mandate for PM's.

## Who's Who

On international projects what I call the collaborative project enterprise (CPE) is a variety of organizations that come together to perform a project. The illustration on the next page is a simplified view of a typical international project. A customer is developing a project for an end user, with a partnership providing expertise, and value chains providing specialty services. The CPE is the project. Now let's look at the definitions:

- According to the PMBOK (Section 1.2.1) a project is "a temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product, service, or result."
- According to the IPMA (Section 2.7.1) a project is "a time and constrained operation to realize a set of defined deliverables up to quality standards and requirements."
- According to IPMA (Page V), a project manager is "the professional specialist who plans and controls a project."
- According to the PMBOK (Page 369), a project manager is "the person assigned by the performing organization to achieve the project objectives."
- According to IPMA (Section 1.02), a stakeholder is "a party interested in the performance and/or success of the project, or who is constrained by it."
- According to the PMBOK (Pg. 376), a stakeholder is "a person or organization that is actively involved in the project, or whose interests may be affected by the execution or completion of the project."
- According to IPMA (Section 1.02), a customer is "an interested party." IPMA emphasizes the importance of customer satisfaction, but it does not provide a definition of what a customer is.
- According to the PMBOK (Pg. 358), a customer is "the person or organization that will use the project's product or service or result."
- According to the IPMA, "a programme of projects is put together to realize a strategic goal set out by the organization." The IPMA continues by saying "the programme defines business benefits management process as well as tracking the business benefits."
- According to the PMBOK, a program is "a group of related projects managed in a coordinated way to obtain benefits and control not available from managing them individually." Also according to the PMBOK program management is "the



centralized coordinated management of a program to achieve the program’s strategic objectives and benefits.”

So the question: is an international project manager a program manager? And who is the customer? As with ethics, PMI and IPMA together may create a definition that is more compatible with the actual nature of international project structures. IPMA has it right with regard to the strategic goals of the CPE, and PMI has it right when it says to obtain benefits not available from managing the individual organization projects that compose the CPE.

## Leadership

In the PMBOK the word leadership appears nine times, six of those are thanking people for their leadership in putting together the PMBOK, and the word culture appears fourteen times. All but one of those deals with organizational culture only. In the ICB, of the International Project Management Association, the word culture appears 16 times, and like the PMBOK has only one citation relating to societal culture. However, the ICB does have four references to team culture. Here are some of the strongest statements regarding leadership in the two standards:

- Page 240 of the PMBOK. “Leadership. Successful projects require strong leadership skills. Leadership is important through all phases of the project life cycle. It is especially important to communicate the vision and inspire the project team to high performance.” That is the only definition in the book.
- Section 2.01 is devoted to leadership in the IPMA ICB. Page 86 introduces the concept by saying “Leadership involves providing direction and motivating others in their role or task to fulfill the project’s objectives. It is a vital competency for a project manager.”

IPMA devote a lot of attention to leadership, the PMBOK very little. In the PMBOK the word leadership shows nine times, but it is not elevated to the level of say a scheduling lag, having no definition.

My book on cross-cultural leadership presented the following definition for leadership: “the ability to inspire the desire to follow, and to inspire achievement beyond expectations.” The definition is similar to the PMBOK and ICB definitions, but also different in its scope and vision. Think about the chart on the previous page and think about your partner, or your value chain, and then apply my definition. It is a lot of work to do this for the CPE, but the rewards are huge.

## Conclusion

There are other differences between the PMBOK and the ICB, but these three are the major ones. I think that the profession, especially international project management, could benefit greatly from a combination of the people skill emphasis from IPMA, and process emphasis from PMI. The synergy could well lead to an improved project management guideline.

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Dr. Thomas Grisham (BE, MBA, Doctor of Project Management, PMP, PE) has over 36 years of Project Management experience in 53 countries in the power, infrastructure, transportation, education, commercial, communications, manufacturing, business development, and dispute resolution sectors. He also has over 11 years of research and teaching experience at the undergraduate and graduate levels, and in the for-profit and executive education sectors.