

# PMI Mid-Mo Chapter News

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## Nine Project Management Fallacies: Part I

by Richard Brenner

*Most of what we know about managing projects is useful and effective, but some of what we “know” just isn’t so. Identifying the fallacies of project management reduces risk and enhances your ability to complete projects successfully.*

Nan pushed the door open, and she and Trish stepped out of the conference center into the morning air. On their first break from the off-site meeting, they hadn’t quite yet relaxed from the pressure cooker that was the final stretch of Marigold, their latest project. It hadn’t gone well, and they were all spending three days trying to figure out what happened.

“So what do you think?” Nan opened.

“I’ve been to off-sites before,” said Trish. “But this is the first time I’ve felt hopeful that truth would come out.”

Nan agreed. “Me too. I liked the bit about myths and fallacies.” Nan sat down on one of the

Plastic chairs. Trish sat too. “But knowing these fallacies,” she asked,

“won’t we just get better at fooling ourselves? If we could get any better which I seriously doubt.” Nan smiled. “Well, I think his point was that by naming the fallacies, it gets harder to use them.”

Universal awareness of common fallacies deters us all from using them

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## PROjections

PMI Mid-MO Chapter News

### Board Members Express Hopes for Mid-Missouri Chapter

At the September 22, 2005, Chapter business meeting, Chapter members elected a slate of officers to serve January 1, 2006-December 31, 2007. Listen to what your new officers have to say about the Mid-Missouri Chapter PMI and their Board positions.

**Bob Roark**, First Vice President, will become President of the Chapter two years from now beginning January 1, 2008.

Bob writes, "I would just like to say that I look forward in continuing the great work and dedication of my predecessors, Frank and Ron. We could not be where we are today without them. I, along with all the board members, will be dedicated to carry on this legacy and promote the benefits and stature of project management across all organizations and fields."

**Michelle Navarro**, Vice President of Professional Development, is responsible for implementing the Chapter's professional development events and workshops, including Project Management Professional (PMP) certification, preparation and maintenance.

Michelle writes, “I decided to run for a PMI office because I’ve really enjoyed attending the monthly chapter meetings and getting to know other people like me. I felt that holding an office would give me the opportunity to work with other like-minded professionals while allowing me the chance to give back to an organization from which I’ve benefited.

The office of Professional Development appealed to me because I like organizing events, and Karen has really ‘raised the bar’ in the past two years by hosting nationally-known speakers at our all-day events. Also, this office provides the chapter an opportunity to become

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more involved with universities and colleges. As a college student, I thought I wanted to be a project manager, but I didn't know how to begin my career. I hope our chapter will help students and faculty learn more about project management careers."

**Lois Heldenbrand**, Vice President of Programs, plans, arranges, and coordinates Chapter meeting programs.

Lois writes, "I agreed to hold office because I think project management is relevant at different levels to all types of work. Many times our work may not formally be called a 'project'; however, defining outcomes and scope, setting deadlines, and managing resources are critical skills for all types of work.

I hope we have lots of volunteers who are willing to offer ideas and screen the proposed program presentations in order to make sure they are useful and relevant. I plan to keep in close contact with the Kansas City and St. Louis PMI Chapter Program VPs as a strategy for additional program ideas. Also, I encourage members to propose and develop program presentations, too. A blend of national and local speakers would be good because I think the day-to-day experience of our members is extremely valuable."

**Lori Kleckner**, Vice President of Administration, maintains records of all Chapter meetings, including establishing and maintaining a Chapter history file, owns Chapter Bylaws, records Board and Annual and Chapter business meeting minutes, and serves as Chapter liaison with the national headquarters of PMI® for administrative purposes.

Lori writes, "PMI is a very worthwhile organization and the local chapter is filled with wonderful people. Whatever I can do to be a part of this organization to learn and assist others is time well spent."

### **Speaker Gifts Assist Mid-Missouri Charities**

Did you know Chapter speakers are invited to direct their speaker appreciation gifts to charities of their choice? Neal Whitten, our September 2005 Chapter meeting speaker, chose to donate to The Special Learning Center of Jefferson City. Our November 2005 speakers Richard Christman and Steve Adams directed a contribution to Hospice of Jefferson City and Mid-Missouri.

In a note of appreciation to the Chapter, Debbie Hamler, Director, The Special Learning Center, wrote, "Please let Mr. Whitten know we appreciate his donation to the Special Learning Center. We will use the donation to help our children."

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Trish sipped her coffee and set down the paper cup. Missing her own coffee mug was one thing she hated about off-sites. "I didn't quite get some of those fallacies," she said to Nan. "They're a little confusing." Nan nodded. "Yeah, me too. But what did he say about that — something about the confusion is what makes them so common?"

Just then, Peter came through the doorway, carrying a paper cupful of coffee and three huge chocolate chip cookies wrapped in a napkin. He sat down in the empty chair next to Nan.

Nan smiled at Peter and, gazing at the cookies, she said, "Peter, how nice of you to think of us."

Peter smiled back, took a cookie, and pushed the others to Nan. Then he turned to Trish. "So what's your favorite project fallacy?"

Trish reached for a cookie. "I don't know," she said. "We were just saying that they're a bit confusing."

"Yeah," said Nan. "I think he was saying that their wrongness is so subtle that we just accept them as conventional wisdom."

And so it is with most fallacies. Their simplicity makes them seductive, and their subtlety makes them durable.

Our best defense against project management fallacies is to study them. By naming the fallacies, the patterns become obvious to everyone, which deters us from using them. Here's Part I of a little catalog of project management fallacies – two common fallacies that arise from our wish for simple solutions, and two fallacies that survive on the basis of their subtlety.

### *The Fallacy of Positivism*

The Fallacy of Positivism holds that if we believe we can accomplish something, we're more likely to actually accomplish it; and inversely, if we express doubts about accomplishing something, we're less likely to execute it successfully.

This fallacy is especially tempting to leaders who want to motivate reluctant teams to attempt (or keep trying to do) the impossible. They're using it as a tool of manipulation. All things being equal, it's probably helpful to have a positive attitude.

But Truth is most important. Be positive when it's appropriate, and express doubts when they're real and relevant. Both staying positive and expressing doubt inappropriately can lead to catastrophe.

### *The Bad Actor Fallacy*

If a team exhibits a repeated pattern of dysfunction, we commit the Bad Actor Fallacy when we assume that one

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## Chapter Board Members

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## *Nine Project Management Fallacies: Part I continued*

one single team member is the likely cause of the problem.

Isolating the cause of a team problem to a single individual is tempting because it suggests that dealing with that individual can resolve the problem. No need for messy and expensive team interventions; no need for involving more than one person.

While it's possible for a single individual to keep a team in a state of dysfunction, more typically many individuals contribute to team problems. Team performance is an attribute of the team's system, and the organization in which that team is embedded.

### *The Naturalistic Fallacy*

A cousin of the Fundamental Attribution Error, this fallacy holds that professional credentials — experience, education, seniority or past performance — are equivalent to abilities. For instance, if a particular project manager led a few projects that failed, we conclude that he or she is incapable.

Fallacies are widespread. Their simplicity makes them seductive, and their subtlety makes them durable.

Judgments based on credentials and past performance alone are likely to omit from consideration

the past prevailing context, which might have been a significant contributor to past results. To assess the capabilities of a person, an organization, a technology or a design, consider not only credentials and past performance, but also contextual factors.

### *The Culturalistic Fallacy*

We commit this fallacy when we believe that the project manager, or some other organizational leader, creates a high performance team, without the assistance or influence of the people who belong to that team.

To measure the prevalence of this fallacy, track the attributed causes of team performance. In organizations where the credit for high performance tends to flow to leaders, while the blame for dysfunction tends to flow to team members, it's likely that the Culturalistic Fallacy is at work.

While any one person can undermine a team's performance, no single person is responsible for creating high performance. External factors certainly contribute, but a team's performance is most directly due to the choices of the members of that team.

These last two fallacies are closely related — the Naturalistic Fallacy undervalues contextual factors, while the Culturalistic Fallacy undervalues the contributions of people. They're two different ways to misperceive reality.

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One more fallacy is perhaps most common, though I don't consider it a project management fallacy. It's the Purity Fallacy, which holds that we're personally pure: we never use fallacies ourselves. We all use them, of course — we're human. The trick is to catch yourself when you do.

*Rick Brenner works with people in dynamic problem-solving organizations that need state-of-the-art teamwork. He writes and edits a weekly newsletter available at his Web site, [www.ChacoCanyon.com](http://www.ChacoCanyon.com). Copyright © 2005 Richard Brenner*

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*PROjections continued*

Deewayne Hord, Director of Operations, Hospice of Jefferson City and Mid-Missouri, wrote to Chapter members: "On behalf of Hospice of Jefferson City and Mid-Missouri and our residents, we would like to thank you for your donation of \$100. These funds will continue helping us provide for the sick that stay at our Friendship House and others in the community. Thanks for thinking of us."

#### **PayPal Payments for Meetings and Chapter Events**

With the November 2005 Chapter meeting, the Mid-Missouri Chapter PMI began accepting individual meeting registrations and credit card payments via PayPal. PayPal accepts payment via MasterCard, VISA, American Express, Discover, and PayPal accounts.

In 2006, we plan to roll out PayPal individual registration and payments for seminars, group registration and payment for meetings and seminars, and provide Chapter sponsors the ability to make sponsorship payments via PayPal.

We hope you are pleased with the additional convenience of being able to register and pay electronically for Chapter events. Let any member of the Chapter Board know your thoughts on how this new service is working for you and your organization.

#### **Chapter Meeting Fees Changed to \$20 for Both Members and Non-Members Effective January 2006**

Chapter Board members voted at the December 2005 Board meeting to change the cost of Chapter meetings to \$20 for both Chapter members and guests effective January 2006. The \$20 meeting cost more accurately reflects the cost of food, speaker expenses, and administration of Chapter meetings. A single rate structure simplifies meeting registration and administrative tasks.

## **Volunteer Opportunities** **Content Editor (2 positions)**

### **Position Description:**

As a member of the PMI Mid-Missouri Chapter's Communications team, the **Content Editor** produces the Chapter's bimonthly Newsletter. The **Content Editor** may also be responsible for editorial content of written material on the Chapter's Web site, <http://www.pmimidmo.org/> and may assist with the Chapter's publicity for Chapter events. If you are a PMP, the Chapter's **Content Editor** position may provide up to 5 PDU's per year to meet requirements for continuing PMP certification. For Missouri-certified project managers, this position qualifies for up to 5 PMDU's per year.

The **Content Editor** works with the Newsletter Production Editor, Sponsorship and Advertising committee, Webmasters, and Vice-President of Communications.

### **Requirements and Activities**

- Reporting, editing, or writing background is desirable but not required. Interest in writing and communications are helpful for this position.
- Availability and commitment to meeting bimonthly Newsletter publication deadlines at the beginning of January, March, May, July, September, and November
- Excellent English grammar and editing skills
- A "nose for news" for project management stories of interest to Chapter members
- Compile articles and other project management sources from PMI's weekly *Friday Facts* electronic newsletter for publication in Chapter Newsletter
- Understanding of copyright regulations
- Skilled in use of Microsoft Word
- Knowledge of or willingness to learn how to convert Word documents to PDF
- Prepare Chapter meeting minutes for posting on the Chapter's web site by converting material from Word to PDF format and sending to Webmasters with instructions for posting
- Receive advertising material from Sponsorship and Advertising committee for publication in newsletter

### **Estimated Time Commitment**

Up to 6 hours per month

### **How to Volunteer**

To volunteer, or for more information, e-mail Carol Elliott, VP Communications, at [pmivpcomm@pmimidmo.org](mailto:pmivpcomm@pmimidmo.org)

## Upcoming Chapter Events

**Chapter Meeting – January 19, 2006, 5:00-7:15 PM**

### *Enterprise Project Management (EPM)*

**Speaker:** Frank Records, Oakwood Systems

**Where:** [Summit Lake Winery](#)  
Capitol View Room (upstairs meeting room)  
1707 South Summit Drive  
Holts Summit, MO 65043-2100  
(573) 896-9966

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**All-Day Workshop – March 9, 2006**

### *Rational Change Management Without Hype and Myth*

**Speaker:** Peter de Jager – Back by popular demand!

**Sponsored by:** [CIBER, Inc.](#)

**Where:** [Ramada Inn](#)  
1510 Jefferson Street  
Jefferson City, MO 65110  
(573) 635-7171

*To register or for more information, visit the Chapter's web site*

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### [PMI: Mid-Missouri Chapter](#)

#### **Advertising and Sponsorship**

Interested in promoting your organization's project management related services?

Consider sponsoring PMI Mid-Missouri Chapter meetings and seminars, or placing web button advertising on the Chapter's Web site, [www.pmimidmo.org](http://www.pmimidmo.org).

To learn about sponsorship opportunities, visit our sponsorship page at [PMI Mid-Missouri Chapter Sponsorship](#), or contact a members of our Communications team at [ads@pmimidmo.org](mailto:ads@pmimidmo.org).

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#### **Webinars on new PMP**

On 1 December, PMI hosted two Webinars about the new Project Management Professional (PMP) certification exam. The Webinars were well attended and PMI is addressing numerous questions received from the attendees. The questions and answers will be posted on PMI's Web site on Monday, 5 December on the [Component Leadership Online Community](#) and on the Certification Program section under [breaking news](#). The Friday, 9 December issue of *PMI Community Post* will also cover information about the new exam and address some of the common questions.

## Additional information regarding the PMP® Examination

As we have previously informed you, PMI has been actively collecting test scores and results on each question of the new Project Management Professional (PMP®) exam from over 800 candidates since its release on 30 September 2005. Now that PMI has captured sufficient data, we can perform a psychometric analysis that is statistically reliable from which to make conclusions about the performance of questions as well as candidate performance.

Before offering the new examination, PMI assembled a group of volunteers to help establish the passing score. Using a method known as the "Modified Angoff Technique" (a proven exam development method), a group of global PMPs in the summer of 2005 assessed each test question and independently evaluated the questions to determine their difficulty level. Their responses were then sent to PMI's psychometric (exam development) experts and averaged. From that information, PMI's psychometricians recommended that PMI adopt a passing point of 81 percent (141 correct questions).

After the examination was introduced, PMI monitored candidate performance to verify the validity of the passing score. In addition to its analysis of the actual test results from over 800 candidates, PMI sought review by an additional volunteer team. After performing a statistical analysis of the additional data, PMI and its independent psychometricians were able to make conclusions about the performance of questions as well as candidate performance. This second review, initiated by PMI as part of standard exam development procedure, indicated that the passing score should be adjusted.

Accordingly, PMI revised the passing score for the exam to 61 percent (106 correct questions). PMI then applied the new passing score to all examinations taken since 30 September 2005 by candidates who sat for the new exam. PMI is in the process of updating the candidates' records.

While we remain extremely sensitive to candidate and trainer concerns about such a change in the passing score, these considerations While we remain extremely sensitive to candidate and trainer concerns about such a change in the passing score, these considerations must be weighed in context of the overall purpose of the exam:

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to provide a consistent global standard that all practitioners must meet to ensure the credential is awarded to qualified individuals. We need to ensure that candidates who do not meet the knowledge and experience criteria do not receive the credential but more importantly, we do not want candidates that are qualified to be prevented from receiving the credential because the exam presents such a strenuous challenge to the test taker.

The steps PMI is taking include:

- Candidates who were not successful on the new exam have had their test re-scored using the adjusted passing score.
- Where the result of this review determined that the candidate's score is above the adjusted passing score, he or she is awarded the credential and notified through a communication.
- Candidates who were granted the PMP Credential will be mailed their new PMP packages and will have their names added to the online PMP registry within 8 weeks.
- Candidates who still have a failing grade after having their test re-scored are advised through a communication and are encouraged to re-take the test.
- Candidates, regardless of whether they have passed or failed, received a communication from PMI advising them of their revised status.
- Prometric has taken steps to adjust the passing score so that candidates who are scheduled to test will be scored against the revised passing score. The complete global deployment of the change in passing score at all Prometric sites will take place between 15 December and 30 December.
- Candidates testing between now and the December deployment will have their test score evaluated by PMI and will receive a communication as outlined above.

## **PMI requests your input on *Project Management Journal*®**

PMI wants to hear about your interest in our professional and academic research quarterly. We have created a [Web-based survey](#) to learn what you like about the *Journal* and what you might like changed. Whether you are an avid reader or an occasional one, you undoubtedly have opinions on what you prefer. December's expanded issue will feature seven papers - including three award-winning student papers - as well as Christophe Bredillet's thought-provoking "From the Editor" column and four book reviews in Ken Rose's insightful "Cover to Cover" column. If you do not receive the *Journal* in print, you can access it online through the [member's area](#). If you prefer to receive your issues in print ("hard copy"), please e-mail your request to [pmjinprint@pmi.org](mailto:pmjinprint@pmi.org).

**Please take a few minutes to complete the brief [linked survey](#).** This is an excellent opportunity to make your voice heard, since your feedback may be utilized in PMI's mission to make *Project Management Journal* a tier one publication.



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