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Common Language is the Key to Project Management

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By J. LeRoy Ward, PMP, PgMP, Executive Vice President, ESI International

Imagine being asked to work on a project, only you don't speak the language in the country in which it will be conducted. You wouldn't get very far, and you'd most likely experience a lot of raised eyebrows because all you could do is point and smile. Sharing a common language is not the same thing as speaking the same mother tongue. But, as project managers will tell you, project-speak has a dialect all its own. Whether in Singapore or Stockholm, communicating what you mean in business is critical to completing a project on budget and time.

An emerging global business culture has brought with it an ever-expanding language of 'project-speak' that you hear in boardrooms around the world. My advice is to learn the lingo in your field as quickly as possible to maintain your competitive edge.

The more diverse the field, the more terms are needed to operate within it. With over three decades of experience with project managers from Shanghai to Stuttgart to Salt Lake City, I have witnessed an explosion of new terminology in project management first-hand (from just over 1,600 terms in the 90's to over 3,400 today). As globalization broadens markets, the language required to keep up grows with it. What you say is as important as how you say it.

Let's take the term 'drill down'. In the oil industry, you might think it refers to the act of seeking oil under the Earth's surface. In project-speak, it actually means the act of moving from a summarized view of data into a lower level of detail. While on an oil rig in the North Sea, you would want to know the difference.

Or consider 'unk-unks'. No, it's not a Bali starling mating call, but a risk management term that stands for unknown unknowns (risks that are unknowable). 'Pound of flesh' is another favorite, eliciting scenes from your favorite horror movie. In project management, however, it really means you're going to have to pay someone back in a huge way for doing something for you. Aside from the obvious hard skills, language is key in project management. After all, projects are people.

There exists an international business culture that has emerged as a result of globalization and cross-border and cross-functional project activity. Managers worldwide tend to be a highly educated, well-credentialed body of professionals who are apt to read the same business books and who listen to the same lecturers and pundits on various topics. It's best to learn the language so, when you attend meetings, collaborate on projects or are involved in any business activity, you understand what people are saying. And, perhaps more importantly, when it's your turn to speak up, they understand you, too.

J. LeRoy Ward, PMP, PgMP, author of *Dictionary of Project Management Terms* (3rd edition, October 2008), is Executive Vice President at ESI International, a global learning company helping people and organizations improve the way they manage projects, contracts, requirements and vendors. Complementing a 17-year career with four U.S. federal agencies, Mr. Ward is responsible for, among other things, ESI's product offerings worldwide. He is a noted author and speaker and appears frequently at project management gatherings around the world. <http://www.esi-intl.com>

New Release: Dictionary of Project Management Terms

Project managers can now rely on a newly updated handbook, thanks to its author, J. LeRoy Ward, PMP, PgMP, Executive Vice President at ESI International. *Dictionary of Project Management Terms*, now in its third edition, shows how the field of project management has exploded in the last few years. With over 3,400 terms, up from 1,800 in 2000, this book includes not only traditional project management terms, but also broader business terms to help seasoned managers as



well as their successors navigate the ubiquitous language of project-speak more easily.

“The larger the field, the more terms are needed to operate within it,” said Ward from his Arlington office where he heads ESI’s worldwide training programs and international partnerships. With over three decades of experience with project managers from 50+ countries, Ward has witnessed the upward trend in project management first-hand.

“LeRoy Ward proves himself to be the Noah Webster of project management,” stated Carl Pritchard, PMP, EVP, Principal, Pritchard Management Associates in Frederick, Maryland. “He provides a comprehensive, clear, incisive assessment of the body of terms in project management, rich with both technical and idiomatic terms. This exhaustive lexicon is a must-have for any project manager.”

Spanning over 480 pages, the Dictionary of Project Management Terms encompasses acronyms, relevant project management organizations and project-speak to ensure consistency in communication, an indispensable skill arising from globalization itself.

“This book is one of the rare examples of a successful marriage of quantity and quality,” claimed Piotr Maciejczyk, Chairman, Management Training and Development Center in Warsaw, Poland. “No wonder that, along with the PMBOK® Guide, it is one of the two most popular, most recognized, and most useful books among project management professionals in Poland. And no wonder that it became the basis for creating and promoting a common project management terminology, which is one of the most crucial aspects of communication in the PM environment.”

Dictionary of Project Management Terms (\$39.95) is available for immediate purchase at www.esi-intl.com or http://www.amazon.com/dp/1890367451/?tag=itman-20&link_code=as3&creative=373489&camp=211189.

About ESI International

ESI, a subsidiary of Informa plc (LSE:INF), helps people around the world improve the way they manage projects, contracts, requirements and vendors. In addition to ESI’s more than 100 courses delivered in 18 languages at more than 75 locations worldwide, ESI offers eight certificate programs through our educational partner, The George Washington University in Washington. Founded in 1981, ESI’s worldwide headquarters are in Arlington, Va, USA. To date, ESI’s programs have benefited more than 950,000 professionals worldwide. For more information visit www.esi-intl.com.

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1. [Brian Barker](#) on November 13th, 2008 8:44 am

As far as learning another language, is concerned, can I put in a word for Esperanto?

I know that Esperanto is a living language, but it has great propaedeutic values as well. It helps language learning!

You might like to see <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-8837438938991452670>

A glimpse of the language can be seen at <http://www.lernu.net>

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