



Richard Graham,  
Framestore,  
London, England



TALES FROM  
THE FRONT

# Under the Radar

Infrastructure and IT may be teeming with project managers, but they're not the only sectors benefiting from practitioner expertise. Five project managers describe their experiences in less-expected industries.

BY MATT ALDERTON  
PORTRAITS BY JON ENOCH



"Garden of Australian Dreams,"  
National Museum of Australia

PHOTO BY GEORGE SERRAS, COURTESY OF NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIA



## Museums



**Benita Tunks**, content  
project manager,  
National Museum of  
Australia, Canberra,  
Australia

**"My trajectory to project management was an evolution.** When I grew up, there was no question: I was going to be an artist. As soon as I graduated from high school, I went to art school. When I left, I thought, 'Okay, what am I going to do now?'—because you don't make money making art. I ended up getting a job at the National Film and Sound Archive.

Then I was offered a project to manage at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney. I'd managed small projects, but this was an opportunity to manage a really big project. I was responsible for assessing and relocating their works on paper and their textiles collection. I collaborated with fabricators to design the storage units and then relocated well over

50,000 fragile objects into new stores.



That was my first true project management experience. It's in my nature to organize things. I'm a problem solver.

At the moment, I'm the content project manager for the National Museum of Australia. The museum itself is evolving how they do project management. Whereas before they would have a team of project managers working at a distance with curators, I'm actually embedded with them. It's the first time a project manager has been embedded with a curatorial team here.

The difference between a curator and myself is: I'm not wedded to the story. A curator gets really deep into the content. I don't. I sit above it. My end goal is delivering what we have to accomplish by the agreed date, mitigating the risk associated with that and managing stakeholders' expectations.

In cultural institutions, you can't be a rigid project manager. You've got to be flexible because you are working with very intelligent, creative, passionate people with great ideas. Rather than dismissing them, I allow them to develop. So if it is a good idea, we don't miss out, and the end product is much better for it."

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—Benita Tunks

## Film

**Richard Graham,**  
visual effects project  
manager, Framestore,  
London, England

**"In film, there's an awful lot of project management—it's just called production.** Although it's definitely project management, the job I do, helping create the visual effects, is normally called visual-effects producer.

When I left university, I came to London and worked as a runner, which is basically someone who makes the tea, fetches things and, if they're lucky, gets to learn how a film gets made. I did that for 18 months, then over the course of 10 years found my

way into progressively more senior roles. A small visual-effects company offered me a job. I took it, and for three months I was a visual-effects coordinator until I learned the ropes, at which point I became a producer.

The people working on the visual-effects component of a big visual-effects film can be as much as 50 percent of the entire budget of a film. It's the largest single expense after the actors and directors. On a big visual-effects film, the visual-effects crew approaches two-thirds of the credit list, so it's also the most labor-intensive part of the filmmaking process. For instance, I worked on *Iron Man 3*, and the total number of visual-effects contributors was nearly 600 people on a credit list of 800. The work is very detailed and very specialized, and in the scheme of making a film it takes a long time. Film tends to get shot in 12 to 24 weeks, but visual effects can often take 40 or 50 weeks.


All of that—the budget, the people, the schedule—has to be managed.

Typically, a single visual-effects shot goes through between five and 15 pairs of hands as it travels from one end of the visual-effects pipeline to the other. The project managers, or producers, manage the passing of the work from one pair of hands to the next.

The single-most important part of a film producer's job is managing the creative component while trying to make a commercially successful product. The hardest thing is balancing the desire to do really great work with the need to do it on an incredibly tight margin, because the resources available to us are not endless, although the requests for creative often are.

Although visual-effects companies generally don't have producers who come from an academic project management background, as an industry I think we could only benefit from hiring more people with formal project management training."



A man with short brown hair and a slight smile stands with his arms crossed in front of a large, dark wooden door. He is wearing a black t-shirt with a red and blue graphic, blue jeans, and green sneakers. A large shadow of him is cast onto the door to his left. The door has horizontal wooden planks and metal hardware with the names 'CHARLES', 'COLLINGE', and 'LAMBERT' visible. The ground is dark asphalt with a yellow line.

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—Richard Graham





The Salt Lake Temple of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Salt Lake City, Utah, USA

## Religion



**Loren Bishop, PMP**, project manager, planning and processes division, publishing services department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah, USA

**“It doesn’t matter if you’re building a freeway system or a CD, a car or a Christmas concert. Behind the scenes, there’s a project manager keeping things organized, on budget, within scope and on schedule.”**

—Loren Bishop, PMP

**“The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints** has over 5,000 employees at our headquarters in Salt Lake City, Utah and about 16 million members worldwide. On the business side, the Church has around 25 different departments; publishing services is one of those departments.

I’ve been a project manager in the publishing services department for more than six years. Most of my career, however, has been in IT. In the IT department of the Church, I became very familiar with product and project management. After 15 years in the IT department, I was looking for another opportunity and found out we had a project office outside the IT group. Because I had over 20 years of experience managing projects, they invited me to join them as a project manager.

The publishing services department goes to all the other departments in the Church to find out what their publishing needs are, then we put together an annual budget for meeting those needs—which are much more than publishing. One of the organizations I’m assigned to, for example, is the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, a world-renowned choir sponsored by the Church. One of their most well-known events happens every week, and that’s *Music and the Spoken Word*. I’m the project manager of that production, which airs every week on TV and radio stations, as well as on the Internet. I also manage the choir’s concerts, national tours, recordings—all the products they make, as well as printed items like programs, posters and newspaper ads. I manage all of that by using traditional project management tools to track projects, documents, scopes, schedules and budget.

Here at the Church, we have producers who specialize in high-end films all the way down to those who specialize in quick videos. We also have producers who deal with live events, like putting on a concert, and producers who specialize in broadcasting those events on television or radio. One of my main tasks as a project manager is to organize a project team and put the right producer in place.

It doesn’t matter if you’re building a freeway system or a CD, a car or a Christmas concert. Behind the scenes, there’s a project manager keeping things organized, on budget, within scope and on schedule.”

# Environmental Science

**Elena Bulmer, PMP, PhD**, biodiversity project coordinator, Worldwatch Institute Europe, Madrid, Spain

**"I've always had an interest in environmental conservation**—especially since the age of 12. I was brought up in Malaysia, and while I was visiting a national park there I became aware firsthand of the serious environmental management problems going on in that country. I realized then that I really wanted to do something to help conserve and improve the environment.

I got my master's degree in wildlife management and my PhD in bird ecology. When I completed my PhD thesis, I wanted to get into environmental conservation and was offered a project management coordinating position in Caracas, Venezuela. While I was working there, I felt I needed to improve my project management skills, so I signed up for a Project Management Professional (PMP)<sup>®</sup> course at a business school in Caracas. That's how I ended up in project management.

Currently I have two roles: I'm biodiversity project manager at Worldwatch Institute Europe in Denmark, and I run my own nongovernmental organization in Spain called Eco de la Tierra.

Eco de la Tierra is dedicated to the conservation of Mediterranean biodiversity and ecosystems. One of our projects has to do with environmental education for children. We have another project that has to do with improving the socioeconomic situation of women in northeast Morocco, where in rural areas only 10 percent of women can read and write.

At Worldwatch Institute Europe, we're working on urban biodiversity. One project is called URBIA—urban biodiversity in action. We're working to make Europeans more aware of the urban biodiversity that surrounds them. Even a park may be home to an endangered species of bird, for example.

A project in environmental conservation should be managed the same as a project in any other business sector: You have a plan, you have stakeholders, and you have objectives. It's the same. But a very common problem in environmental nongovernmental organizations is a lack of funding, so as a project manager you often find yourself spending some of your time fundraising.

When an environmental project is successful, you can say you've done something to improve the planet—whether it involves increasing environmental awareness among a group of citizens or helping an endangered animal or plant. Doing something positive for the planet is why I'm a project practitioner in my industry."



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—Elena Bulmer, PMP



## Education



**Ahmed Kotb**, project manager, FIRST LEGO League, the Institution of Engineering and Technology, Stevenage, England

"I did a few years of engineering for a multinational chemicals company. When they had to close down the branch where I was, I found myself using my engineering background as a project manager for the local education authority. That led me to get involved in the STEM community—science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

I'd spent several years managing STEM projects for schools when I came across the FIRST LEGO League (FLL) competition.

FLL is an international robotics program for 9- to 16-year-olds. It's one of the largest STEM competitions in the world, with over 80 countries involved. LEGO and its U.S. partner, FIRST—which stands for "For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology"—look for operational partners to manage the competition locally in countries around the world. FLL had been going on in the United Kingdom since 2001, and in 2012 LEGO approached the Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET) about taking over as operational partner. IET took on FLL as a project and hired me as project manager.

It's my job to embed this project within the IET to move it forward. That requires managing quite a lot of risk in terms of making sure we have the proper funding, the right support network and executive sponsorship. We have about 450 teams that compete in FLL at regional tournaments across the country. I have to manage teams' expectations and work with academic and corporate partners to not only host tournaments on our behalf, but also involve their scientists and engineers as mentors and judges.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF FIRST LEGO LEAGUE





Since I've been on board, we've grown the competition by 33 percent in terms of partners and 20 percent in terms of teams competing.

I think project management in education is unique. When you're a company, you're looking to make a profit for your business. In education, you have a different kind of mission.

You're trying to influence people. Your stakeholders aren't just the people in your institution; they're also young people and parents. Because of that, you have to constantly engage people at different levels.

In the United Kingdom, there's a decline in people getting science and engineering degrees. So when I go to our events and meet young people, and I see them changing their mind about what an engineer can be, that's a very satisfying and rewarding feeling." **PM**

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—Ahmed Kotb