

A BOUNDARY CRITIQUE OF GENDER IN THE *PROJECT MANAGEMENT BODY OF KNOWLEDGE*®

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ABSTRACT

The Project Management Body of Knowledge (*PMBOK*®) is a document describing appropriate reasoning styles and behaviour for project managers. As a codified “body of knowledge,” it acts as a knowledge system for the profession. This codification is tacitly gendered, privileging masculine cognition and action. We examine how this tacit value system has de-legitimized certain feminine contributions to the profession, leaving them outside its boundaries of recommended practice. This boundary critique advocates on behalf of our emancipatory interests in improving the effectiveness of individual project managers, and the success of the profession itself.

INTRODUCTION

In any designed system of ideas, decisions get made about its limits – what the system should include and therefore endorse, and what the system should exclude and therefore discourage. Project Management Institute (PMI) is an association committed to the growth and reputation of the fledging project management profession. PMI has authored the *Project Management Body of Knowledge*® (*PMBOK*) – a system of ideas and principles about what it means to be a project manager and how to manage projects well. This article examines limits of the *PMBOK* as a system of ideas, and what decisions were tacitly made by PMI about what kinds of thought and action are worth endorsing in the project management endeavour and what kinds are not. We draw from critical systems theory to inform this task.

The critical systems theory literature examines system designers’ assertions of rightness – i.e. what knowledges should be deemed relevant and which should be left out. Critical systems theory is an invitation to doubt, calling into question judgments made about the placement of a system’s boundaries, and asking whether those boundaries are drawn widely enough.

This critical examination of the *PMBOK* is a modest attempt at boundary critique. Ulrich (Jackson, 1991; Ulrich, 2005) lays out several tasks for effective boundary critique:

- Identifying “sources of selectivity” conditioning claims about why a system was designed as it was;
- Examining implications of such selectivity, practically and ethically; and

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- Options for expanding the possibilities for boundary placement.

We take Ulrich's tasks as guides for boundary critique in our analysis of *PMBOK*.¹

We focus in this article on one source of selectivity that underpins this system's normative claims: gender. We examine forces that gave rise to the *PMBOK*, and the notion of gender as a usually-tacit value system in management discourse in the pages that follow.

THE *PMBOK* DISCOURSE

Project management has been a recognized discipline in organizations since the 1950s. PMI works to legitimize project managers' growing status as a group of experts skilled at managing a mode of working heralded by some organizational scholars as "the future of work" (Bennis, 1968; Clegg, 1989; Weick, 1995; Peters, 1999). Since 1969, the Project Management Institute in the United States (PMI) has been the predominant professional association for project managers in North America and, some would argue, worldwide. It has taken a stewardship role in promoting the establishment of project management standards, training, and education. A key drive for the organization has been the spread of understanding and appreciation for the skills and behaviours collectively termed *project management*. In the 1980s, PMI's focus turned to defining project management. In 1996, *PMBOK* resulted – a 216-page book documenting "generally-accepted" body of project management knowledge, providing a common language for project managers and common standards of project management quality, excellence, and professionalism. We take the 2000 edition of *PMBOK* as a system of ideas, representing this profession's efforts to claim respectability in contemporary organizations.

PMI's intent in developing *PMBOK* was to create a formalized – and therefore boundaried – system of knowledge for the profession. The *PMBOK*'s authors were a group of respected project managers and project management scholars – thereby making PMI's attempt at prescribing professional behaviour a top-down effort. Increased respectability for the profession was PMI's aim in this endeavour. Codification of its knowledge base was an appropriate means to this end.

One of the most potent acts of power is "the structuring of the world-views of others" (Thomas and Lockett, 1991, 93), which *PMBOK* is designed to do, both for aspiring project managers and the organizations that hire them. Documenting information gives the impression of fixing it, reaching a state of certainty about meanings that may have been previously unresolved prior to being captured in written form. When a profession seeks to codify its body of knowledge, it seeks to create closure on the spectrum of acceptable behaviours and thought processes available to individuals who seek to identify themselves with this profession. To a critical systems theorist,

¹ Ulrich posits the tasks of boundary critique as "systematic." We agree, although we do not treat his prescriptions sequentially in this data analysis.

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codification is a political act, as the documenting of legitimate professional knowledge amounts to normative claims about what the profession is and stands for.

One way to understand *PMBOK* as both a system of professional knowledge and a political act is to examine the dimension of gender. Gender, we argue, is an important source of selectivity conditioning PMI's claims of what it means to be a member of the project management profession.

GENDER AS MEANS OF COGNITION AND BEHAVIOUR

Empirical study supports the view that the work world, and perceptions of success held by both practitioners and scholars, are gendered (Acker, 1990; Gherardi, 1994; Fletcher, 1998; Hale, 1999; Nelson and Robinson, 1999). Although the literature generally remains silent on the matter, the ways project managers frame their deliverables, their understanding of how to effectively mobilize a team, and their tendency to focus their energies on task or human aspects of the project management role are all gender-laden (Meyerson and Fletcher, 2000), shaped by normative expectations about how to be seen as competent. Feminist researchers have noted that we commonly see the desire to be competent expressed in two patterns of cognition and behaviour: masculine and feminine.²

Masculine Modes of Thought and Action

The masculine sensemaking style tends to value analytical and impersonal problem solving (Eagly and Johnson, 1990; Magolda, 1992; Daley and Naff, 1998; Hughes, 2000). Individuals with strong masculine styles hold a value system focusing on mastery over their environment (Keller, 1978; Eagly and Johnson, 1990; Hughes, 2000; Martin, 2000). They apply objective and impersonal criteria to decision-making, taking an adversarial stance in evaluating information (Magolda, 1992; Clinchy, 1996; Belenky, Clinchy et al., 1997). Their reasoning styles offers detachment from the individuals and situations they seek to understand (Melymuka, 1999). This detachment is termed "field independence," and manifests in a person's preference to fidelity and conformance to predetermined models of project reality, and preference to execute tasks according to those predetermined views, regardless of the peculiarities of the specific situation (Haaken, 1988).

People with highly developed masculine behaviours tend to exhibit strengths in maintaining an appearance of assertiveness, masterfulness, and control (Kerfoot and Knights, 1993) – often collectively termed agentic qualities (Eagly, Makhijani et al., 1992). People with strong masculine managerial skills tend to be highly task-oriented, excelling at initiating structure through the development of roles and procedures, making

² It is necessary to stress that the gendered tendencies described below are not prescriptions for men and women (Nelson, E. D. and B. W. Robinson (1999). Gender in Canada. Scarborough ON, Prentice Hall.

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leader and subordinate roles explicit, and ensuring team members effectively follow prescribed structures in order to maintain high performance standards (Ibid.).

Feminine Modes of Thought and Action

The feminine sensemaking style involves placing primacy on one's connection with others (Clinchy, 1996; Belenky, Clinchy et al., 1997; Fletcher, 1998). Such individuals value sharing power (Martin, 2000), prizing democratic or participative decision-making (Eagly, Makhijani et al., 1992; Tarule, 1996), and tend to create cooperative work settings (Belenky, Clinchy et al., 1997; Hughes, 2000).

People with highly developed feminine behaviours tend to excel in skills of empathy (Clinchy, 1996), collaborative sensemaking and working styles (Tarule, 1996), and a sensitivity to situations' emotional contexts (Gilligan, 1977; Eagly and Johnson, 1990; Fletcher, 1998). As managers, they tend to develop strong networks of information and power sharing (Daley and Naff, 1998), contribute to the power and status of others (Gherardi, 1994). Overall, their workplace behaviours can be characterized as highly interpersonal. Feminine cognition can be viewed as "field dependent," focusing on conceiving of tasks and plans through consideration of the particular, idiosyncratic demands of the moment. Field dependent behaviour is informed primarily in response to emerging realities, relationships, and information (Haaken, 1988).

We stress again that "there are no pure groups" (Walby, 2007, 452). Rather, following the psychological theories of Jung (1959a;b), we focus here on masculinity and femininity as value systems not constrained to biologically male or female individuals. In the project management profession, many female project managers enjoy substantial success by virtue of their highly developed masculine ways of thinking and acting. Many male project managers have exceptionally well developed feminine thought and behavioural skills they can call upon in delivering their projects to successful conclusions (Thomas and Buckle Henning, in press). Rather, our concern was understanding the degree to which masculine and feminine thought and action were positioned as legitimate parts of the *PMBOK* interpretive system, and by contrast, how certain gendered thinking and actions were rendered absent as valued ways to approach one's project work and the implications of this orientation to the redefinition of work.

While we believed that both masculine and feminine ways of knowing and being in workplaces are undoubtedly valuable for project management (and are equally complex [(Magolda, 1992)]), they are not equally valued. *While feminine thought and behaviour is not absent in PMBOK, it is often portrayed as suspect or inferior.*

The analysis presented here focuses on PMI's conceptualization of project management, the role of project managers, and the notion of risk (i.e. forces that threaten or inhibit the successful completion of projects).³ Unless otherwise noted, all citations come from the *PMBOK*'s 2000 edition.

³ We have published analyses of other sections of *PMBOK* elsewhere (Buckle, P. and Thomas, J.(2003). Deconstructing Project Management Guidelines: A Gender Analysis of Project Management Guidelines" *International Journal of Project Management. Special Issue.*, 21(6): 433-441.

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PMBOK ANALYSIS

Conceiving of Project Management

Definition: “Project management is the application of knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to project activities to meet project requirements.” (*PMBOK*, 2000, 6)

In *PMBOK*, project management is framed as a task focused, instrumental business process.

Masculine and feminine reasoning styles inform differing perceptions about what project management work is all about. The masculine view has clearly delineated ideas of what should fall within the scope of a project, and what should be considered extraneous. It places great importance on discerning a project in terms that “[include] all the work required, and *only* the work required” (our emphasis – p. 7), seeking to create a singular reality that eliminates information, events, persons, and agendas from the manager’s field of vision that could distract from this conception of reality. The basic thrust to develop a conception of project objectives and processes, and to preserve this perception intact, appears throughout the advice about appropriate project management reasoning styles and processes: “Sequential logic [is] designed to ensure proper definition;” and “numerous forms, charts, and checklists... provide structure and consistency... called project management methodologies... divide each project into several project phases to improve management control” (p. 11-12).

Such desire for clarity, control, and the cognitive filtering processes described above, are invaluable tactics to serve motives of efficiency. Under such logic, a competent project manager does what s/he needs to do to clear the most direct possible route between point A (the present) and point B (the desired state of project completion). Plural or shifting views of either point create uncertainty and hamper efficiency; masculine logic prefers to construct reality (processes, deliverable, and overall project objectives) in terms of what can be best controlled; that which is difficult or impossible to control is interpreted as deviant or problematic.

Feminine reasoning operates on a broader perception of what falls into the realm of project work. If the central *modus operandi* of masculinity is a preference for control, feminine reasoning utilizes a more fluid, responsive orientation to emergent project realities. Feminine thought processes note that projects have “stakeholders with differing needs and expectations” (p. 6). Stakeholder orientation encourages acknowledgement and acceptance of multiple project realities depending on the events that unfold and the players involved. This orientation also sounds much like (Checkland, 1991)’s report of Vickers’ systems approach: “[his] concept of relationship-maintaining was more fruitful than that of goal-seeking, being not only closer to reality but also overcoming the problem of treating as fixed an element you know is really continually changing” (p. 64)

Masculine reasoning believes that project management requires decision making informed by a relatively fixed normative view of what is and what must be done. By

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contrast, feminine cognition moves from the present moment toward a project end state that is provisional and acceptably uncertain. Such uncertainty demands continually monitoring the environment for cues that affirm the appropriateness of the original project goal or suggest it needs to be revisited. Thus, such uncertainty enables a project manager to more easily discover, adapt, and design appropriate action as s/he moves through time.

Inherently, a feminine orientation of the goals and processes of project management is neither positive nor negative; however, *PMBOK* frames the effects of this orientation as problematic. The book expresses a preference for clear, masculine, unified views in its warning that “different objectives [for a project] may come into conflict” (p. 17); *PMBOK* does not acknowledge that the expression of multiple objectives also enables a greater understanding of the interests and needs of users, increasing the likelihood that more users will be satisfied by the project’s end result. Similarly, the document reveals discomfort with the unknown: “The probability of successfully completing the project is lowest, and hence risk and uncertainty are highest, at the start of the project” (p. 12). A project’s beginning is the point at which a project possesses its greatest potentiality, opportunity for creativity and innovation; it is also the point at which a masculine-oriented project manager has the least clarity and guidance about what s/he is to perform. *PMBOK* frames the initial stages as fraught with the threat of failure – an assessment that makes a great deal of sense to masculine reasoning and less sense to feminine reasoning.

Role of Project Manager

Nowhere in *PMBOK* is there a concise definition of the role of a project manager.⁴ What can we infer from this choice to leave the role of the person of the project manager tacit? We speculate that a profession intent on institutionalizing its discipline as a bona fide and valuable business process might view the depersonalized approach to explaining the role of project managers as consistent with this aim. Depersonalization is also a tendency of masculine approaches to organizational practice.

The masculine manager views him- or herself as separate from surrounding reality. This orientation favours acting on her or his environment according to preconceived plans and predefined conceptions of success: “The project management team must identify the stakeholders, determining their requirements, and then manage and influence those requirements to ensure a successful project” (our emphasis – p. 16). This sequence is carried out from a stance apart from the reality the project manager must impact. The external environment is a force to be reckoned with in terms of its malleability or rigidity in supporting or inhibiting the attainment of stated project aims: for example, “the structures of the performing organization often *constrains* the availability of, or terms under which resources become available to the project” (our emphasis – p. 19) and “the project team must periodically measure itself *against* the expectations of those *outside* the project” (our emphasis – p. 119). The masculine mind

⁴ Finally, in late 2002, perhaps in recognition of this gap, PMI released a statement defining the project manager’s role in some detail and describes the competencies necessary to fulfill this mandate.

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views environmental people and events, whether friendly or resistant, as forces to be influenced and acted upon.

Much organizational literature supports the masculine logic. *PMBOK* cites definitions of “power” by Pfeffer (1992) and Eccles et al (1992): “to get people to do things that they would not otherwise do,” and “getting collective action from a group” (p. 26). “Getting” action from people is an agentic orientation to human relationships (Eagley et al., 1992) characterized as strongly masculine and evident throughout *PMBOK*’s descriptions of the project manager’s work. In the statement, “Most projects are performed by a team created for the sole purpose of performing the project, and the team is disbanded when the project is complete” (p. 5), both projects and people are positioned as means to a desired organizational end. People and processes, in this view, are tools or inputs the project manager uses to perform project tasks.

If the masculine orientation to a project manager’s activity is conceived as acting on environments and people to achieve project aims, the feminine approach is oriented toward acting *with* people, circumstances, and environments to realize desired objectives. Action is achieved through unfolding coordination of relationships. The strongly feminine project manager has an interest and readiness to respond to environmental changes – not to brace against challenges to the initial project plan (a masculine motivation). Rather, the effort is to determine how changing circumstances may be worked *with* to create consensually-defined success. The subtleties and complexities of project progress are noted: for example, “the nature and number of project stakeholders will often change as the project moves from phase to phase of its life cycle” (p. 108); and “roles and responsibilities may vary over time” (p. 110). Accepting these complexities, the feminine mode of acting with people and processes to carry out project asks evolves fluid response strategies to recognize and work with shifting project realities. Essentially this is a strategy of adaptable readiness: “The results of [formal planning processes] should be reviewed regularly... to ensure continued applicability” (p. 109); and, “Leadership... may be demonstrated by many different individuals at many different times during the project” (p. 24). While the masculine orientation *gets* others to execute project plans, the feminine approach engages in “coordinating people and other resources to carry out the plan” (p. 30), connoting a *power with* orientation to managerial influence.

We leave our analysis of the role of the project manager with a final thought. *PMBOK* uses the words *perform*, *performs*, *performing*, and *performance* to outline appropriate project management behaviour. Terms commonly found in theatre, *perform* and its derivatives connote execution of a preplanned script for an audience’s benefit. Such execution is roughly equivalent to the masculine orientation of working to maintain loyal to original project specifications (i.e. “the script”). Curiously, the complementary terms – *improvise*, *improvises*, *improvisation* – fall nowhere in *PMBOK*’s lexicon on the project manager’s role. In theatre, successful improvisation is considered a far more difficult way to relate to a scene and audience. Its success demands advanced skills in responsive and effective relating without the benefit of a previously conceived plan. This reliance on moment-by-moment relation, navigating the constantly shifting configuration of stakeholders, information, objectives, and constraints is intensely demanding, less predictable, and far more creative than pre-scripted project performance. This reliance is also a form of work drawing on feminine capacities. Clearly we do not advocate

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forsaking the scripts of project management – the tools, models, and techniques that serve the profession well. But, despite *PMBOK*'s silence in this regard, we cannot help but wonder how the profession might look if its metaphors included the innovation of improvisation?

Defining Risk

Definition: “Risk management is the systematic process of identifying, analyzing, and responding to project risk. It includes maximizing the probability and consequences of positive event and minimizing the probability and consequences of adverse events to project objectives.” (*PMBOK*, 2000,127)

PMBOK's definition of risk advocates a preventive and rational treatment to aspects of organizational life that may pose as threats to the successful completion of projects as they are conceived by the project manager and project sponsors. It recognizes that environmental forces can interfere with the implementation of planned projects. And it advocates buffering project work from conflicting influences that can arise from within a project or outside of it.

Handling risks associated with project management is a serious concern to *PMBOK*'s authors. The chapter on risk is the book's lengthiest, revealing a strongly masculine orientation to issues of risk. To a project manager informed by a masculine value system, risk is a straightforward concept: that which threatens achievement of predetermined project objectives. In *PMBOK*'s words, risk is defined as “an uncertain event or condition that, if it occurs, has... a negative effect on a project objective” (p. 127). The profession has evolved extensive and often elaborate tactics to exert control over the unknown. Careful instruction is offered, describing how uncertainties (i.e. risks) ought to be identified, structured, and controlled through various tactics, budgets, and reporting.

Unquestionably, project managers have a responsibility to minimize cost and other inefficiencies, and risk management practices can help to do this. Interestingly, however, what remains unnoted in *PMBOK*'s discussion of project risk is the reality that, to the degree that project managers execute projects by successfully blocking obstructions or threats to initial planning, they also prevent new information from influencing the project process or desired outcomes: they prevent creativity from entering into the project system. The type of ready, fluid responsiveness known to be a strength of feminine cognition and behaviour takes a different approach to the unplanned events the profession views as risk. Instead of seeing the occurrence of 'risks' as exceptional events that ideally should not enter into daily project life, a feminine value system is receptive and interested in such 'deviations,' intently seeking a potential only mentioned in passing in *PMBOK*: “Project risk includes both threats to the project's objectives *and opportunities to improve on those objectives*” (our emphasis – p. 127).

DISCUSSION

As a documented and recognized standard of how project managers ought to construct, define, and achieve their success, the *PMBOK* system provides powerful

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messages⁵ about legitimate ways of thinking and behaving to individuals in professional work settings. While no current research evidence proves that *PMBOK* enhances the perceived success of project managers (Crawford, in press), the book has a wide following.

PMI has taken seriously its stewardship role in promoting the establishment of project management standards. A key element of this role has been codification of its body of knowledge in service of this aim. Codifying a body of knowledge is an ambitious system design task. Necessarily, PMI's design puts boundaries – gendered boundaries – around those forms of reasoning and behaviour deemed appropriate for the project management professional.

Masculine cognition and action is, perhaps, more amenable to codification, with its clear toward fidelity to normative standards determined at a project's outset, regardless of the peculiarities of specific situations arising through a project's life cycle. It is, perhaps, more difficult to document femininity's relational view of project realities that demand a moment by moment detection and response to subtle and dynamic environmental cues that unfold as a project progresses. The act of documenting a knowledge system, itself, seems to us a masculine-leaning endeavour, favouring a portrayal of project management as faithful performance of appropriate responses through terrain of threatening yet predictable challenges. We consider this system an example of a hazard of any system design, as Ulrich has said, that what gets left out or undervalued are those elements that seem un-neat: "The implicit criterion [for inclusion in a system] is that everything that cannot be controlled or is not known falls outside the boundaries of the model, so that the model itself looks neat and scientific." His argument, and ours, is that untidiness does not justify exclusion: "Aspects that are not well understood ought to be considered as belonging to the system in question rather than to its environment, at least until their significance has been studied" (Ulrich, 1991, 106-107).

Although *PMBOK*'s omission is understandable, critical systems theorists would claim it amounts to a failure to exercise responsibility. By implying that *PMBOK*'s prescriptions are the legitimate way to approach project management, PMI's *PMBOK* endeavour fails by suggesting that the book's approach constitutes *the* rational way to proceed (Romm, 1996) in managing projects. *PMBOK* is an inadequate knowledge system as critical systems theorists view adequacy: by making a system's normative content explicit (Ulrich, 1991). The system design project that resulted in *PMBOK* was a laudable attempt to increase the success and status of its profession. However, we argue that the result has considerable costs to the psychological health of project managers and to organizations they try to serve. Because its masculine bias is left tacit, project management's official body of knowledge is particularly damaging.

⁵ PMI, the book's authors, make strong adequacy claims for the book by widely publishing its distribution figures: By 2002, over 939,500 copies of *PMBOK* (1996 and 2000 versions) were in circulation, and it had been approved as an American National Standard by the American National Standards Institute (www.pmi.org, 2002).

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Jungian scholarship argues that the conscious exploration and development of both masculine and feminine capacities have considerable psychological benefit to individuals (cites). Among such benefits is an intrapersonal bridging function (cite Jung 1957a in our paper) that develops between masculine and feminine reasoning that could permit access to more creativity and problem solving power. Our call for the project management profession to advocate for the use of both gendered ways of reasoning and behaving arises from our concern with the personal, psychological development of project managers as human beings.

However, on its own, such a concern could be dismissed as uncritical emancipation (Gregory, 1996). After all, this is a profession concerned with the successful completion of projects for organizations. Beyond concern for the psychological health and career success of project managers, our call to emancipation should and does aim at improvement of project management itself. A truly systemic way of thinking measures success by its “improvement of the “larger system” (... the population to be served) rather than in terms of... individual careers” (Ulrich, 1996, 166-167). Emancipating the project management profession from overreliance on masculine ways of being and underreliance on feminine ways of being is a worthwhile goal because it will improve the effective managing of projects. Today’s complex projects demand the best of human functioning. Both masculine and feminine strengths have roles to play if project managers are to meet the challenges their projects demand.

Masculinity and femininity are examples of multiple knowledges, which (Schechter, 1991) identifies as a key element in the critical system thinker’s call to action. When two knowledges are present, one tends to be suppressed, rendering its dominant counterpart more greatly legitimized and therefore powerful (Flood and Romm, 1996). Suppression of one knowledge also leaves the other uncritiqued (Schechter, 1991). The matter goes beyond interests in critical reflection. In the case of masculine dominance in a professional knowledge system, when professional behaviour fails to meet organizational demands – which is often the case in this profession (cites) – project managers’ improvement efforts understandably draw on that same masculine focus, the kind of “misguided improvement effort” (Midgley, 1996) that is no improvement at all. Thus, we see project managers seeking to exert increased hierarchical power, dominance over people and processes, control, exercise of hierarchical power, and redoubled efforts to push through perceived project “risks” that deviate from original project specifications (cite our interviews paper). Feminine pursuits of improvement via greater relatedness to a project’s environment and receptivity to changes in that environment fall largely outside the system of practices the profession recommends. (Olga, 1991) has reported on the danger of one-dimensional uses of power. Given the profession’s official endorsement of a knowledge system dominated by masculinity, such unidimensionality in actual project management practice is understandable, but unfortunate.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

While the documentation of a body of knowledge may be an important step to establish of a new profession, as (Gregory, 1997) notes, we must remember that such communication is always distorted because it always leaves things out. We suggest that a worthwhile objective for the project management profession would be to make the value

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systems that govern *PMBOK* explicit, focusing on gender inequities in this knowledge system prescribes. The aim of such an effort would be to destabilize the “givenness” (Oliga, 1991) of this body of knowledge as the defining word on professionalism in project management. An outcome of such an effort, we believe, would be the transformation of *PMBOK* into a more open system, one better able to recognize the contributions that feminine cognition and behaviour do make to the effective management of project-based work – albeit covertly, at present (Thomas and Buckle Henning, in press).

We recommend that PMI treat revisiting the design of its body of knowledge as a project. Heeding (Gregory, 1996)’s advice, this project should be a multiactor one, involving project managers whose success has involved masculine orientations and those whose success has come from feminine strengths. To be a truly critical endeavour, the participation of both gender voices would empower and strengthen the reflective capacities (Brown, 1996) of *PMBOK* designers’ capacities to voice their thought processes and behaviours in project work, bringing such information into open dialogue. As we have indicated, hearing and incorporating the feminine voice in the design of codified knowledge systems is particularly challenging. The project’s critical objective would be to articulate and broaden the boundaries of recommended project management practice, developing consensus among the two gendered orientations in order to improve the success and continued growth of this important profession. Critical systems theorists have evolved considerable resources in the form of frameworks and questions (i.e. Ulrich, 1991; 1996; 2005) that can guide the project management revision project.

While the status quo is always a compelling option for any human system, the profession of project management shows signs of interest in critically revisiting its foundational tenets (e.g. (Hodgson and Cicmil, 2006); and the 2006 Special Issue of the International Journal of Project Management (24:8) on “Rethinking Project Management”). Critical systems theorists urge that such critique be viewed as a desire for citizenship: “We ought to support whatever readiness there is on the part of decision makers to think and to act more systemically, and perhaps we can even increase this readiness” (Ulrich, 1996, 167). Boundary critique is a concrete means to move toward increased inclusiveness in project management’s knowledge system, and, we believe, increased responsiveness to the organizational demands project managers face.

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