

# PROJECT REPORT

## A CROSS-CULTURAL JOINT VENTURE or ADVENTURE?

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### Introduction

Joint ventures between companies that are geographically, culturally, and technologically close to one another often fail to deliver the benefits the partners hope for. The twenty-year history of litigation between Intel and AMD is a spectacular example of what can happen when companies join forces without sharing goals, objectives, or a passion to serve shared customers. Serving today's intelligent, educated, and affluent customers requires that we form alliances with those who can do what we cannot do for ourselves.

### What Makes a Successful Joint Venture?

A successful joint-venture project may depend on many factors. Among them are the relationships among the principles that must include:

- a high degree of trust,
- determination to do together what cannot be done separately,
- clear understandings about who will contribute what to the effort, and
- technology that supports a seamless integration of the values added by each of the partners.

Managing a cross-cultural joint venture brings many unexpected rewards well beyond the business purposes it was undertaken to achieve.

### Bridging Distance, Culture, and History

To begin at the beginning, I must go to October of 1998 when I attended my first PMI Global Leadership Meeting in Long Beach, California. At one of the luncheons, charters for new PMI chapters were distributed. Among the recipients was a gentleman named Vladimir Liberzon who had founded a PMI chapter in Moscow, Russia. I got to know Vladimir and his wife, Maria (Masha) Klavdeiva who interprets between English and Russian professionally. At the time I was still writing my first book. After the Leadership Meeting and the Symposium, I continued my relationship with Vladimir and Masha via e-mail.

By the time the book was finished, we had agreed that Masha would translate it and Vladimir would publish it in Moscow. By the end of 2000, Vladimir had sold many copies of the book including two to company CEOs who contacted him independently to ask if I might come to Moscow to conduct seminars for their employees. Vladimir and Masha's kindness and generosity had opened the way to a part of the world I'd never hoped to explore.

I made my first trip to Moscow in June of 2001. My first seminar was held in a classroom belonging to Moscow's IT Company and among the participants was a director of the company, Alexey Bazhenov. On my second trip to Moscow in June of 2002, I was greeted at Sheremetyevo Airport by Vladimir and Alexey Bazhenov, who drove us to the Moskva Hotel and helped me with my luggage and the check-in procedure. When I was handed a card, in Russian, to prove that I was registered at the hotel, Alexey noticed my puzzled look at the foreign alphabet. He took the card from my hand, turned it upside down, and handed it back to me. "Now it is in English!" he joked. Later, I invited Alexey to visit California and he asked, "Why would I come to California, we have McDonalds in Moscow?" Sharing humor is a vital step in building trust and in moving from acquaintance to friendship.

### Adding the Unexpected

In what seemed an unrelated parallel development, in September of 2000 I formed a partnership with Cyndi Snyder, then president of the Orange County, California chapter of PMI, to create a set of PMP Examination Preparation training materials and to create an on-line study aid for the examination. We established January 1 as the deadline for the training materials and March 15 for the launch of our website that includes over 900 practice questions with text references and explanations of their correct answers. Both projects were completed a few days earlier than scheduled. In September of 2003, Cyndi and I reached an agreement to terminate the partnership and I became the sole owner of the materials and the study aid.

By the end of 2003, neither the Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge® nor the Project Management Professional® (PMP®) examination were available in the Russian language but both projects were in progress as a result of several years of effort and substantial financial contributions from PMI members in Russia. The PMP has become a globally recognized designation of competence. Making the distinction available to competent project managers in Russia who do not speak, read, or write English is essential to both the value of the certification and to the further development of the project management discipline. The contributions of this very sophisticated economy are simply too profound to ignore.

## Seeds Of AdVenture

In the meantime, Alexey Bazhenov had left IT Company and with a partner, Alexey Arefiev, founded PMO.ru. Alexey had also succeeded Vladimir Liberzon as president of the Moscow chapter of PMI. By May of 2004, we reached an agreement to create a Russian language version of our website. To begin the project, I delivered a CD containing the 937 preparation questions to PMO.ru on my visit to Moscow in June.

Our original plan was to build a second site, with a Russian address. That plan, fortunately, did not survive. Instead, Glen Christiansen who is president of Christiansen Consultants, called my attention to a very desirable technical alternative. Glen suggested that it is possible to maintain a single website in multiple languages, displaying the website in the language preferred by the computer being used to access the site. This alternative eliminates several disadvantages that might have been associated with duplicate sites:

- Material shared between the sites need not be duplicated and synchronized, an administrative nightmare,
- Duplicate costs are eliminated,
  - domain registration,
  - site hosting,
  - advertising,
  - data back-up,
  - payment authorization services
  - banking services
- Confusion among potential customers about which website is intended for them is prevented.
- The investment to add a second language can be leveraged to additional languages.
- Users of the service can move from one language to another whenever it meets their needs.

For now, visitors to the website whose computers prefer the Russian language see the site in Russian. All others see it in English. When other languages are added, visitors will see the site in the language of their preference.

Agreements in place, all that remained was to accommodate both the Latin and Cyrillic alphabets in a single SQL database, translate over 900 practice questions and 60 pages of html, distinguish shared and independent administrative functions and build processes to support both, and coordinate the efforts of five people across an eleven time zone separation.

## Challenges

These technical challenges were accomplished while overcoming language, cultural, and work/holiday schedule differences. Written words, unaccompanied by gestures, tone of voice, body language, or inflection are a lousy means of communication. E-mail simply allows us to confuse our readers more quickly. Nevertheless, e-mail overcomes much of the difficulty associated with an eleven hour difference in time. Christmas, in another example, is celebrated on December 25 in the United States and on January 7 in Russia.

As is the case with most projects, resolution of one set of issues often led to the discovery of yet another set of issues. Many of the practice questions, like many of the questions of the PMP examination, are based on texts that are not available in the Russian language. Only patience, understanding, and determination held the team together. By early October a project deadline of February 1 had been established and was being advertised on the website for Russian language visitors.

## Ukraine Experience

I've returned from my fifth trip to Central and Eastern Europe. This time I visited Poland, Russia, and an entirely different Ukraine than on my two earlier visits. During the election difficulties, there was a separatist movement that might have resulted in eastern Ukraine splitting off and rejoining Russia. This movement was funded by an oligarch who owns many factories in eastern Ukraine. At the same time, the Putin government filed additional tax evasion charges against Russian oligarchs similar to those filed in the Yukos fiasco. Apparently the fellow in Ukraine decided he wanted no part of that and withdrew funding of the separatist movement. Ukraine will remain united thanks to Vladimir Putin. Good news!

I spent 45 minutes with Tanya Starinska, a lady 20 years of age, who spent 17 days in November/December camped out on Chrishchatic Street near the Square of Independence in Kiev. Her story of events, and her enthusiasm for what she and one million others accomplished, were most inspiring. Apparently the mood was very like our Woodstock of the '60s with music groups performing in the long pauses between political news.

Late in the interview, Tanya said that she and the others understood that politics is corrupting and that the Yushchenko government would not end this permanent human condition. But, she said, the change of government was not the important thing. "The most important change was the change inside each of us." Her generation has succeeded in taking some measure of control over their environment, unlike any Ukrainian generation in several centuries. They have created a whole new way of thinking about themselves. Awesome! Tears came.

### **Tatarstan**

My visit to Kazan was most encouraging. Tatarstan has determined to distinguish itself in Russia as the home of Russian innovation. I delivered my seminar in a brand new building of a campus of five buildings erected to house a business incubator. They've selected the first 15 start-up companies from over 400 applications to fund and house for up to 2 years while they get product into the market and build strength to survive on their own.

The Board of Directors of the incubator includes the "president" and many of the governing council of Tatarstan and clearly enjoys the support of the Putin government. Kazan also enjoys a close relationship with independent Kazakstan where the national government has made a decision to carry out a similar project. I was asked if I would be willing to travel to Almaty, Kazakstan to deliver my seminar there. Almaty is within 30 miles of the Kyrgestan border and about 120 miles from the Chinese border in central Asia. Time will tell if this will happen.

### **On To Poland**

Poland is well on its way to being a modern capitalist democracy. It has several political parties and the government moves from one party to another in every election. The great beauty of that is that politicians really try to be helpful to the economy rather than simply trying to consolidate power as we experience in our two party system and Russia is experiencing with only one party that matters. The shortcoming is that the shifts in power are usually accompanied by an extended period of uncertainty that stifles investment. Ukraine has also been "on hold" since September and was just beginning to rev up again in the last two weeks.

### **Back To Moscow**

On the evening of January 31, I had dinner in a Moscow restaurant that offers free wireless access to the Internet. From our table, my Russian partners and I were able to make the final change that brought the website up in both English and Russian. At 18:27 Moscow time, our joint effort became the only PMP study aid available in more than one language. It now stands as evidence that the project management discipline, coupled with humor and trust, can overcome barriers that have eluded political leaders throughout history. It can bring people together in positive and constructive ways to achieve goals that are both commercially successful and of real value to customers.

### **Home**

I've learned several lessons from my experience.

- We can learn to trust people who are from very different backgrounds.
- Our relationships with other people can motivate us to take on and overcome difficult challenges.
- Building business relationships on personal relationships is more likely to succeed than starting with business and hoping for the personal relationships that really matter.
- We are lucky to live in a time when technology helps us overcome the barriers of distance, culture, and history.

Since Christmas, I've slept in 12 different beds, spent one night in the air and four on trains. It is very good to be home, enjoy my family, and pet the dog. Yesterday I reached an agreement that will lead to a Mandarin edition of **[www.pm-prepare.com](http://www.pm-prepare.com)**. I'm also involved in conversations about Japanese, Spanish, and Brazilian Portuguese. I hope this joint venture goes on a long time.

## Ed Fern

**Editor's Note:** Ed Fern is one of our favorite deep-thinking rebels, together with Paul Giammalvo. Ed's PM certification preparation website, mentioned above, is [www.pm-prepare.com](http://www.pm-prepare.com). He expressed concerns about being perceived as selling, versus telling his story, so we are mentioning his website here, rather than in the story. Ed's last article, Six Steps to the Future: How Mass Customization Is Changing Our World, is the all-time record holder for *asapm* downloads.