

Ein Interview mit dem Projektleiter

Megaprojekt: *Die Erweiterung des Panamakanals*

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José Reyes graduated in Civil Engineering at the Universidad Santa María (1985) and has a Master Degree in Business Administration, and studies in Management and Strategic Planning from Universidad Interamericana and Program Management at George Washington University. He has received training at INCAE, US and European universities and participated and attended workshops, technical seminars in diverse countries of America and Europe. He is author of articles, papers and a textbook in Project Management, Chairman of the Panamanian Association of Project Management and Director of LATNET (IPMA Networks of Latin Associations). Currently José Reyes is engaged in his Doctorate degree at SMC University, Switzerland. He has 30 years of experience working in different managerial positions at the Panama Canal Authority and ten years as University Professor in project management curricula.

Die Erweiterung des Panamakanals gehört sicherlich zu den größten Megaprojekten unserer Zeit. Schon kurz nach der Fertigstellung des Suezkanals vor 150 Jahren reifte der Gedanke heran, einen Kanal in Panama zu bauen. Analog zum Suezkanal, der den langen Schiffsweg um Afrika um mehrere 1.000 km verkürzte, sollte der Panamakanal die Umschiffung Südamerikas überflüssig machen. Dazu engagierte man den Erbauer des Suezkanals als Projektleiter. Leider übersah man die geografischen/geologischen und die klimatischen Unterschiede. Nach mehreren Fehlversuchen wurde der Panamakanal dann am Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts von den USA gebaut.

Das Interesse der USA war offensichtlich weniger wirtschaftlich als vielmehr militärisch begründet. Geostrategisch war es für die USA sowohl im Ersten als auch noch viel mehr im Zweiten Weltkrieg wichtig, ihre Teilflotten (im Atlantik und im Pazifik) nach Bedarf schwerpunktmäßig wahlweise in einem der beiden Ozeane zu vereinigen, ohne dazu die lange Reise um Südamerika antreten zu müssen. Die von den Amerikanern eingerichtete und von ihnen verwaltete Kanalzone zerschnitt dabei Panama praktisch in zwei Teile und machte deutlich, dass die theoretische Souveränität des panamaischen Staates in der Praxis deutlichen Einschränkungen unterlag. So wurde der Kampf für die Rückgabe des Kanals (wiederum analog zum Suezkanal!) zum politischen Kampf für die eigene Souveränität. Zum Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts wurde der Kanal von den USA an Panama

übertragen, wobei die USA für bestimmte politische Entwicklungen vertraglich ein „ewiges Sonderinterventionsrecht“ behielten. In diesem Zusammenhang ist sicherlich auch das chinesische Bemühen interessant, in Nicaragua den Bau eines Kanals voranzutreiben, bei dem es kein Recht auf US-amerikanische Intervention gäbe. Die Kostenschätzungen für dieses Projekt liegen in der Größenordnung von 30 Milliarden USD.

Vor Kurzem ist der Suezkanal mit einem Aufwand von ungefähr acht Milliarden USD erweitert worden. Dafür wird eine Verdoppelung des Umsatzes erwartet. Die Erweiterung des Panamakanals, die fünf bis sechs Milliarden USD kosten soll, wird die maximale Größe z.B. für Containerschiffe von ungefähr 4.000 Container pro Schiff auf ungefähr 14.000 Container mehr als verdreifachen. Das Projekt zur Erweiterung des Panamakanals startete 2007 mit dem Ziel, zum 100-jährigen Jubiläum 2014 fertig zu sein. Nach einigen Verzögerungen ist die Eröffnung für 2016 vorgesehen. Unser Gesprächspartner war José E. Reyes G., PE, IPMA-Level-B-zertifiziert, Projektmanager des Third Set of Locks Project der Atlantic Panama Canal Authority, dem über mehrere Jahre im Rahmen des Projektes ungefähr 5.000 Mitarbeiter unterstellt waren. Das Interview führte Prof. Nino Grau

The expansion of the Panama Canal is without doubt one of the mega projects of our time. Could you please outline the key challenges of this project in terms of project owner, expectations, budget (financial, manpower, time) etc.?



Ein Blick auf die Baustelle: Zu sehen sind die neuen Schleusen auf der Atlantikseite, bereits mit etwas Wasser gefüllt, und die noch trockenen Pufferbecken direkt daneben. Links oben passiert gerade ein Schiff die alten Schleusen. Rechts ist das x-förmige neue Informationszentrum für Besucher zu erkennen. Foto: Panama Canal Authority

José Reyes: The Panama Canal Expansion Program is composed of five major projects, dredging of Pacific and Atlantic Entrances, construction of a new Access Channel to the Pacific Locks, new Locks at the Pacific and Atlantic sites and dredge and rising Gatun lake level. These projects involve interaction with multi disciplines, multicultural and multi generation parties. Then, one of the key challenges was to maintain proper communication between stakeholders. In addition, because of the high visibility of the program, these stakeholders include industrial sectors, economies and counties. The effort to maintain the type, quality and flow of information is higher than any other technical or engineering problem to resolve.

What is the project structure (upper level of the work breakdown structure)?

The expansion program is a breakdown in five projects as described above and the main

deliverables are divided into work packages to allow proper control and follow up. The WBS and schedule is managed in Primavera due to the amount of tasks (more than 20,000) and each of the main deliverables is assigned to a Project Manager who is accountable for the results.

Which administrative roles have been defined in the project? What is your position and what are your responsibilities?

The administration of this program has been delegated to the contractual and construction management roles. The PMO responsibility is headed by a Contracting Officer/Employer Representative who oversees compliance with the contractual requirements. This Officer is then supported by Project Managers who are responsible for the delivery of the works associated with the five main projects of the Program. The Project manager leads a PSO (Project Site Office) that is commonly composed of a Construction

Unit, a Quality Assurance Unit and a Control Unit. The PSO also has its own administrative support personnel. There are approximately 300 professionals of all disciplines working for the PMO. My current position is to lead a Project Directorate of the PSO responsible for the delivery of the New Locks. I have about 50 professionals in my PSO Team. The Team must oversee the works of 5,000 contracted workers.

From your point of view, what are the most important success and failure factors? How did you prepare to meet these challenges in advance and how do you handle them now during the implementation of the project?

One of the most important factors to manage a Mega project is to have a competent team whereby competence is defined not only by the technical skills but mostly by the attitude and focus of each individual towards the project objectives.

A project site with more than 39 nationalities working side by side, day and night need elements such as partnership, collaboration and assertive communication to achieve the desired results. I started early by looking for people with the proper profile, that is with leadership and communication skills. I lead by example and practicing our IPMA behavioral competences. My IPMA formation allowed me to respond in the proper way to the challenges and events that are part of a project which has such a large-scale dimension and which has such a high complexity.

Many members of the IPMA Special Interest Group (SIG) Mega Projects are of the opinion that the biggest risk factor for mega projects in the public domain (mostly infrastructure projects) is shareholder management especially with regards to special interest groups in the general public. What is your experience for example regarding referendum or promises made by political parties?

I am totally in agreement with this statement. A project that can influence world shipping commercial routes, the development of port facilities, the economy of countries and the expectations of an entire population have a lot of external pressures. That is why the communication plan and stakeholder management best practices are key competences to achieve successfully project goals that generally have nothing to do with scope, cost and time but with satisfying stakeholder expectations. For the Panama Canal Expansion program, and considering that the Panama Canal is under a Panamanian Government Agency, its performance and disruptions cannot be disassociated from the government public image. This is an element to be considered especially when addressing the public by any type of media. This is the reason why it is necessary to control information and distribution.

How do you perform risk management in your project?

Risk management is mandatory in a mega Project. It is fact that financial institutions and lenders request the implementation of proper risk assessment forces. The Canal Expansion Program has employed a dedicated group of professionals to properly control the risk. The project contingency is managed in addition to any change request that can modify the project

baseline. The PMO has implemented a robust Change Management System that incorporates risk assessment in order to maintain a proper and updated risk register at all times.

Which international geopolitical factors do you consider and how do you manage them such as Panama, Suez, Nicaragua Canal, China and USA?

The Panama Canal organization has its own strategic and marketing division and assesses constantly worldwide events and economic trends. This information is used to update our strategic databases and for Upper Management decision making and policies. These strategic directives are cascaded to the project organization in order to allow us to know the value of deliverables of the Canal operations, also that our efforts are aligned to our strategic objectives where the geopolitical factors were considered such as the Suez Canal modernization, the Nicaragua Canal Plans, and trend of commerce of China, USA and other key canal stakeholders.

Do you experience any challenges due to intercultural factors such as ethnic or language barriers e.g. when dealing with employees, international suppliers, banks etc.?

Fortunately, Panama is a multicultural country, for more than 500 years, Panama has been a route that the world has used for commerce. This has allowed the Panamanian culture to be open to any culture. Our bilingual society allows us to communicate with most of those who visit our shores for any reason. Our business and financial center in addition to our connections has helped us to overcome all possible intercultural problems or ethnical or language barriers that a mega project as the Canal Expansion Program can face, without mayor difficulties.

How do you manage diversity e.g. gender, race, disability?

As project director with the responsibility to lead one of the teams to accomplish the Canal Expansion objectives, I need to focus the competence of the person instead of gender, race or disability. However, there are some specific tasks that need excellent physical conditions and these are described in the competences and task profiles of each position. The process of selecting, hiring, evaluating, recognizing and developing people at the PMO is aligned to the overall Canal strategy. Competence mapping

is done initially to determine the deliverables expected from each individual. When selecting, these deliverables are the selection criteria, the deviations to this criteria is then the development plan for the individual. In addition, the same criteria with the proper goals are the performance evaluation that runs recognition or disciplinary actions. The process is documented and follows our legal framework.

Do (or did) you face any challenges because the canal used to be controlled by the military before control was handed over to a civilian company?

This is part of Panama Canal history; the present Canal organization has used this heritage and incorporated business oriented practices. The discipline of the military history of the Canal combined with the business and customer focus in response to modern context is the basis of the current canal success and numbers. Values are important for proper practice, the pressure of context and political factors can affect an organization if it lacks discipline and government practice, the need of it always follow the book. ■