

Were the Three Stooges Really Good Project Managers?

by Gareth Byatt, Gary Hamilton, and Jeff Hodgkinson, with Eric Lamond

Background:

For those of you not familiar with the Three Stooges, they were an American vaudeville and comedy act of the early to mid-20th century best known for their numerous short subject films. Their hallmark was physical farce and extreme slapstick. In films, the Stooges were commonly known by their first names: "Moe, Larry, and Curly" and "Moe, Larry, and Shemp," among others. The film trio was originally composed of Moe Howard, brother Shemp Howard and Larry Fine. Curly Howard replaced brother Shemp, who later returned when Curly suffered a debilitating stroke in May 1946. Starting in 1922 until Moe's death in 1975, the team appeared in exactly 220 films (30 motion pictures and 190 short films).

Some 50 years after their last short film was released, the Three Stooges remain wildly popular with audiences around the world. Their films have not left the television airwaves since first appearing in 1958, and they continue to delight old fans while attracting a new legion of fervent admirers. A hard-working group of working-class comedians who were never the critic's darlings, the team endured several personnel changes in their careers that would have permanently sidelined a less persistent act. Despite his watching two of his brothers die in a brief span of time, the Stooges would not have lasted as long as they did as a unit without Moe Howard's guiding hand.

In the end, it is the durability of the 190 timeless short films the Stooges made at Columbia Pictures that acts as an enduring tribute to the comedy team. Look for a full feature movie to be released in 2012.

Guest Contributor

We are thrilled that Eric Lamond, grandson of the Stooge, Larry Fine, agreed to be interviewed for this article. Mr. Lamond is the Director of Marketing for C3 Entertainment, Inc., which licenses the Three Stooges. We asked if any of the original hand drawn production schedules were available for use in this article but, unfortunately, none remain.

So, how did the Stooges work?

Each member was a successful Vaudeville entertainer in his own right; they teamed up in the late 1920's somewhat by chance to become 'The Three Stooges', with a mutual career goal of going to Hollywood to make films. They signed with Columbia Pictures to make feature films; however, because their audience couldn't get enough of their wit and comedy, they continued to make their numerous 16-minute 'short films'. Keep in mind that in the 1920's, with television still decades in the future, the movie experience to the public consisted of a newsreel, cartoons, a short film, and then one or two feature films. A ticket cost 25 to 50 cents USD and, for another 25 cents, you could get all the popcorn, candy, and soda you could eat and drink.

During their lengthy careers, (from 1934 to 1958), the Stooges released a total of 190 short films, or 8 short films per year. A Master plan for the intended short films was published annually at a rate of eight per year. This Master plan had to take into account the 10 weeks that the Stooges devoted to public appearances, vacations and such.

Each short film had a storyline with a 'situation' which was then scripted, edited, final scripted, cast, rehearsed, and scheduled to film (which took 4-6 days). There was a team of writers, directors, supporting actors, props, grips and film editors working on these films. The Stooges contracted with the studio only one year at a time and, toward the end of this period, they made the break into longer feature films. This happened in 1958, just as television became popular and 60 of their short films were released for TV, which helped their popularity soar and resulted in their finally being invited to make full length films. Films, personal appearances and a cartoon series continued until 1970 at which time Larry had a stroke. Both Moe and Larry died within months of each other in 1975.

Neither Moe nor Larry had any regrets about their career paths, other than their wish to have done more motion pictures versus short films. Keep in mind that during the Depression when the market was only for their short films, they were paid well, lived well and eventually achieved their goal of making only feature films. They were proud of what they had accomplished and lived by a motto quoted from Joe DiMaggio (a famous baseball player from that era) that "whatever I do, this might be the one and only time people will see me so I have to do my best."

So, what can we take from this for our program and project management community?

Analysis in Program/Project Terms:

- Moe was the Program Manager of the team in their 50-year program consisting of 220 projects. He led the overall Masterplan. Larry was the Assistant Program Manager, supporting Moe's work.
- For 24 consecutive years, they scheduled a steady eight projects per year. Each project had a lifecycle of Idea, Final Script, Casting, Rehearsing, Scheduling, Set-up, Filming, Editing and Release. That is to say, these guys worked to a controlled schedule.
- They had a strict budget for each film, as the theatre would pay only so much for short films. Their budget management had to be very tightly controlled.
- The Stooges had to deal with a diverse group of stakeholders — a project team of writers, directors, actors, managers, camera men, prop personnel, schedulers, and others involved in the making of films. All of this means that they had to deal with different ideas and views. They knew that their key external stakeholders — the Columbia studio executives and the theatre audiences — could make or break their reputation, and they kept them in the forefront of their minds.
- They had a vision and an end goal, which was to make full length movies. That took the Stooges 30 years to achieve, yet they never lost sight of it; all of their actions took them closer to this goal as they steadily enhanced their reputation.
- Upon completion of their goal, they had no real regrets and had executed to the best of their abilities over all those years.
- Their projects have stood the test of time, and, arguably, realised all the benefits they had hoped to achieve.

In Conclusion

People in the program/project management profession would probably not readily identify the Three Stooges as being relevant to their daily work – however, our research and the interview kindly granted to us by Mr. Lamond suggests otherwise. Although we only see the final output of the “16 minutes of buffoonery” in their short films, and their movies for that matter, the amount of project management activity undertaken by the Stooges when producing these iconic pieces of popular culture was tremendous.

Keep in mind this was well before the existence of computers, scheduling software, email, mobile phones, and all the collaborative and productivity devices that we PM practitioners use today. They had a plan and they worked that plan. How many of us will be able to say that 50 to 80+ years after the completion of one of our projects, that outputs will still be utilized and enjoyed globally?

We hope this article has given you a different perspective on how to view and appreciate project management. For those readers that don't agree with us and/or don't like this article, we can only respond with a time-honoured Stooges quote: “Nyuk – Nyuk – Nyuk”.

Article Author Bios

<p style="text-align: center;">About The Article Authors, Their Roles Their Plans, And Their Goals</p>	<p>Gareth Byatt, Gary Hamilton, and Jeff Hodgkinson are experienced PMO, program, and project managers who developed a mutual friendship by realising we shared a common passion to help others and share knowledge about PMO, portfolio, program and project management (collectively termed PM below). In February 2010 we decided to collaborate on a three (3) year goal to write 50 PM subject articles for publication in any/all PM subject websites, newsletters, and professional magazines / journals.</p> <p>Readership of the articles is continuously increasing and we are fortunate to have assistance from people around the world who have taken the time to translate our articles into Arabic, Czechoslovakian, French, German, Indonesia, Italian, Korean, Spanish, Portuguese, and Russian for their readers. Our articles are published on websites in 30 countries including Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Italy, India, Jamaica, Jordan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Pakistan, Panama, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Singapore, South Korea, Spain, Sri Lanka, Trinidad, Turkey, UK, Ukraine and the USA.</p> <p>Our mission with these articles is to help expand good PMO, program, and project management practices by promoting the PM profession, to be a positive influence to the PM Community, be known as eminent influencers of good PM practices, and in earnest hope readers can gain benefit from the advice of their 66+ years of combined experience plus the expertise of co-authors who kindly write with us on particular subjects. As of May, 2012, we have been published over 600 times! Along with writing articles, each also champions a role in the overall writing program collaboration process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Gareth manages all requests for additional guest author collaborations → Gary manages the article development tracking and readership metrics → Jeff manages the article distribution and new readership demographics <p>Each of us can be contacted for advice, coaching, collaboration, and speaking individually as noted in our bios or as a team at: Contactus@pmoracles.com</p>
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	<p>Gareth Byatt has 16+ years of experience in project, program and PMO management in IT and construction for Lend Lease. Gareth has worked in several countries and lives in Sydney, Australia. He can be contacted through LinkedIn. Gareth holds numerous degrees, certifications, and credentials in program and project management as follows: an MBA from one of the world's leading education establishments, a 1st-class undergraduate management degree, and the PMP[®], PgMP[®], PMI-RMP[®], PMI-SP[®] & PRINCE2[®] professional certifications.</p> <p>Gareth is a past Director of the PMI Sydney Chapter, he is currently the APAC Region Director for the PMI's PMO Community of Practice and he chairs several peer networking groups. He has presented on PMOs, portfolio and program and project management at international conferences in the UK, Australia, & Asia including PMI APAC in 2010.</p> <p>Email Gareth: gareth.byatt@gmail.com</p>
	<p>Gary Hamilton has 17+ years of project and program management experience in IT, finance, and human resources and volunteers as the VP of Programs for the PMI East Tennessee chapter. Gary is a 2009 & 2010 Presidents' Volunteer Award recipient for his charitable work with local fire services and professional groups. He has won several internal awards for results achieved from projects and programs he managed as well as being named one of the Business Journal's Top 40 Professionals in 2007.</p> <p>Gary is the 5th person globally to obtain the six PMI credentials PgMP[®], PMP[®], PMI-RMP[®], PMI-SP[®], PMI-ACP[®], and CAPM[®]. In addition to these, Gary holds numerous other degrees and certifications in IT, management, and project management and they include: an advanced MBA degree in finance, Project+, PRINCE2, MSP, ITIL-F, MCTS (SharePoint), MCITP (Project), CSM (Certified Scrum Master), and Six Sigma GB professional certifications.</p> <p>Email Gary: Gary@PMOracles.com or contact him through LinkedIn.</p>
	<p>Jeff Hodgkinson is a 33+ year veteran of Intel Corporation, where he continues on a progressive career as a senior program/project manager. Jeff is an IT@Intel SME and blogs on Intel's Community for IT Professionals for Program/Project Management subjects and interests. He is also the Intel IT PMO PMI Credential Mentor supporting colleagues in pursuit of a new credential. In 2012, he earned an IAA (Intel Achievement Award), Intel's highest recognition, with the team for work in implementing an industry-leading private cloud solution.</p> <p>Jeff received the 2010 PMI (Project Management Institute) Distinguished Contribution Award for his support of the Project Management profession from the Project Management Institute. Jeff was the 2nd place finalist for the 2011 Kerzner Award and was also the 2nd place finalist for the 2009 Kerzner International Project Manager of the Year Award™. He also received the 2011 GPM™ Sustainability Award. He lives in Mesa, Arizona, USA and is a member of Phoenix PMI Chapter. Because of his contributions to helping people achieve their goals, he is the third (3rd) most recommended person on LinkedIn with 590+ recommendations, and is ranked 33rd most networked LinkedIn person.</p> <p>Jeff holds numerous certifications and credentials in program and project management, which are as follows: CAPM[®], CCS, CDT, CPC™, CIPM™, CPPM–Level 10, CDRP, CSM™, CSQE, GPM™, IPMA-B[®], ITIL-F, MPM™, PME™, PMOC, PMP[®], PgMP[®], PMI-RMP[®], PMI-SP[®], PMW, and SSGB. Jeff is an expert at program and project management principles and best practices. Jeff is currently focusing on gaining additional expertise in energy efficiency and home energy savings alternatives.</p> <p>Email Jeff: jghmesa@gmail.com or contact him through LinkedIn and/or Facebook</p>

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