Brief analysis of the discovery of America as a success case for the project stakeholder management

Guillermo Montero*
Dpto. de Organización Industrial y Gestión de Empresas II,
Escuela Superior de Ingenieros,
Universidad de Sevilla,
Av. Descubrimientos s/n, Sevilla 41092, Spain
Email: gmontero@us.es
*Corresponding author

Adolfo Lopez-Paredes and Javier Pajares
Dpto. de Organización de Empresas y CIM,
Escuela de Ingenierías Industriales,
Universidad de Valladolid,
Paseo del Cauce S/N, Valladolid 47011, Spain
Email: adolfo@insisoc.org
Email: pajares@insisoc.org

Luis Onieva
Dpto. de Organización Industrial y Gestión de Empresas II,
Escuela Superior de Ingenieros,
Universidad de Sevilla,
Av. Descubrimientos s/n, Sevilla 41092, Spain
Email: onieva@us.es

Abstract: The Discovery of America marks the point between the medieval times and the modern age, and it can be considered as a good case study for the project stakeholder management. Although the Stakeholder Theory appeared in the 1980s in the Management, it took a relevant function in the project management in the last years. The different roles played by the main actors allowed the project to be successfully consummated in terms of the stakeholders’ view. This paper considers its applications within an example and identifies the main stakeholders in the project.

Keywords: stakeholder management; project management; PMBOK; Columbus; Discovery of America.

**Objective**

This paper tries to introduce the Discovery of America, one of the most relevant facts in the history, as a successful example of the project stakeholder management. The objective is to analyse this historical event from the point of view of the stakeholders, their engagement and how it, and specifically, its management allowed reaching the project goal: to open an alternative route to the west to the Indies.

The structure of the paper is an introduction about the project stakeholder management, a description of the main relevant facts related to the discovery, as well as of the project, a section that shows the stakeholder management in this specific project and, finally, the conclusions.
2 Project stakeholder management

Stakeholder theory sets that the organisation has relationships with many actors or groups and that it can engender and maintain the support of these by considering and balancing their relevant interests (Clarkson, 1998; Evan and Freeman, 1988; Freeman, 2010; Harrison and Wicks, 2010; Jones and Wicks, 1999; Reynolds et al., 2006).

There are some projects that are considered unsuccessful, though time, cost and quality objectives are achieved, because they have been a failure from the perspective that a stakeholder of the project, for example a sponsor or promoter, has not been satisfied with the final result (Lopez-Paredes and Pajares-Gutierrez, 2009).

In the last version of the Project Management Body of Knowledge, PMBOK®, (PMI, 2013), as also in the new ISO 21500, Guidance on Project Management (ISO, 2012), project stakeholder management becomes relevant within the inclusion of that as an independent knowledge area.

Bearing in mind the definition that PMBOK® shows that “a stakeholder is an individual, group or organisation who may affect, be affected by, or perceive itself to be affected by a decision, activity or outcome of a project. Stakeholders may be actively involved in the project or have interests that may be positively or negatively affected by the performance or completion of the project”.

In this sense, stakeholders may be people, groups or organisations who may affect or be affected, as well as be involved in the project or have interests.

Stakeholders are a fundamental element in the definition of the project framework, since with their action they determine the success possibilities. It is necessary to integrate them into the project and to consider their objectives while defining the scope (Lopez-Paredes and Pajares-Gutierrez, 2009; Montero, 2011).

3 Discovery of America

The Discovery of America by Christopher Columbus has been one of the relevant facts in world history, because it allowed the relationship between two different lands that were separated until then.

This event can be considered within a project management perspective in the usual knowledge areas. The Discovery of America is an excellent example of project stakeholder management.

The Columbus’ adventure took place after the Hundred Years’ War, the first crisis of the Catholic Church, the decline of the Holy Roman Empire and, above all, the occupation of the Ottomans in Constantinople in 1453 (Gómez Gómez, 2012; Verlinden and Pérez-Embíd, 2006). This is a fact of special relevance, blocking the Silk Road to China, India and Japan.

In 1249, the Reconquista in Portugal ended with the capture of the Algarve. This enabled the kingdom to take the initiative in discovering new territories overseas. In 1479, Portugal and Castile signed Alcaçovas Treaty (confirmed in 1481, with the papal bull Æterni regis), which granted all lands south of the Canary Islands to Portugal. By this treaty, all the lands discovered later by Columbus should belong to Portugal, although the existence of land west of Europe was unknown at the time of the drafting and signing of the treaty (Payne, 1973). King John II sought to reach the Indies, Cathay
and Cipangu by a new route around Africa. Under his reign, Bartolomeu Dias reached the
Cape of Good Hope, which opened the way to Asia.

Columbus studied widely about astronomy, geography and history, which originated
his project (Gómez Gómez, 2012; Morgan, 2009; Verlinden and Pérez-Embid, 2006). His
readings included the works of Claudius Ptolemy (Berggren and Jones, 2000), Cardinal
Pierre d’Ailly’s Imago Mundi (d'Ailly, 1990), the travels of Marco Polo (Polo and
Murray, 1845) and Pope Pius II’s Historia Rerum Ubique Gestarum (Pio II, 1991).

Columbus’ technical preparations of the project were clear, however most authors
agree that Columbus was a bad manager.

The marriage of Christopher Columbus and Filipa Moniz Perestrelo, belonging to the
Portuguese nobility, allowed him to be able to access the most important people in
Portugal.

Columbus presented his project to John II of Portugal in 1483. The king submitted the
proposal to a committee of experts, who dismissed it.

After rejection of the project by the King of Portugal (and an attempted assassination
of the king that his family in law could be involved), Columbus headed to Castile in 1484
for submission of his project to the Catholic Monarchs, while his brother Bartholomew
was commissioned to do so in his name, first to the Court of England, and then in the
France. Both Henry VII of England and Charles VIII of France rejected the proposal, or
at least did not give approval on time.

Christopher Columbus got his first meeting with the Catholic Monarchs in 1486 in
Alcalá de Henares (see Figure 1), thanks to two Franciscan monks Hernando de Talavera
and Antonio de Marchena. The latter monk can be considered in fact as the real leader
of the project (Lopez-Paredes and Pajares-Gutierrez, 2009; Manzano Manzano, 1984). His
name appears in all correspondence between Columbus and the Kings (Ortega, 1927).

From the first time it was presented, the Queen Isabela was interested in Columbus’
proposal. After several meetings, including some in which the project had been rejected,
Isabella postponed because of it to the conquest of Granada.

The key role in the project by King Ferdinand (Ibarra, 1847) and the Crown of
Aragon are clearly reflected in the involvement of his main collaborators: Juan de
Coloma, notary of the kingdom, and Luis de Santangel (Jewish convert) and Francisco
Pinelli, both responsible for the treasury.

Meanwhile, Columbus returned again to present, though unsuccessfully, his project to
John II of Portugal. The key point of the rejection by the Portuguese was always the
beginning of the route west from the Canary Islands.

Columbus had to wait seven years (Manzano Manzano, 1989) and signed the
Capitulations of Santa Fe on 17 April 1492. This document gave Columbus great benefits
in case of success.

On 23 May, Columbus presented the project to the citizens of Palos, but he did not
convince anyone. This town had to build two caravels (the sailing ships to be used) by
mandate of kings and make them available to Columbus.

On 2 August, Columbus ordered the crew to board and the next day they started the
journey to the Canary Islands, which was a stop required to capture the Alisios Winds.
The stay in the Canary Islands lasted from 9 August to 6 September, while repairing La
Pinta. There is talk of sabotage by its owner, Cristobal Quintero. The second stage of the
journey was completed on 12 October, although the last few weeks had been particularly
difficult. A key figure at the time was again Martin Alonso Pinzon. He convinced the
crew against causing several mutinies, although he also had his disputes with Admiral.
4 The project

Before proceeding, the initial scope of the project should be considered as reaching the Indies, Cathay and Cipangu, by an alternative route to the west. The initiation of the project could be dated after his marriage with Filipa Moniz in 1479 or 1480, and the death of Alfonso V of Portugal in 1481 (Losada Castro, 1990; Pla Alberola, 2000).

The goal of the project was to open an alternative route to the west to the Indies, which would be competed with the Portuguese one around Africa.

In this scope, the project considered not only the voyage, including its plan, organisation and later execution, but also the calculations related to it, the presentation of the idea, the definition of valuable considerations and other compensations and financing, etc.

Apart from controversies over previous contacts by Columbus, such existence of an anonymous sailor (Manzano y Manzano, 1976), or theory of the meeting (Pérez de Tudela y Bueso, 1983), Christopher Columbus considered the existence of lands or islands in the westbound, which were included in that scope of the project and that were reflected in the Capitulations of Santa Fe.

The project included not only reaching the destination, but also the return. None of the routes hitherto were known.
5 Stakeholders management in the project

The stakeholder management in the project was not easy at all. Such a project would be sponsored by a crown and supported by the Church. The support of the brothers Antonio de Marchena and Juan Perez was essential, both in negotiations with the Kings and in the introduction to the sailor, Martin Alonso Pinzon (the other main protagonist of the first trip to America). Pinzon, born in Palos, supported Columbus from the first time they met and then convinced a crew of expert sailors to take part in the project.

The Pinzon brothers were responsible for the administration of the enterprise and armed ships and recruited the crew, even ahead of receiving money.

In the search for project sponsors, the support by the two Andalusian high nobles, Enrique Guzman, Duke of Medina Sidonia, and Luis de la Cerda, Duke of Medinaceli was a key point (Gómez Gómez, 2012). The reason was that they had the important ports in their lordships’ coastal region. For example, Sanlúcar de Barrameda and Huelva belonged to the Duke of Medina Sidonea and El Puerto de Santa María belonged to the Duke of Medinaceli (Ladero Quesada, 1990; Manzano Manzano and Manzano Fernández-Heredia, 1988).

Also, from the point of view of the Crown, the port of departure had to have royal range (for which they had to buy half of the villa of Palos in June of 1492) (Izquierdo, 2002) and the expedition had to sail westward out of the Canaries.

Another key point was the economic aspect. The project budget was more than 2,000,000 maravedis. Luis de Santangel, treasurer of the Crown of Aragon and baptised Jew, as well as Francisco Pinello, also baptised Jew, gave 1,400,000 maravedis from the Treasury of the Holy Brotherhood. Other Genovese investors contributed with 250,000 and Santangel provided 350,000 maravedies.

Table 1 shows the Stakeholder Register of the project with the main stakeholders. For each of them, it is necessary to identify other information, as requirements, expectations or compromise, etc. To classify the stakeholder, the three main ones would be:

- the project team, formed by Christopher Columbus and the Fray Antonio de Marchena from the beginning, and afterwards by other Franciscan monks, the crew of the ships, with especial relevance in the captains
- the promoters, Isabella or Ferdinand, or both
- the investors, leaded by Luis de Santángel.

On the other hand, there were more actors participating or influencing in the results of the project: clergy linked to the Court, as well as the main members of the nobility, especially from the Andalusia, the Duke of Medina Sidonia and the Duke of Medinaceli. Other group was the competitors, for example, the Crown of Portugal, etc.

Table 2 shows this information for some stakeholders. This information is important for the strategy to follow. For example, Columbus’ expectations were his positioning in the Castilian nobility, the discovery of new lands, probably at the same time as fortune and richness. In other case, Fray Antonio de Marchena might expect the growth of the Catholicism or of the Franciscan order, as well as the confirmation of his knowledge about the viability of the route.
Table 1  Some stakeholder register for the project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Roll</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christopher Columbus</td>
<td>Crown of Castilia</td>
<td>Admiral</td>
<td>Project management team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fray Antonio de Marchena</td>
<td>Clergy</td>
<td></td>
<td>Project manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fray Juan Perez</td>
<td>Clergy</td>
<td></td>
<td>Project management team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fray Hernando de Talavera</td>
<td>Clergy</td>
<td>Queen’s Confessor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabella I of Castile</td>
<td>Crown of Castilia</td>
<td>Queen</td>
<td>Promoter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferdinand II of Aragon</td>
<td>Crown of Aragon</td>
<td>King</td>
<td>Project sponsor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John II of Portugal</td>
<td>Crown of Portugal</td>
<td>King</td>
<td>Competitor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry de Guzmán</td>
<td>Nobility of Castilia</td>
<td>Duke of Medina Sidonia</td>
<td>Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luis de la Cerda</td>
<td>Nobility of Castilia</td>
<td>Duke of Medinaceli</td>
<td>Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luis de Santángel</td>
<td>Crown of Aragon</td>
<td>Treasurer</td>
<td>Investor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francisco Pinello</td>
<td>Crown of Aragon</td>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>Investor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Geneva</td>
<td>Investors</td>
<td>Investor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin Alonso Pinzón</td>
<td>La Pinta (ship)</td>
<td>Captain</td>
<td>Project management team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francisco Martín Pinzón</td>
<td>La Pinta (ship)</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>Project team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cristobal Quintero</td>
<td>La Pinta (ship)</td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>Project team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>La Pinta (ship)</td>
<td>Crew</td>
<td>Project team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicente Yañez Pinzón</td>
<td>La Niña (ship)</td>
<td>Captain</td>
<td>Project team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juan Niño</td>
<td>La Niña (ship)</td>
<td>Master/Owner</td>
<td>Project team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>La Niña (ship)</td>
<td>Crew</td>
<td>Project team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juan de la Cosa</td>
<td>Santa Maria (ship)</td>
<td>Master/Owner</td>
<td>Project team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Santa Maria (ship)</td>
<td>Crew</td>
<td>Project team</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2  Stakeholders’ expectations and compromise for the project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Expectations</th>
<th>Compromise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christopher Columbus</td>
<td>Positioning in the Castilian nobility</td>
<td>Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discover new lands</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Make a fortune, ...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fray Antonio de Marchena</td>
<td>Extending the Catholicism</td>
<td>Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Application of his knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Development of Franciscan order</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fray Juan Perez</td>
<td>Extending the Catholicism</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fray Hernando de Talavera</td>
<td>Extending the Catholicism</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabella I of Castile</td>
<td>Extending the frontiers of the Kingdom of Castile</td>
<td>Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Extending the Catholicism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2  Stakeholders’ expectations and compromise for the project (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Expectations</th>
<th>Compromise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ferdinand II of Aragon</td>
<td>Recognition as king of Castile</td>
<td>Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Extending the frontiers of the Kingdom of Castile</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and Aragon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John II of Portugal</td>
<td>Extending the frontiers of the Kingdom of Portugal</td>
<td>Against</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry de Guzmán</td>
<td>Expand his heritage and noble position</td>
<td>Resistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luis de la Cerda</td>
<td>Expand his heritage and noble position</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luis de Santángel</td>
<td>Return on investment</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ensure their Jewish lineage of the Inquisition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francisco Pinelli</td>
<td>Return on investment</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martín Alonso Pinzón</td>
<td>Support for the project (beginning)</td>
<td>Leader /</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Return on investment</td>
<td>Resistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discover new lands (end of the first voyage)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cristobal Quintero</td>
<td>Natural captain of his boat, relegated for another</td>
<td>Resistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>appointment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6 Conclusions

The Discovery of America is an exceptional case from a project management point of view, as well as the project stakeholder management. The first conclusion within this perspective is the relevant role played by some stakeholders, such as Fray Antonio de Marchena and Fray Juan Perez, the Catholic Monarchs and Martin Alonso Pinzon, long-time supporter of Columbus.

In any project, the ‘game’ with some stakeholders could mean the success or failure of it. In this case, the possible offer of the project to the King of France by Columbus, the intervention of the Church, the buying of the port of Palos to acquire more rights by the Crown or the recognition of ‘old Christian’ for some converts are clear cases of this game.

Something to keep in mind is who is the Project Manager in the Discovery of America. The suggested options for this key role in the project are either Christopher Columbus or Fray Antonio de Marchena. For considering this aspect of discussion, the first step could be to start from the definition of project manager. In this paper, we consider the Franciscan monk as the project manager, although some parts of the project were out of his control in the execution, as for example the voyage. As we mentioned before, the Almiral was not a good manager, but a good planner.

Other key point is related to the sponsor of the project, either Isabella or Ferdinand. Most of the authors show the queen as the main promoter of the project. However, there are aspects that may suggest that the real sponsor was the king. For example, most of the funds financing the project came from people of institutions related to the Crown of Aragon or that the Capitulations of Santa Fe were written by Juan de Coloma, also linked to this crown.
The first voyage of Columbus included many interests that came to light and conditioned the journey, for example, the ‘sabotage’ of the Pinta or the key support from Martin Alonso Pinzon during several stages of the trip.

References


Ibarra, E. (1847) *D. Fernando el Católico y el descubrimiento de América*, Fortanet.


Brief analysis of the discovery of America as a success case


