As we enter the new millennium, organizational pressures continue to increase toward rapid and accurate market response. New developments must often be planned and managed in an environment of fast changing technology, markets, regulations, and socioeconomic factors, as well as within team-based organizations that rely on resource and power sharing. Modern project management provides the process template for effectively executing these ventures, while information technology provides many of the tools for dealing with the enormous complexities of tracking, integrating and controlling these projects. In addition, sophisticated people skills are critically important for managing effectively in such a complex organizational environment. The six papers collected in this minitrack provide a small sample of field research that spans across a wide spectrum of issues and best practices that address the challenges of project managers’ in today’s complex business environment.

“Understanding Your IT Project Organization’s Charter” by Erling S. Anderson examines the cultural differences between project organizations and their functional support groups. The paper provides an useful insight into the intricacies of today’s project environment and makes suggestions on effectively getting support from functional departments in spite of the different cultures, values, power structures and task orientation.

These cultural differences further influence the accuracy of project status reporting, a topic explored by Andrew Snow and Mark Keil in their paper entitled “The Challenge of Accurate Project Status Reporting: A Two-Stage Model Incorporating Status Errors and Reporting Bias.” The authors discuss the various factors that affect reporting accuracy and develop a model for tracking software projects more effectively.

Yet another challenge in our fast changing world of global enterprising is the ability to cope effectively with the continuously increasing need for strategic integration of projects with the total business enterprise. These challenges are being addressed by N. Jonsson, D. Novosel, M. Eriksson and J. Lillieskold in “Successful Management of Complex, Multinational R&D Projects,” and by Joseph W. Weiss in “Impact of Strategic Business Decisions on Project Management.”

Building on contemporary management, the Project Management Minitrack concludes with two papers discussing the role and effects of change on project organizations and their performance. The specific contributions include: “Organizational Change as a Contributing Factor to IS Failure” by Heidi Winklhofer and “Structural Change Advocacy: A Study in Becoming a Software Engineering Organization” by Kay M. Nelson, Mari Buche, Mehdi Ghods and H. James Nelson.

Taken together, this group of selected papers emphasizes the challenges faced by project leaders, today. In our global economy, projects are becoming more complex and in both the technical and the organizational dimensions. Many of the traditional management tools and techniques, such as unity of command, complete project definition and organizational stability, are being challenged. These traditional approaches often lead to a “linear implementation mentality,” neglecting the important need for cross-functional sharing and integration. Studies of best business practices suggests an increased emphasis toward better understanding of organizational culture and values, underscoring teamwork and the organization’s capability to function in a unified interdisciplinary unit.

Taken together, these field studies suggests, that successful project management in today’s challenging business environment requires both, appropriate tools, techniques and processes, and sophisticated people skills. Effective project leaders are social architects who understand the interaction of organizational and behavioral variables and can foster a climate of active participation and minimal dysfunctional conflict. They also build alliances with support organizations and upper management to assure organizational visibility, priority, resource availability, and overall support toward the
multifunctional integration, throughout the project life cycle.