

From Chaos to Opening Night

Opera and Project
Management



Andreas Schulz

Andreas Schulz

**From Chaos to Opening Night –
Opera and Project Management**

Sometimes looking at something from an unusual angle helps you see the heart of a problem more clearly.

Andreas Schulz

FROM CHAOS TO OPENING NIGHT

Opera and Project Management

Chaos Wears a Tuxedo Today

Welcome to the Operaneum—where projects aren't merely managed, they're staged. This book is not a dry score of methods; it's an overture to a mindset in which beat, timing, and teamwork set the tone. Here, you'll meet conductors instead of dictators, stage managers instead of firefighters, and an ensemble that shows how vision, vanity, and budgets can sing their arias—without anyone missing a cue.

This is about the big picture: how ideas earn their place on stage, how decisions sound when they're properly harmonized, and why the best crisis is the one that never steals the spotlight. Light on its feet, clear, and with a knowing wink, this introduction leads you to the place where projects find their premiere. No table of contents in costume, no spoilers—just the promise that after this overture, you'll look at your next rehearsal differently.

When the curtain rises, only one thing matters: the performance must land. Everything else, we'll handle in tempo.

What a Drama!	1
Conductor or Trumpeter?	4
The Unfinished Aria	8
When the Stage Is Already on Fire	12
Assistant Director: The Quiet Conductor	15
The Underestimated Queen	22
Premiere vs. Season	27
The Wrong Casting	32
The ISO-Certified Magic Flute	37
Aria: The Sacred Chart	41
Appendix: The Playbill	44

What a Drama!

Opera and Project Management

I have been working with projects and programs for many years—hands-on in everyday life and in my professional role; and in theory, through training and continuing education. Along the way, one question kept returning: how can we make complex management dynamics simple enough to grasp at a glance?

As an opera enthusiast, it hit me some time ago: projects are really just dramas after all. Grand visions, a motley crew of contributors, expectations that shoot through the roof—and then the inevitable chaos backstage. That is precisely why the world of opera is such a perfect set of metaphors for projects and their wonderfully unpredictable twists.

But why opera in particular? Why not theatre or film? Quite simply: nowhere else do timing, collaboration, and nerves of steel matter quite so much.

Project management is a staging

Every opera production is a gigantic project—with a fixed deadline (opening night), a limited budget (that never stretches

far enough), and a team of specialists who each live in their own universe. Sound familiar? You bet.

- The artistic director—the executive sponsor—has a grand vision, but little appetite for the details.
- The conductor—the project manager—keeps everyone in the same tempo.
- The singers—the subject-matter experts—do the real work... but not always exactly as planned.
- The sponsors—the funders—want a spectacular show, preferably at no additional cost.
- The audience—the stakeholders—has expectations, but no two expectations are the same.

And then reality arrives: delays, budget cuts, cast changes, last-minute creative epiphanies— in short, exactly what happens in projects all the time.

Why this analogy works so well

I wanted a metaphorical world that's instantly relatable. Because let's be honest: scope creep sounds abstract. But when I say, "The director decided—right before the performance—that Don Giovanni needs a sci-fi setting," everyone instantly understands what I mean.

Change management? Switching the orchestra to period instruments—just before opening night.

Risk management? Keeping an understudy tenor ready, in case the overexcited star has a buffet-related meltdown.

Problem management? Improvising on the spot when the soprano forgets her lines in the final scene.

The parallels are simply too perfect to ignore.

Conclusion: Projects are stagings—with or without applause

The opera world helps me explain project management vividly—with a wink. And it makes one thing unmistakably clear: no matter how chaotic it is backstage, in the end, all that matters is that the show is a success.

Because in projects, as in opera, the curtain rises—ready or not.

Conductor or Trumpeter?

The Project Manager

There's a stubborn myth that refuses to leave the building: a project manager must know everything. Truly everything. Every technical detail, every piece of specialist jargon—and ideally the entire history of the industry, too. A walking encyclopaedia, sector oracle, and certified superbrain rolled into one. Naturally, they also make coffee, rattle off three programming languages, and juggle the business case across five Excel sheets—one-handed, during the status meeting.

A lovely fantasy. And about as useful as insisting that the maestro tune every violin before rehearsal.

The conductor doesn't play every instrument

Anyone who expects the project manager to be the universal expert is essentially demanding that the conductor master every violin, every trumpet, and the bassoon—otherwise, how could they lead the orchestra?

Spot the nonsense?

A conductor reads the score. They hear when something slips out of tempo. They notice when the brass enters too early or the

strings are drifting into their own private interpretation. But they do not leap off the podium mid-performance to play the trumpet solo just because the principal trumpeter has a cold.

Projects work the same way: leadership is not an audition for “Most Helpful Specialist.” It’s the craft of coordination—keeping the ensemble aligned, the cues clear, and the overall interpretation intact.

Wagner: genius, with a side of control mania

If you want a shining example of the opposite approach, look no further than Richard Wagner. Composer, poet, conductor, stage designer, director—and, when needed, financial controller. A genius, unquestionably.

But his appetite for control at the Bayreuth Festival became legendary: he wanted to dictate every detail, from lighting technology to the final brushstroke. The result reads like a case study every PMO should keep under glass: exploding costs, chaotic timelines, and musicians hovering at the edge of collective nervous collapse.

That is what projects look like when the manager tries to do everything personally—and, in the process, loses sight of the whole. A project can be brilliantly “managed” into the ground.

Mozart: a conductor with an instinct for collaboration

Mozart, by contrast, understood something fundamental: the magic happens in the interplay. His operas thrive on the precise alignment of music, text, and staging—and he worked masterfully with librettists, musicians, and theatre practitioners.

Had he micromanaged every costume seam or every lighting cue in *The Magic Flute*, the opera might never have reached opening night. Instead, he focused on his strength—music—and trusted others with the rest.

Which is, in project terms, the difference between a confident leader and a nervous bottleneck in a nice suit.

Expertise? Yes. Specialist tunnel vision? No.

Of course a project manager needs domain knowledge. They should understand the vocabulary, the processes, the constraints—absolutely. But the moment someone believes they know better than their experts across the board, they are on a fast track to becoming Wagner in full control frenzy.

And then the real question arrives—quietly, but mercilessly:

Who keeps the tempo? Who ensures the orchestra stays in harmony? Who protects the narrative thread of the story when every section is convinced it has the most important melody?

Conclusion: Conduct Instead of Playing Everything Yourself

A project manager doesn't have to know everything. They have to know whom to ask, whom to appoint, and how to make the whole ensemble sound like one performance rather than twenty competing solos.

They hold the production together, ensure clear communication, and bring the work safely to the stage.

Anyone who believes they can play every instrument themselves isn't "dedicated." They're auditioning for a breakdown. The rest of us prefer professionals— and we let the conductor conduct.

And if we're honest: Wagner's music is divine. But his project plans often sounded like an orchestra without a conductor.

The Unfinished Aria

Agile Project Management

Imagine producing an opera agile.

Four weeks in: first sprint review. The audience takes their seats, expectant, dressed for a premiere—and gets... half a scene.

No overture. The set is a few painted cardboard boxes. The tenor launches into his great aria even though the soprano hasn't been told yet that she's supposed to die.

No worries, that's in the next sprint.

Sounds absurd? It is. Because opera doesn't work in bite-sized increments. Nobody wants to show up every month for an unfinished version and then hope the dress rehearsal will magically smooth out the chaos. An opera is a Gesamtkunstwerk—a total work of art—or it's nothing at all.

Where Agile Actually Makes Sense

But don't panic. There are plenty of projects where agile methods are pure gold—especially when you can incorporate feedback and improve step by step without ruining the whole experience.

Take an opera app, for example:

- Sprint 1: Season schedule overview
- Sprint 2: Feedback says: navigation is a maze → improve UX
- Sprint 3: Ticket booking
- Sprint 4: Streaming for performances you missed

That’s how something real grows: one increment at a time, but always usable. Each release is small, tangible, and—crucially—doesn’t require the user to “imagine the rest.”

If Wagner Had Composed with a Scrum Board...

Now picture Richard Wagner standing in front of a Scrum board.

- First release: Das Rheingold.
- Stakeholders demand “more drama,” so Die Walküre gets re-worked and adds a few tragic heroes.
- Siegfried arrives with exciting new features—but in a completely different key.
- Götterdämmerung is cancelled because, frankly, everyone has lost interest.

What's left is an audience quietly wondering whether they've walked into the wrong theatre—and whether the “product vision” was ever more than a magnificent hallucination.

Mozart's Magic Flute as an MVP

Or take Mozart.

- Sprint 1: Three arias are finished, but Tamino still doesn't have a flute.
- Sprint 2: Papageno gets his bells; the rest remains... atmospheric fog.
- Sprint 3: User feedback demands more drama, so the Queen of the Night gets a second aria.
- Sprint 4: Sarastro is cut—decision in a meeting: too long.

The result? A Magic Flute stitched together like a patchwork quilt: a little brilliance here, a little chaos there, and no one quite sure what the story is supposed to be.

Finale

Agile is wonderful—when it fits.

- For software, apps, and products? Ideal.
- For an opera that must land as one overwhelming whole? Not so much.

From Chaos to Opening Night

In other words: some projects are like arias. They have to be sung in a single breath.

When the Stage Is Already on Fire

Risk vs. Problem in Projects

There are two types of project managers:

- The first has the umbrella open before a single cloud dares to appear.
- The second is sprinting around, face flushed, clutching a fire extinguisher—because the curtain is already burning.

Both types have perfectly respectable counterparts in management:

- Risk management means thinking ahead and preventing disasters.
- Problem management means finding a way to survive once things have already gone bang.

Sounds simple. Rarely is.

Opera: With or Without a Safety Net

Let's take opera as the project's natural habitat. Good risk management asks the unglamorous questions early—while everyone is still smiling.

- What if the soprano gets sick? Cover is booked.
- What if the set mechanism jams? Plan B is waiting in the wings.
- What if the audience boos? The critics have been handled, and the champagne is chilled.

The premiere happens—maybe not flawless, but at least predictable.

And then there's the other version: zero preparation, maximum improvisation. That is problem management in its purest form:

- The soprano is out? Panic. The understudy is racing across the country on the fastest train available.
- The set is only half finished? “Minimalism is the new Baroque,” announces the director with a straight face.
- The audience boos? Lights down. Intendant out the back door.

You can survive like that. But “elegant” is not the word most reviewers would choose.

If It Really Does Catch Fire: Three Golden Rules

Because sometimes the problem actually happens. Then the priority is not heroics—it is control.

- One person is in charge (like the stage manager). Otherwise ten people talk at once, and chaos doubles itself.

- Roles are clear. The audience may improvise; the project team should not.
- Keep calm. Panic is the wrong baton.
- Timing Is Everything

The difference between risk and problem management is, fundamentally, a question of timing.

- Risk asks: “What could go wrong—and how do we prevent it?”
- Problem asks: “Why is it on fire—and how do we put it out now?”

The best problem manager, incidentally, is the one you barely need—because the best rescue is the one that never becomes necessary.

After all, applause is not for the last-second save. Applause is for the performance that never dissolves into chaos in the first place.

Finale: Prevent, Don't Extinguish

The most successful projects are not the ones spectacularly dragged out of the flames. They are the ones that never catch fire.

So: better to be the stage manager than the firefighter. Because once the set is burning, even the warmest applause tends to get stuck in everyone's throat.

Assistant Director: The Quiet Conductor

PMO — Project Management Office

Whenever the letters PMO enter the room, you can usually watch the audience split in two.

One group flinches as if someone just announced an emergency meeting about “governance.” They hear bureaucracy, templates, status reports, and an Excel sheet that somehow has opinions.

The other group exhales in relief, because someone—finally—will make sure the project doesn’t vanish into creative chaos with a theatrical bow and no encore.

I will admit my allegiance: I’m firmly in the second camp. A well-set-up PMO is not a paper-pushing creature from the administrative underworld. It is the structure that allows ambition to survive contact with reality. And if we want a stage that understands both ambition and reality, we might as well walk straight into the opera house.

The PMO as the Conductor Behind the Curtain

Imagine an opera production without clear structures:

- The tenor arrives for opening night—only to discover his sheet music has “mysteriously” gone missing.
- The orchestra rehearses, but nobody knows whether the director changed the tempo yesterday... or three weeks ago.
- The sets are magnificent—unfortunately, they’ve been built for the wrong stage.
- The stage manager sprints in circles, because the singers are still arguing about who enters when.

In short: chaos.

And this is precisely where you see what a good PMO can do. It is not the star of the show. It does not take the curtain call. But without it, the entire production starts drifting—one misunderstood cue at a time—until the evening becomes an accidental avant-garde experiment.

So, what does the PMO do—on the opera stage and in the project world?

Here are three invaluable roles:

1. The PMO as Guardian of the Score

A PMO ensures that everyone knows what is being played, which version is valid, and what the current interpretation actually is. In project terms: clarity on scope, baseline, decisions, and the “single source of truth.” It’s the place you go when you need

to know what is agreed—rather than what is merely believed with great conviction.

Let's take Verdi's La Traviata.

Even if you've never seen it: it's a story of glamour, love, and social hypocrisy—and yes, it ends tragically. Violetta dies at the end. That is not a negotiable feature request.

Now, opera is full of interpretation. You can set *La Traviata* in a Parisian salon, a modern penthouse, or a bleak neon-lit club where everyone looks like they've just resigned from something dramatic. Fine. But imagine the following:

- The director is staging a minimalist tragedy.
- Costume design delivers a sparkling party extravaganza.
- Marketing sells it as a romantic comedy.
- The conductor has notes from last year's production and is convinced "this is how we do it."

You don't get one opera. You get two (or four) competing realities fighting for stage time.

A good PMO prevents exactly this: the project equivalent of running two productions at once and acting surprised when the audience is confused. It aligns people on the agreed version of the "score"—scope, priorities, and decisions—so interpretation can be creative without becoming contradictory.

2. The PMO as Keeper of the Schedule

No opera house can afford to “just see how it goes” with dates. Opening night is not a suggestion. The orchestra, chorus, soloists, technicians, venue, marketing, sponsors—everyone’s calendar is locked in. If the premiere slips, the damage is not theoretical; it’s immediate and expensive.

A PMO does the same in projects: it holds the timeline, coordinates dependencies, and makes sure “we’ll catch up later” doesn’t become the official project strategy. And perhaps most importantly: it mediates early—between leadership, delivery teams, and the people who actually have to build and ship things—before minor delays become full-scale drama.

As an example, consider Wagner’s Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg (The Mastersingers of Nuremberg).

It’s magnificent, it’s sprawling—and it’s famously long. We’re talking over five hours depending on the cut and the conductor.

Imagine: The conductor takes artistic liberty and extends the arias by ten minutes, the director adds extra monologues, and the orchestra spontaneously inserts a few interludes. Suddenly, the opera lasts eight hours—and the audience sits sleepily in their seats while the cleaning team waits impatiently.

A PMO’s job here is not to destroy artistic dreams. It is to keep the dream performable. To hold the schedule with enough realism

that the show can actually happen—without sacrificing quality, burning out the ensemble, or turning every rehearsal into a negotiation about time.

In project language: you still aim high, but you stop pretending that time is infinitely elastic.

3. The PMO as Translator Between Worlds

Opera is a multilingual environment—even when everyone speaks the same human language.

- Musicians think in bars, tempo, and phrasing.
- Directors think in images, tension arcs, and symbolism.
- Stage technology thinks in loads, safety margins, build times, and “please do not stand there.”
- Sponsors think in reputation, audience appeal, and “Can we make it slightly more... uplifting?”
- Management thinks in budgets, risk, and whether the fire marshal is happy.

Everyone is right—in their own dialect.

A strong PMO translates between these worlds. It turns artistic intention into operational plans. It turns constraints into creative boundaries. It turns “we need a miracle” into “here’s the decision we must make by Tuesday, or we miss the milestone.”

To see why this matters, look at Bizet’s *Carmen*. Even if you only know the famous music: it is not a gentle story. *Carmen* is fiercely independent, and the plot ends violently. That tragedy is part of the work’s identity.

Now imagine the sponsor steps in and says:

“We love the music. We love the costumes. But can we make the ending more family-friendly? Perhaps everyone learns a lesson, hugs it out, and opens a small flower shop?”

At that point, you don’t have *Carmen*. You have an involuntary comedy—or a brand-new opera that nobody asked for.

This is exactly where the PMO earns its keep: mediating early, framing what is changeable, what is not, what the impacts are, and how to keep stakeholders aligned without turning the project into a tug-of-war.

PMO: Assistant Director, Not Bureaucracy Monster

Yes—poorly designed PMOs can be annoying. If a PMO defines its purpose as “collecting reports” and “enforcing templates,” it will quickly become the villain of the piece: a papier-mâché dragon guarding the gate to progress.

But a good PMO is closer to an assistant director backstage: attentive, calm, relentlessly practical, and quietly obsessed with making sure the performance works. Not glamorous. Not loud. Not applauded. But essential.

Because in the end, there are only two kinds of productions:

- Those that look effortless on stage—because the work happened behind the scenes.
- And those where everyone can see, in real time, that the project is turning into a botched premiere.

And really—who wants their project to feel like opening night where the tenor is still searching for his sheet music?

The Underestimated Queen

Stakeholder Management

There are things a project lead would dearly love to ignore—and high on that list are stakeholders. The only problem is: ignored stakeholders always come back. And by then, they are rarely in a forgiving mood.

Opera, as ever, knows this lesson by heart. If you don't keep your power players close, you should be prepared for dramatic plot twists—often in the third act, when you can least afford them. Let's look at a few classic mistakes and how they play out in famous operas.

The biggest mistake: Completely ignoring a stakeholder

Some people truly believe they can simply blank out an inconvenient stakeholder. The strategy goes something like: “If I ignore them long enough, perhaps they'll forget they ever wanted something from me.”

A perfect example? Mozart's Don Giovanni.

This self-absorbed daredevil is the living embodiment of catastrophic stakeholder management. He seduces, he promises, he deceives—and then disappears the moment things turn uncomfort-

table. His greatest mistake? Underestimating his angriest—and most powerful—stakeholder: the Commendatore (the slain commander who returns with supernatural authority).

Had Don Giovanni been smart, he would have dealt with that force early, before escalation became inevitable. But no—he ignores the problem. And in the end, he goes straight to hell. Opera can be very clear about consequences.

Project lesson:

Stakeholders do not simply vanish. If you believe problems will solve themselves, you are essentially scheduling your own very painful finale.

Playing stakeholders against each other: A dangerous game

In some projects, people try to pit stakeholders against one another to buy themselves time. The idea: “As long as they’re fighting each other, they’ll leave me alone.”

A brilliant—and fatal—example? Verdi’s Aida.

Radamès, the Egyptian military hero, is trapped between two fronts: his secret beloved Aida (a stakeholder with deep emotional interests) and the official power structure embodied by Princess Amneris (a stakeholder with political leverage and institutional muscle).

Instead of taking a clear position early and managing expectations with an actual strategy, Radamès tries to use both sides—until both sides turn against him. The result is total loss: love, career, and life. Verdi does not do partial penalties.

Project lesson:

Stakeholders do have different interests—but trying to weaponize those differences usually ends in disaster. Better: involve them early, communicate honestly, and manage expectations before the temperature rises.

Underestimating a stakeholder's expectations

A classic trap: you assume a stakeholder is harmless because they're quiet at the beginning. Then comes the moment they finally speak—and the entire project starts wobbling like a tenor on an icy staircase.

*Need an example? Mozart's *The Magic Flute* (*Die Zauberflöte*).*

Prince Tamino believes his greatest problem is Sarastro—the wise high priest he has been warned about by the Queen of the Night. What does he miss? The Queen herself is the truly formidable stakeholder, with her own agenda and power base. And when Tamino stops playing along, she reveals her real face—sending her daughter Pamina off with a murderous command.

Had Tamino taken her seriously earlier, diplomacy might have been possible. But he realizes it too late—and suddenly he's caught between two warring centers of power.

Project lesson:

Never underestimate the quiet stakeholder. Silence at the start does not mean low influence. It often means someone is watching—carefully—and waiting for the right moment to move the entire board.

Trying to keep too many stakeholders happy—and delivering nothing

The evergreen classic: you try to please everyone. But whoever wants to satisfy everyone usually ends up satisfying no one.

For that, Wagner immediately comes to mind: Tannhäuser.

Tannhäuser stands between two worlds: the sensual, indulgent Venusberg and the strict social order of the Wartburg. He wants both. Yet instead of choosing a clear path, he zigzags—restless, indecisive, constantly switching allegiances—and collapses in the end.

Had he made a clear decision early, he might have spared himself a great deal of suffering. Wagner, however, is not in the business of gentle coaching.

Project lesson:

When stakeholders have conflicting expectations, it doesn't help to keep changing course. You need a clear line—or you will fragment into activity without outcomes.

Conclusion: Stakeholder management is survival management

Whether in opera or in projects, stakeholders want to be heard. Ignore them, underestimate them, or manipulate them—and you will regret it by the third act.

The most important rule is simple: talk to them before you have to fight them.

Because opera rarely offers a happy ending for bad stakeholder management—and real life is, frankly, not much softer either.

Premiere vs. Season

Project vs. Program

Anyone who's spent five minutes in project management has heard this line:

"Oh, a program is just a big project."

Wrong. Very wrong.

A project is a self-contained production. A program is an entire opera season. The difference is not only size—it's the type of management required.

The Project: One Single Production

A project is like the premiere of one specific opera. There's a clear objective: the curtain must go up—and the show must work. The project manager (also known, in this opera-house metaphor, as the stage director) coordinates everyone involved, plans the set, runs the rehearsal logic, and makes sure that on opening night, only one thing happens:

The audience must not witness a disaster.

A good example is Puccini's *Tosca*: a clean storyline, a sharp dramatic peak, and after three acts the fate is sealed. No open

ending, no parallel plotlines, no “let’s revisit this in Q3.” The project ends when Tosca jumps from Castel Sant’Angelo.

In management terms: a project has a defined goal, a fixed time frame, and a set budget.

The Program: The Entire Season

A program is the full opera season—a collection of projects that together pursue a higher-level objective. It’s not enough to stage a successful Tosca if, next door, you’re also mounting Carmen, The Magic Flute, and some form of Wagner marathon that consumes three weekends and half the brass section.

Here the question isn’t only whether each production works on its own. The real question is whether they fit together, whether resources are used intelligently, and whether the audience experiences a coherent season rather than a random playlist with costumes.

A strong example: Wagner’s Ring Cycle.

Das Rheingold can function as a standalone evening—but if it isn’t embedded in the larger Ring architecture, you lose the long-term effect. Each opera is a work in its own right, but the program is the interplay of all four.

In other words, program management is about:

- consistent musical “leitmotifs” (strategic direction),
- a coherent directorial concept (governance and alignment),
- and efficient use of orchestra, stage, and talent across multiple productions (resource and dependency management).

A program manager doesn't think in isolated deliveries. They think in strategic cumulative impact.

Why Programs Are Not Just “Big Projects”

Some people say: “Fine—then we’ll treat a program as one large project and split it into smaller pieces.”

And that is exactly the trap.

- A large project still has one objective (e.g., the premiere of Tosca).
- A program has an overarching objective achieved through multiple projects (e.g., a well-curated season with a deliberate repertoire arc).

If you manage a program like a big project, you will run into the classic opera-house problems:

Projects competing for resources, key people burning out, and one production tipping the entire season off balance.

Example of what poor program management can look like?

A Ring staging where each part follows its own aesthetic universe—one night in GDR grit, the next in Western imagery, then something else entirely—until the audience no longer knows whether they’re watching one coherent cycle or four unrelated worlds wearing the same title.

A program manager would have asked early, calmly, and with the appropriate dramatic pause:

“Hold on—how do we ensure this makes sense as a whole?”

The Biggest Differences at a Glance

Project	Program
Opera performance	Opera season
Clearly defined performance date, with a fixed opening night	Can run over a longer period, with an evolving strategy
A flawless premiere that captivates the audience	Overall impact and the season’s sustained success
Limited room for major changes once it starts	Adjustments across multiple projects

Project	Program
Detailed planning and execution	Strategic governance and long-term coordination

Conclusion: Whoever Sees the Whole Stage Wins

A project manager brings one opera successfully to the stage.

A program manager ensures the entire season succeeds.

Or, in Operaneum terms:

- Project management is conducting a concert.
- Program management is curating an entire music festival.

And anyone who has ever watched a badly planned season collapse knows: it's not enough for one premiere to shine. The big picture has to hold—otherwise the applause is for a single night, while the season quietly burns behind the curtain.

The Wrong Casting

Resources and the “Talent Shortage” Myth

In the opera world there is a golden rule: a piece can only shine if everyone is in the right place at the right time—choir, orchestra, soloists, stage crew, the whole carefully choreographed machine. But what happens when the cues don’t land? When the chorus comes in too early, the orchestra is still tuning, and the lead is still in make-up wondering whether anyone has seen their entrance?

That, in spirit, is what happens in many projects—right before someone declares, with great certainty: “We don’t have enough resources!”

And yet, the uncomfortable question remains: is it really a shortage—or is the truth hiding elsewhere?

Welcome to a drama in three acts: what happens when resources are distributed badly.

Act I: The Wrong Cue at the Wrong Time

Think of Giuseppe Verdi’s *Aida* and its grand Triumphant Scene: massive chorus, blazing brass, an orchestral wall of sound designed to feel like history marching through the theatre.

Now imagine an opera house that “has resources,” but allocates them like a sleep-deprived intern with a spreadsheet and a coffee problem: twice as many trumpeters as needed, but not enough strings—because the budget was “optimized” in the wrong place.

The result? A melody buried under brass, a thin string sound, and a “triumph” that doesn’t feel triumphant so much as improvised.

Projects do the same thing, just without the costumes:

- Teams burn out because they are simultaneously assigned to five projects, while others sit idle waiting for their moment.
- Specialists get “re-purposed” for administrative chores instead of applying the expertise you actually hired them for.
- Critical support functions show up only when the project is already wobbling.

In other words: the resources are there—they are simply deployed badly.

Act II: Nobody Checks the Casting

Opera houses plan seasons with ruthless precision. Major institutions—think the Metropolitan Opera in New York or La Scala in Milan—line up productions and key performers years in advance.

Not because they love bureaucracy, but because you can't stage excellence on improvisation.

Now imagine they didn't. Suddenly a baritone is asked to sing a tenor role because nobody verified the fit. Or the orchestra arrives with twenty harps and not a single clarinet, because "details" were postponed until "later."

In projects, this is painfully familiar:

- Experts get placed in the wrong roles because nobody mapped strengths, limitations, and real capability.
- Teams spend time on work that should have been automated months ago.
- Key positions remain unfilled until the moment they become a crisis.

Again: it's not that you lack resources. You lack casting discipline.

Act III: The Chaos of Double Booking

Now let's scale up to Wagner: *Der Ring des Nibelungen*—a gigantic undertaking, four evenings, roughly fifteen hours of music, and a production effort that makes even confident planners suddenly speak more softly.

Picture this: the orchestra changes every night because the musicians are also booked into other performances. The conductor cancels every second rehearsal because he is "needed elsewhere."

The result would be predictable: uneven quality, rising risk, and a production held together by adrenaline and prayers.

That is what projects look like when people are spread across too many tasks:

- Meetings overlap, deadlines slip, quality drops.
- Your most valuable specialists hop between projects like fire-fighters—always moving, never going deep.
- Everyone is exhausted, and the outcome is... average.

Multitasking may sound efficient. In practice, it often means nothing gets finished properly.

Finale:

Resource Management Is Not Mathematics—It's an Art

Opera houses understand something that project environments sometimes forget: it is not enough to “have” enough musicians, singers, and technicians. What matters is timing, placement, and role—the right people, in the right moment, doing the right thing.

Project management works the same way. Projects rarely fail because of an absolute lack of resources. They fail because of weak planning, unclear prioritisation, and the kind of allocation that looks acceptable in a status slide and disastrous in reality.

*Or, to borrow Wagner's spirit—because he never did understate-
ment: "Here, it's all about the art." And in projects, the art is not in
having more people. The art is in deploying the people you already
have—so the production actually works.*

The ISO-Certified Magic Flute

Standardization in Project Management

Welcome to the gleaming world of fully standardized project management. No more surprises, no spontaneous flashes of brilliance—just a tidy universe of processes, templates, and ISO-certified arias.

What does that sound like? Picture the opera world deciding—collectively and with impeccable seriousness—to follow the principles of project standardization to the letter.

The Magic Flute—Now with a Process Manual

Project kickoff for Mozart’s masterpiece. But before anyone sings a single note, the documentation is, of course, produced with exemplary discipline.

- Who is allowed to sing when? Please consult the RACI matrix.
- Which “lessons learned” from earlier opera projects can be reused?
- Risk management: What if the Queen of the Night suddenly can only sing alto?

- Change-request procedure: If Tamino decides he no longer loves Pamina—what approval workflow is triggered?

The first critics begin to grumble, but the PMO remains stoic: “We’re doing this professionally.”

Die Meistersinger—A Drama of Over-Regulated Processes

Wagner’s *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, already a piece about creativity colliding with rules, becomes the ideal pilot project. This time, however, the governance gets serious:

- Singing by ear? Prohibited. Every vibrato must be captured in the checklist.
- Walther von Stolzing may present his creative musical idea only after a three-stage approval process.
- Sachs has a spontaneous inspiration? Not documented = not allowed.

The result: the opera no longer lasts five hours, but twelve. After every aria: a quality-gate review. Row three is sound asleep, but the PMO cheers: “Finally—order in the arts!”

Tristan & Isolde—Love, with an Approval Workflow

Tragic passion is so yesterday. In the new version of *Tristan und Isolde*, the rules are clear:

- Before Tristan falls in love, there must be a romance requirements analysis.
- Isolde submits a change request for her feelings—the steering committee meets in three weeks.
- In the end, the couple doesn't die of love, but because the antidote release process took too long.

Still, the production is celebrated as a success: not a single emotion went undocumented.

The Audience Flees, the PMO Celebrates

After five performances of strictly standardized opera, the audience is gone. Too many processes, too little soul.

But the PMO is satisfied: a root-cause analysis is produced, with a review meeting included. The conclusion? “The problem wasn't too much standardization—it was insufficient standardization.”

Conclusion: Standardization—Yes, but with Musical Sense

Of course: rules, methods, standards—they belong in project management the way a score belongs in opera. But when every creative deviation is treated as an incident, the very thing that keeps opera (and projects) alive starts to die: shaping power, flexibility, surprise.

From Chaos to Opening Night

So yes: processes—absolutely. Quality control—naturally. But without a little artistic freedom, The Magic Flute becomes a corporate operating manual with singing—and nobody wants to listen to that.

Aria: The Sacred Chart

Project Planning

(Music: Dramatic and weighty—echoing Verdi’s grand tragedies, with a touch of Wagnerian gravity in the middle.)

Recitative

(In utter despair)

Alas—what woe, what bitter night!
The plan is blank, no scope in sight.
No chart, no line, no steady thread—
How can this work move on ahead?
How shall the whole design unfold,
Without a plan that’s brave and bold?

Aria

(Overflowing with pathos, a heroic longing for structure)

O Plan—my sacred, steadfast frame,
You keep our deadlines from the flame!

With milestones set and pathway clear,
So that no task may disappear.

(Lamenting toward the audience—swelling crescendo, all in legato)

Yet hours vanish, lists expand—
A change request: the nerves can't stand!
Stakeholders call, the schedules shake,
And without a plan? A vast mistake!

Interlude

(A dramatic orchestral build, while the PMO tangles itself in endless Excel sheets.)

Finale

(A desperate—yet triumphant—vow to the art of planning.)

So set the plan! Hold fast—take heed!
Every work requires a guiding deed.
Or else it ends—ah, mercy, no—
The plunge to chaos: project's woe!

(Final chord—held long, with a vast orchestral crescendo, as the project manager clings with last remaining strength to the Gantt chart.)

Curtain

(Applause—another curtain—and so on...)

Appendix: The Playbill

In the previous chapters, a number of masterpieces from opera history have had to serve as case studies for classic project-management headaches. So you don't lose the plot amid all the drama, arias, and catastrophes, here's the repertoire—bundled neatly in one place.

Think of this list as your cultural cheat sheet: every opera used in the book, cleanly itemized with the hard facts—and a short summary that leans less into romance and more into the cold light of project reality. Warning: contains spoilers and cynicism.

Don Giovanni — Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1787)

A notorious womanizer ignores the pointed feedback of a critical stakeholder (the Commendatore) and ends up in hell on an accelerated timeline—textbook escalation management.

The Magic Flute — Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1791)

A prince survives the trial phase thanks to magical gadgets and an improvised “agile” approach—ISO certification for the Queen of the Night is still pending.

The Ring of the Nibelung (complete cycle) — Richard Wagner (1876)

A programme that stretches across four evenings because dwarves and gods cannot execute basic resource allocation (gold)—classic waterfall, with classic failure modes.

La Traviata — Giuseppe Verdi (1853)

The director wanted a futuristic dystopia, but the budget only covered coughing and heartbreak—change request rejected.

The Mastersingers of Nuremberg — Richard Wagner (1868)

A five-hour meeting about compliance in singing—arguably the ultimate “quality gate” review.

Carmen — Georges Bizet (1875)

Sponsors asked for a happy ending and received jealousy and a dead bull instead—stakeholder expectations missed.

Aida — Giuseppe Verdi (1871)

An extravagant trumpet deployment distracts from a resource conflict that ends with two people being sealed in alive—poor exit strategy.

Tannhäuser — Richard Wagner (1845)

The hero cannot choose between the Venusberg (party) and the Wartburg (work)—unclear objectives, predictable derailment.

Tosca — Giacomo Puccini (1900)

When every contingency plan fails, there's always the jump from Castel Sant'Angelo—now that's a clearly defined project end.

Tristan and Isolde — Richard Wagner (1865)

They drink poison because the approval process for their relationship takes too long—your standard bureaucracy burnout case.

From Chaos to Opening Night

1. Edition, 2026

© 2026 Andreas Schulz

All rights are reserved by the author.

More on operaneum.com

These are fictional stories. All actions and dialogue are entirely invented, and any resemblance or connection to real persons or events is purely coincidental.

Andreas Schulz

c/o COCENTER

Koppoldstr. 1

D-86551 Aichach