

What to consider before Landing Your Dream Overseas Project Role

May 7, 2024



Many individuals pursue a career in project management attracted to the variety of opportunity, high salaries and flexibility of working. A particular draw for some is the opportunity to work internationally.

In this week's article, I want to look at some of the truths and misconceptions around free-lancing internationally as a project professional. Just how easy is it for an individual to do, what are some of the considerations and where in the world are the best opportunities for someone wishing to pursue the pathway.

From 2021 to 2023, I had the opportunity to fulfil a lifetime ambition and travel and work internationally as a senior project consultant. Although I was not an independent consultant or freelancing, through a combination of personal circumstances, and my company's overseas strategic market activities. I had the opportunity to work in Spain, Dubai and India over a 12-month period. It was everything that I had expected...and more. It was a chance to see a new perspective on the work that I was doing. Experience incredibly varied cultural activities, food and interactions. And to meet and work with a range of people who I would never have connected with before.

It was a wonderful and life-affirming 12 months, and one that I will not forget and would highly recommend that you experience at least once in your project career.

But how do you go about creating the opportunities to work internationally, and where in the world do you go?

In this 2-part article you'll find my advice on the key issues that you need to consider when creating a strategy to achieve a happy, healthy and financially viable opportunity to work as a PM abroad.



Part 1 – Deciding to Position as Freelance Contract or work for an international corporate firm

Achieving international opportunities as part of a multinational corporation or as a freelancer requires careful consideration and planning. Here are the key considerations and comparisons between following the path of working for a multinational versus freelancing or being an independent contractor.

1. **Employment vs. Self-Employment** – working for a multinational corporation typically involves full-time employment with benefits such as health insurance, retirement plans, and paid time off. As a freelancer you will typically be self-employed. And while this will provide you with greater flexibility, you will also bear the responsibility of managing your own taxes, insurance, and retirement savings.
2. **Visa and Work Permits** – Multinational corporations often handle visa and work permit processes for employees relocating internationally, making it easier to navigate legal requirements. As a freelancer it is critical to both understand and ensure that you comply with visa and work permit regulations independently. This can vary significantly by country and may involve complex processes. All of which you will be responsible for fulfilling.

3. **Stability vs. Flexibility** – Working for a multinational corporation can provide more stability in terms of steady income, long-term employment contracts, and access to resources and support systems. However, like any employer you will be impacted by market conditions and your access to opportunities may be dependent on you achieving company set objectives, such as length of service. Specializing in key subject matter areas or fulfilling flexibility criteria. As a freelancer you'll enjoy greater flexibility in choosing your projects, work hours, and locations, and when and where you want to go. However you may experience income variability and significant lack of job security. Contract lengths can be as short as 3 months. You will need to ask yourself 'Would you risk changing your life, and potentially that of your family for such a limited guarantee?'
4. **Networking and Connections** – Multinational corporations offer extensive networks and connections, providing opportunities for professional growth, mentorship, and collaboration with colleagues from diverse backgrounds. As a freelancer you will need to actively build and maintain your essential professional networks, leveraging platforms, events, and social media to connect with potential clients, collaborators, and mentors. Don't underestimate how much work and effort this may take. And be sure that your personality as well as your skillset match up to the pressure of doing this.
5. **Specialized Skills vs. Generalist Approach** – In regards to the specific skill sets required, multinational corporations will often have specialized skills or industry expertise relevant to their operations, with opportunities for career advancement within specific domains only. You will need to be clear on what these are and ensure that you position yourself in a space where you can take advantage of any opportunities that come your way. As a freelancer, you will still need to align to the demands of the market, but you will have much greater freedom to choose to specialize in niche areas or adopt a more generalist approach. As long as you pay close attention to the market demand and match both the skills development and personal preferences to perfectly align.
6. **Income Potential** – Multinational corporations typically offer competitive salaries and benefits, with potential for promotions, bonuses, and performance-based incentives. This can be significantly magnified if you land a prominent role overseas. Not to mention additional non-quantifiable benefits in terms of personal kudos within the firm, development of your network and growth of opportunities and increase in your personal profile to leadership and peers in your organization. As a freelancer you will equally have the potential to earn higher hourly rates or project fees, especially if they have in-demand skills or work with high-paying clients. In fact as a freelancer working abroad your services will often attract a premium, far outstripping what you would have earned in the same role in your home country or even working on the same gig within a corporation. However, keep in mind that you will also bear the responsibility of covering your own expenses and managing your cash flow. You'll need to create your own financial safety net, if anything goes wrong. Adequate insurance, financial advice and exit plan is an absolute must, if this is the route you intend to choose.

In terms of the easier path, there's no one-size-fits-all answer. Working for a multinational corporation and freelancing internationally both have their advantages and challenges, and the choice depends on individual preferences, goals, and circumstances. Some may prefer the stability and support of a corporate environment, while others may value the flexibility and autonomy of freelancing.

With either choice it's essential to assess your skills, interests, risk tolerance, and long-term objectives to determine which path aligns best with your career aspirations.



Nicola Benjamin

Nicola Benjamin is a Project Management Specialist with 20+ years' experience in the project industry. She began writing a weekly blog to support the career development of project management professionals. Providing the tools and insights to ensure project managers make strategic long-term career planning decisions.