



Project Management Strategy—project management represented as a process based set of management domains and the consequences for project management strategy

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Abstract

Project Management is not as consistently effective as it ought to be. If we re-examine some of the examples of failures or poor performance we can see that the causes often originated in poor management particularly at the front-end during strategy formulation, rather than poor downstream execution. Yet most of the project management literature concentrates on the execution tools and techniques rather than the effective development and deployment of project management strategy within a total process concept. An initial process model of project management was presented at the IPMA 15th World Congress in May 2000. This paper reports on further research, developing the model and its deployment, to place project management and project management strategy in the context of business development. Adding value to the business and leading to a reappraisal of the role of project managers in a global energy company.

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1. Introduction

Project management is not as consistently effective as it ought to be in delivering bottom line improvement when used in the business context. Even when projects are completed on time and to budget, the result is often less effective than the business required or hoped for. If we re-examine some of the studies of failure or poor performance we can postulate that the causes often originate in poor management particularly at the front-end during strategy formulation, rather than poor downstream execution. Yet there is a paucity of research and literature addressing effective strategy for developing and deploying projects and conversely, there is very little in the business and management literature on how business strategy should be translated into projects.

The term ‘project management strategy’ is used to mean a strategy for the management of a project to differentiate the concept from a ‘project strategy’ which

usually refers to a high level plan for achieving a given project’s objectives.

2. Research context

The context chosen is engineering based projects. The focus is also on capital investment projects in the business community that are designed to generate revenue and maintain or develop a business, as opposed to for example business transformation projects. In addition, although programme and portfolio management are acknowledged, the model currently refers to a single project.

3. Background

The initial research created a process based model of project management as a set of eleven domains [1].

Requirements Management	Procurement Management	Uncertainty Management
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Process Management	Change Management	Design Management
Team Management	Cost and Time Management	Crisis Management
Environment Management	Knowledge Management	

This research tests the initial model in two ways. Firstly, by interviews with practitioners in a major global energy company. Secondly, by comparison to existing published models of project management in order to confirm that it represents a different but synergistic view, thus cross-referencing established theory with the interview findings.

4. Interviews

Over 30 interviews were conducted using a semi-structured qualitative interview technique to probe the experience of the practitioners and produce evidence of the model's acceptability and potential. This is sometimes referred to as in-depth interviewing or structured observation and is seeking qualitative, subjective information from people who are thought to be knowledgeable by their peer group, rather than quantitative, objective data from a representative sample. The findings represent a distillation of the views expressed by the interviewees.

5. Interview findings

The interview findings have been grouped into clusters centred on themes that emerged as the interviews progressed, concerning how project management manifests itself and what strategy means. In addition, comments and suggestions on the initial model were accumulated and analysed to inform and revise the model.

5.1. Terminology

All the interviews support the general observation that there is a wide variation in use and meaning of almost every term in the project management canon, even within one company. This has been commented on in recent writings for example [2–4]. However, this did not seem to confuse or frustrate the interviewees since they are aware of the problem, understand and recognise the processes, even if the names and terms used vary.

5.2. Use of the term project

The terminology problem exists to the extent that the very word 'project' was used holistically to include the

total environment and whole life from inception to imbedment, similar to the Management of Projects concept [5] but was also used simplistically, referring to the design and execution of the work. This is not to say that the simplistic view is wrong or even poor but that these projects are better seen as sub-projects (sometimes even as contracts) which therefore do not need to address the total holistic environment of the overall project.

5.3. Use of the term strategy

The use of the term strategy varied from meaning a basic plan to an overarching policy. There was general agreement that strategy implies a high level and allows a cascade of coherent sub-strategies and tactics to be developed. Several interviewees commented that strategies do not always address all the necessary elements and contingent factors and were not always derived in project mode.

5.4. Project mode

The discussions concerning the term project, resulted in a general agreement that project mode is a form of management that should be used to address situations where there is a business requirement that cannot be satisfied by normal routines. These situations are unique, [6] and [7] and the business needs to recognise that it lacks the necessary resources, expertise or both. Several interviewees expressed the view that the company and industry in general exhibited a lack of understanding and respect for project management and the abilities of project managers in such circumstances. This often led to unrealistic expectations, opportunities being missed, non-optimum solutions and some contingent factors badly managed. Poor management of the inception phase (see Fig. 1) creates an unnecessary risk that there will be a flawed strategy with the inevitable legacy of poor performance.

This suggests that the business management tends to think it does not need a project manager until it has a discrete project identified for implementation. This is evidence of a credibility gap or lack of common understanding that project mode has a potentially wider application than just project implementation.

5.5. A development process

A few of the interviewees had experienced projects that had been approached in a significantly different manner as evidenced by their use of the word 'development'. The word was used to refer to both the overall undertaking as a development of the business, as well as the process of developing the necessary project(s). In some situations identified as complex (involving issues

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