Available online at www.sciencedirect.com
SCIENCE DIRECT®
International Journal of Project Management 22 (2004) 327–337
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT
www.elsevier.com/locate/ijproman

Would the real project management language please stand up?

Connie L. Delisle *, David Olson [1]

Project Networking Specialists, Chief Knowledge Officer, 4690 McNeely Rd., Navan, Ont., Canada K4B 1J1
Projectworks International 579 West 19th Avenue, Vancouver, BC, Canada V5Z 1W8

Received 23 April 2002; received in revised form 1 October 2002; accepted 13 June 2003

Abstract

The bodies of knowledge that serve project management as a practice and academic discipline provide a potentially useful organizational resource. However, coordinating bodies of knowledge and keeping pace with changing concepts create a challenge. Overall, many believe that we have a *generally accepted* body of knowledge for use in managing projects. However, practitioners filter and critically interpret information that in turn shapes their perceptions and generates knowledge to either support or challenge what seems to be "true" from book learning or practical experience. This paper purposely questions whether project-based terminology and definitions are actually as widely accepted as believed. The scope limits the presentation to a summary of two exploratory pieces of scholarly work. The initial literature review from the first source [C. Delisle, Success and communication in virtual project teams, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Dept. of Civil Engineering. Project Management Specialization, The University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta, July 2001, pp. 1–442], follow up literature review, web-based search and in-class experiment from the second source [D. Olson, Is a common vocabulary lacking in project management? Final assignment for Information Technology Project Management, Athabasca University, 2001] provide key information on where we are in terms of investigating assumptions around project management language use. The authors conclude that coordination of glossaries and dissemination of information about project management terms and definitions lack coordination on a broad scale.
© 2003 Elsevier Ltd and IPMA. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Organizational resources; Managing projects; Language use

1. Introduction

Many practitioners and academics see the bodies of knowledge that serve project management (PM) as being *generally accepted*. The term generally accepted according to the PM BOK Guide® [23] "means that knowledge and practices exist that apply to most projects most of the time, and that widespread consensus endures about their value and usefulness" (p. 3). However, the growing incidence of failed projects and case law citing communication breakdown as a cause begs the question about the degree to which those managing and studying projects share their understanding of related project concepts, terminology, and definitions. As a matter of course, those involved in any quasi or true profession share only parts of terminology and conceptual systems at any one time. Thus, expecting a sustained high level of consensus may be unrealistic. Rather, understanding what level of consensus exists concerning how we talk about and manage projects may help organizations better address ways to share their knowledge about the process of managing projects, such that it may enable the achievement of successful projects.

To this end, this paper presents foundational work done to investigate language use in managing projects as a necessary step in raising awareness and building our understanding of challenges inherent in fostering a shared project management language. The first part of the paper provides insights from a literature review. Next, the paper presents an overview of what practitioners, associations, and academia have done in terms of addressing language use in project management. Attention shifts to the latest academic work specifically about project management language use, providing a condensed overview of the rationale, methodology, analysis, results and discussion.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +613-266-7024.
E-mail addresses: projectnetwork@sympatico.ca (C.L. Delisle), david.olson@projectworks.biz (D. Olson).
[1] Tel.: +604-683-2277.

0263-7863/$ - see front matter © 2003 Elsevier Ltd and IPMA. All rights reserved.
doi:10.1016/S0263-7863(03)00072-3

This work represents the first of its kind to investigate a *Common Language Problem* (CLP) in managing projects. The CLP, coined by the author [19] refers to the difficulties inherent in and surrounding language use because meaning appears to be assigned, understood, and communicated in social contexts. Thus, "individuals create their own meanings and only through [social] agreements do parallel personal meanings develop" [10] p. 3. Ultimately, "what we agree to standardize or treat as if it were shared and constant, [and] to create procedures for" helps us to generate commonly accepted vocabulary [10], p. 5.

The following section of the paper provides practical suggestions about how to work toward creating a common project management language instead of assuming that we have generally accepted meanings about "project management" concepts, knowledge and practices. Finally, the authors suggest several areas of future research in the area of language use in the practice of managing projects.

2. Do we really have a common language problem?

The fundamental question, "Is there discussion about the need for or problems in creating a generally accepted project management (PM) language or vocabulary?" guided an in-depth review of the literature [19]. The initial query included two esteemed business-based subscription databases and two academic databases: Ebsco Business Source Elite; [2] Dow Jones Interactive; [3] Simon Fraser University Catalogue (SFU) [4] and Amicus (the National Library of Canada). [5] Two sets of search terms "project management"/"terminology"; and "project management"/"vocabulary" did not produce substantial findings. The findings shown in the bulleted list suggest a low level of awareness about project management vocabulary issues:

- Ebsco queries yielded a simple PM glossary published by PC Magazine and one by Infoworld, as well as one article about PM language. [6]
- Dow Jones Interactive queries did not yield any relevant results.
- SFU catalogue queries yielded two results. First, reference to a textbook by Forsberg et al. [8] that only dedicates 2% to the subject content to project vocabulary (i.e., Chapter 4 on "project vocabulary" accounts for only 8 of a total of 354 pages). Second, the search identified a dictionary of PM terms by Cleland and Kerzner [2] dating back to the year 1985.
- National Library of Canada Amicus' queries did not yield any relevant results.

While disconcerting, the lack of academic or business discussion about PM language or vocabulary does not mean the absence of a CLP. On a practical level, we see evidence in daunting accounts of failed projects often pointing to communication breakdowns on projects. For example, 7 of 20 projects from multi-industries lost more than $100 million, citing communication problems as an early symptom of failure. [7] Many other examples in the initial literature review raise important questions about communication breakdowns whose future answers may help piece together the bigger picture about how people managing and working on projects actually communicate successfully. Some key questions raised include, "Why do businesses continue to fail in bids to successfully anticipate market twists and turns despite the availability and use of "better" communication technologies, knowledge management systems, and PM full-suite software packages? Why do many businesses continue to make expensive incremental improvements in communication technology, but still deliver failed projects? Why do many organizations continue to assume that new employees will catch on to the language inherent in the culture of their new company? Why are assumptions made that the employees will speak a common language when mergers or hostile take over bids force two often divergent cultures to unite?

Given the literature review results and host of unanswered questions, the authors adopt a basic assumption that a CLP does exist. As well, we need a greater awareness and understanding about the reasons for and benefits of having a common vocabulary in managing projects. The next assumption being that this area of research does hold some practical value in terms of business practice. For example, businesses may be interested in finding out just what role communication breakdowns have in failed projects. As well, businesses may benefit from finding out what impact a common vocabulary has on enabling more successful mergers or acquisitions.

[2] A leading subscription-based service that provides access to "one of the most diverse full text business databases currently available". It includes popular business magazines, scholarly journals and trade publications. http://search.epnetcom

[3] A leading subscription-based information service that provides access to more than "6000 newswires, newspapers, magazines and trade journals". http:www.djinteractive.com.

[4] SFU's URL is http://www.sfu.ca.

[5] The Amicus (http://amicus.nlc-bnc.ca/aaweb/amilogine.htm) database provides users with the ability to "search over 22 million full records from 500 Canadian libraries".

[6] Mulder, Louwrens. 1997 July. The Importance of a Common Project Management Method in the Corporate Environment. R&D Management, 27 (3), p. 189.

[7] Project Pathology. Causes, patterns and symptoms of project failure. From the WWW, March 2003. http://www.thomsett.com.au/main/articles/path/toc.htm

دریافت فوری ← متن کامل مقاله

ISIArticles
مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات