

# Six key points to merge project marketing into project management

Bernard Cova<sup>a,\*</sup>, Robert Salle<sup>b,1</sup>

<sup>a</sup> ESCP-EAP, European School of Management & Euromed Marseilles, 79 Av. de la République, 75011 Paris, France

<sup>b</sup> E.M. LYON, Lyon Graduate School of Business, 23 Av. Guy de Collongue, BP 174, 69132 Lyon Ecully Cedex, France

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## Abstract

From a conceptual point of view, project marketing and project management have existed for years as separate disciplines, each having developed independently from the other. In the nineties, evolutions in project management edged the project out of its strict time frame in order to re-position it within a strategic, long-term and customer-oriented approach. In doing so, such developments concur with progress made in project marketing over the last decade. This article proposes to bridge the gap between the two disciplines on six key points, thus structuring a conceptual time frame common to project marketing and project management.

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## 1. Introduction

In the large amount of the literature on project management, the issue of marketing the project appears to be of marginal interest [1,2]. Two main reasons can be given. The first reason is that many projects are developed within firms, that is to say they do not or may not need to be marketed. The second reason is that projects are bound in time and the vast majority of project management methods are mobilised once the go-ahead has been given to the project team. A recent survey [3] confirms this marginal interest for marketing. Based on an analysis of the relative frequency of attention given to body of knowledge topics of project management (44 topics were selected), in papers published between 1990 and 1998 in the *International Journal of Project Management* (IJPM) and in the *Project Management Journal* (PMJ), this survey showed that very limited attention is dedicated to marketing and sales topics: respectively, 0% in IJPM and 2% in PMJ.

Things have evolved and widened approaches to project management have appeared [4]. These approaches led to refocusing the goals of project management to make them customer- and stakeholder-based, whether or not these groups of actors happen to be internal or external to the company. However, these widened approaches to project management began to take shape [1] without any interaction or cross-referencing with the emerging trend of project marketing [5] in business-to-business marketing. The same applies to the latter: project marketing researchers never attempted to take into account project management concepts and methods [6]. The European Network for Project Marketing, also known as the International Network for Project Marketing (INPM), a research community loosely affiliated with the Industrial Marketing and Purchasing Group (IMP Group), has only recently taken steps to establish a dialogue with project management researchers. This dialogue is more of a monologue, however, as it entails a review of the INPM's possible contributions to project management [7].

This article proposes to bridge the gap between the two disciplines – project marketing and project management – using a meta-theoretical approach organised around six key points: the project, characteristics of

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\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +33 149232164.

E-mail addresses: [bcova@escp-eap.net](mailto:bcova@escp-eap.net) (B. Cova), [salle@em-lyon.com](mailto:salle@em-lyon.com) (R. Salle).

<sup>1</sup> Tel.: +33478337773.

projects, project cycle, focus of the approach, stakeholders, project origin.

## 2. What is a project?

According to Turner and Müller [8], “a project is a temporary organization to which resources are assigned to undertake a unique, novel and transient endeavour managing the inherent uncertainty and need for integration in order to deliver beneficial objectives of change”. To be compared with Cova et al.’s project marketing approach [6], where project is defined as “a complex transaction covering a package of products, services and work, specifically designed to create capital assets that produce benefits for a buyer over an extended period of time”. Whereas the field of project management emphasises the temporary organization, project marketing emphasises the transaction. In fact, here we can point out the different viewpoints as exemplified in French by the couple *projet/affaire*; the customer’s project (*projet*) is perceived as a transaction for the supplier (*affaire*). Consequently, in project marketing there is only a project if the owner has decided to externalise an entire project or part of one. Taking this stance, some marketing approaches aim at driving the owner towards an outsourcing choice in order to create the transaction.

Both are aimed at creating something unique or specific, but whereas project management focuses on the temporary endeavour that takes place after signing of the contract, project marketing focuses on the long-term consequences (an extended period of time) of the project for the buyer. This is where, recent work of a strategic nature in project management [9] bridges the gap in relation to the project marketing’s definition by taking into account the long-term effects of the project on the customer’s business. Thus, there is a tendency to reconsider the particular risks and rewards of each project within the wider context of the organization involved, in order to bear in mind the impact on the supplier’s competitiveness.

## 3. What are the characteristics of projects?

From the vast amount of literature available on project management, it is possible to distinguish four common characteristics of a project: Finite budget and schedule constraints/Complex and interrelated activities/Clearly defined objectives/Uniqueness. These characteristics have to be compared with the DUC model in project marketing [10], where the major characteristics of project transactions are defined as: *Discontinuity/Uniqueness/Complexity*.

Complexity and Uniqueness are both presented as major features in the two bodies of literature. Whereas

the customer-based project management approach emphasises the specific time frame and objectives of a given project, the project marketing approach emphasises the discontinuity between one project and another [11], which means that many buyer–seller project-related resource and activity ties are terminated at the end of each individual project. One approach focuses on an existing project, the other focuses on project business. Even customer-based project management sees the world through the eye of a Project Manager (PM) who is in charge of a unique project which must be developed successfully in order to achieve the highest level of customer satisfaction. Project marketing sees the world through the eye of a marketer in charge of successfully managing a strategic business unit in order to achieve best performance. Actually, the whole development of project marketing over the last three decades [6] illustrates the move from focusing on a specific project through a competitive bidding strategy, to multi-project focusing with the same customer (follow-up projects). A similar evolution appeared recently in project management: from the management of single projects to project portfolio management [12].

Crucially, project management must be able to coordinate complex activities in a limited (often too short!) period of time, for a customer between the two boundaries of a project (beginning and end). What is critical for project marketing, however, is the unlimited period of time (often too long!) between the end of one project and the beginning of the next one for the same customer; a time frame that is known in project marketing approach as the *independent of any project* phase [6]. Limitation is central for project management; discontinuity is central for project marketing [11]. Herein lies the possible major discrepancy between these two visions of the world and thus between the two disciplines and their possible articulation. “The International Network on Project Marketing (INPM) argument for studying project marketing rests on the assertion that it is not enough to regard a project delivered by one firm/a group of firms to another organization/group of organizations as a set of managerial actions taken by the supplier(s), i.e., mere project management... From an INPM perspective, project marketing is the broader term; it always implicitly includes project management but not (necessarily) vice versa” [7]. Thus, project marketing re-embeds the project in the wider context of project business. Some attempts at this kind of re-embedding can be found in the abundant literature dealing with projects in the construction industry [13].

## 4. What is the project cycle?

Project management in its modern form began to take root in the sixties with major military space

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