

The impact of Puritan ideology on aspects of project management

Stephen Jonathan Whitty*, Mark Frederick Schulz

School of Information Technology and Electrical Engineering, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Qld 4072, Australia

Received 23 March 2006; accepted 24 May 2006

Abstract

This paper examines the impact of Puritan ideology on various aspects of project management. By using a memetic approach to project management research, this paper traces the development of the ethos or spirit of project management from its Puritan origins. It argues that contrary to traditional thinking, project management has developed against a background of Puritan elements (memes) that are favourable to the development of capitalism. Moreover, it is suggested that these religious origins continue to impact in a conservative way on how the project management discipline evolves; limiting its development, oversimplifying the process of managing people, and consequentially thwarting nonconformists.

© 2006 Elsevier Ltd and IPMA. All rights reserved.

Keywords: History of project management; Puritan ideology; Memetic; Spirit of project management; Religion; Doctrinal supremacy; Protestant work ethic; Scientific management; Managerialism

1. Introduction

The origins of project management (PM) are traditionally considered to be deeply rooted in antiquity [1], with its present day methodology and body of knowledge (BoK) born out of the construction and military weapons industry [2]. I suggest this is an oversimplification that portrays PM in a pragmatic and secular manner with no reference to its anecdotal, mythmaking, and religious origins.

PM is used today in all aspects and areas of commerce and industry, and this trend is likely to continue [3]. So why do people individually and collectively believe in PM, and why is it spreading so profusely [4]? The reasons are more complex than those suggested by our traditional view of PM as an efficient method of increasing productivity. It has been suggested that one possible reason for the rising faith in PM is that it provides a sense of meaning, purpose, and control to work in a fast changing society that leaves many feeling threatened and insecure about

an unforeseeable future [4]. I suggest one possible explanation for its profuse dissemination is that as a concept it survives better than any other in our Western capitalist corporate environment.

In this paper I employ a memetic approach to PM research (see Whitty [4]) which observes over time the evolution of memes and the behaviours they create. I put forward the case that Puritan memes have influenced the development of the 'spirit' of PM. Furthermore, that these memes have evolved through, and been shaped by, the ideological eras known as Newtonianism, Liberalism, and Taylorism.

I begin with a brief overview of memes, how they spread, and how we can begin to observe them by the behaviours they create. Next, I highlight significant memes that provide the social backdrop for Western religiosity. I then define the spirit of PM, and subsequently illustrate the evolution of its inherited traits. Finally I reflect on the impact such Puritan origins have on various aspects of PM such as; how it evolves, how it is studied and practiced, the role of the project manager, the project team and the profession, as well as the impact on the project organisation and how the PM body creates knowledge.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +61 7 3365 9797; fax: +61 7 3365 4999.
E-mail address: jonw@itee.uq.edu.au (S.J. Whitty).
URL: www.itee.uq.edu.au/~jonw (S.J. Whitty).

Fig. 1 summarizes the influence Puritanism has had on the formation of memes that underpin the ideological eras known as Newtonianism, Liberalism, and Taylorism, and

the influence they have all had on PM. Table 1 summarizes the final discussion of this paper and highlights the impact of Puritanical memes on aspects of PM.

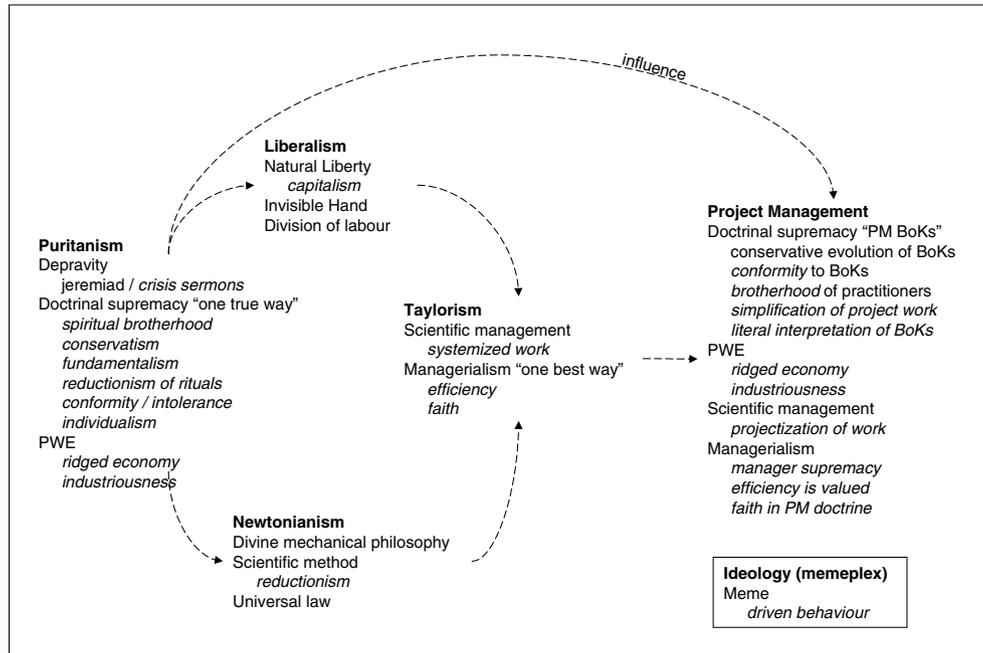


Fig. 1. The evolution of Puritan memes and their influence on PM.

Table 1
The impact of Puritan memes on aspects of PM

Aspect of PM	Meme/driven behaviour	Impact on PM
Evolution	Doctrinal supremacy/ <i>conservatism</i>	Traditional task orientated Puritan work values reinforced. Values of mission, vision, and purpose reinstated. PM language reinforces dichotomist thinking. Traditional practices and BoK will be conserved. Formation of breakaway BoKs.
Study and practice	PWE/ <i>industriousness ridged, economy</i>	PWE continues to be designed into accredited PM training. PWE reinforced by competency certification and mandatory corporate accreditation.
	Scientific management/ <i>projectization of work</i>	Complexity of problems is ignored by redefined problems simplistic and reductive project terms.
Project manager	Managerialism/ <i>manager supremacy, faith in PM doctrine, efficiency is valued</i>	Project manager is a moral agent, a guardian and advocate of correct PM doctrine and practices. Project manager role is institutionalized securing promotional pathway.
Project team	Doctrinal supremacy/ <i>conformity and intolerance, brotherhood of practitioners</i>	Team members conform and accept traditional PM teachings. Team member promote themselves as practitioners of the doctrine.
	Depravity/ <i>Jeremiad</i>	Team members share a communal identity, struggle against the PM doctrine, and reinterpret events in light of that struggle.
Profession	Doctrinal supremacy/ <i>brotherhood of practitioners</i>	PMBOK® Guide provides guidelines for PM behaviour. Practitioners owe their allegiance to the profession. Conformity is premium, dissent is penalized.
Knowledge creation	Doctrinal supremacy/ <i>conservative reductionism</i>	Restricted evolution of traditions and BoK. Complexity of reality is simplified and misinterpreted by use of metaphors and anecdotes.
Project organisations	Doctrinal supremacy/ <i>fundamentalism</i>	Literal interpretation and application of PM doctrine. Senior management cannot conclude that PM is a waste of time and money.

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

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