

# Investigating the rationale for adopting an internationally-recognised project management methodology in Ireland: The view of the project manager

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## Abstract

As businesses become more dependent on technology, effective project management has been recognised as a necessity, in order to lead and deliver quality software applications on time and within budget. One possible option in software projects is the use of a project management methodology. This exploratory research examines why organisations with an existing project management methodology are transitioning to an internationally-recognised methodology, and why organisations that do not have a project management methodology are implementing an internationally-recognised methodology. Results of five case studies suggest that while an in-house project management methodology can work well within an organisation, the benefits of using an internationally-recognised methodology should be considered. These include: the assurance that the organisation is using what is considered to be best-practice; demand from external customers that a recognised methodology is used; assistance with external recruitment; and the availability of suppliers of the methodology for training and support.

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## 1. Introduction

The growth and acceptance of project management of Information Systems (IS) projects in organisations is on the increase and has come about more through necessity than through desire (Abbasi and Al-Mharmah, 2000; Crawford and Pollack, 2007; Kerzner, 2006b). More and more organisations are under pressure to develop and execute innovative business strategies and projects in order to stay competitive (Srivannaboon and Milosevic, 2006). Increasingly, information systems are being used to carry out these business strategies, and as a result better planning skills are required (Brancheaum and Wetherbe, 1987). Management are realising that to remain competitive their organisations must implement good project management practices as an organisation may find that they are no longer competitive on price or quality and that it may be

cheaper to outsource project work (Kerzner, 2006b). As a result, organisations are forced to look internally for a solution to execute these projects effectively. One possible solution is project management, as using good project management practices can help organisations to better plan, organise, manage and control work, which leads to better performance and increased productivity (Abbasi and Al-Mharmah, 2000; Loo, 2002).

The fundamental objective of project management is to deliver a project within time, cost and to specification (Jurison, 1999). Yet, it is well known that many IS projects exceed their budget and time schedule (De Meyer et al., 2002). Various studies have found that between 40% and 50% of these projects fail to meet estimates and that the degree of overspend can exceed 200% (Keil et al., 2000; Robey and Keil, 2001). In 2004 the StandishGroupInternational (2004) conducted one of the most extensive and often cited studies which showed that only 29% of all the projects surveyed succeeded (i.e. were delivered on time, on budget, with required features and functions) with 18% of projects failing (cancelled prior to completion or delivered and never used).

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Brock et al. (2003) are of the opinion that these IS project performance problems could be addressed by having better implementation procedures and better management of projects while Milosevic and Patanakul (2005) have identified the use of project management processes as a factor affecting the success of IS projects. Research by Parker and Skitmore (2005) and Wateridge (1997) has also shown that IS projects that do not have a project manager or do not follow a methodology or a defined process are more likely to fail as ultimately, the project manager is responsible for the delivery of a project and is fundamental to ensuring that the project is a success.

## 2. Motivation for the research

Many organisations have developed their own project management methodology for managing IS projects, but Forrester (2005), a US-based, independent technology and market research company has found that organisations are tending to move away from internally-developed project management methodologies towards more broadly recognised approaches. In the USA, project management training and certification is on the rise in public and private companies (Pappas, 2005). This is also evident in Ireland where the number of individuals completing project management certification programmes is increasing year on year (IPMA, 2005). It is likely that many organisations in Ireland still use an in-house project management methodology or no methodology at all, although there is no data available to validate this claim.

The existing literature focuses on various elements of project management methodologies including: why a project management methodology should be adopted; the benefits and drawbacks of adopting a project management methodology; and more recently on the value of specific project management tools and techniques that are employed by project managers (Besner and Hobbs, 2006, 2008). Yet, little research has sought to determine why organisations transition from an in-house project management methodology to an internationally-recognised alternative. This is surprising given that such a transition is rarely trivial, and often requires substantial commitment of resources and upheaval. In addition, the new commercial methodology rarely caters for the needs and nuances of the organisation in the same way the in-house methodology would have done. Likewise, little research has tried to determine why organisations without a project management methodology are choosing accepted methodologies over internal alternatives, which can be simpler, require fewer resources, and are always tightly aligned to the organisation.

This study aims to address this gap by attempting to gain an understanding as to:

- i. Why organisations in Ireland with an existing project management methodology in place for managing information systems projects are transitioning to an internationally-recognised project management methodology (IRPMM).
- ii. Why organisations that currently do not have a project management methodology in place for managing information systems projects are choosing to implement an

internationally-recognised project management methodology rather than developing an in-house methodology.

To address these questions five exploratory cases studies were conducted. In the next section of this paper the background literature is reviewed. The research approach is then explained. This is followed by a presentation of the findings and an analysis and discussion of the results. The paper ends by identifying some limitations in the research and making some suggestions for further research.

## 3. Project management methodology

Before proceeding any further it is important to explain what a methodology is in the context of this research. A methodology is a structured approach for delivering a project, and consists of a set of processes, with each process having clearly defined resources and activities (Turner, 2000). A project management methodology will set out what an organisation regards as best practice; improve inter-organisational communication; and minimise duplication of effort by having common resources, documentation and training (Clarke, 1999). Research by Payne and Turner (1999) has shown that project management practices can vary significantly from one project to another. However, Kerzner (2001) believes the best way to increase the likelihood of an organisation having a continuous stream of successfully managed projects is to develop a good project management methodology in-house that is flexible enough to support all projects. Some organisations adapt their project management methodology from external standards such as the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBoK), as project life cycles and management structures are different in every organisation (Zielinski, 2005). The amount of time and effort needed to develop a methodology will vary from company to company depending upon factors such as the size and nature of projects, competitive pressures and the number of functional boundaries to be crossed (Kerzner, 2001).

For those that do not wish to develop their own methodology, there are internationally-recognised project management methodologies available which are supported by accreditation. Two most commonly known methodologies are the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBoK), developed by the Project Management Institute (PMI) and Projects IN Controlled Environments (PRINCE2) developed by the Office of Government Commerce in the UK (McManus and Wood-Harper, 2002). The focus of this research is on organisations who have adopted either of these two project management methodologies.

## 4. Adopting a project management methodology

The project management methodologies of most organisations are fairly standard with most using a common project-management language and framework across the organisation, often adapted from external standards like those of the PMI. However, project life cycles and management structures are different in every organisation and therefore one project

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