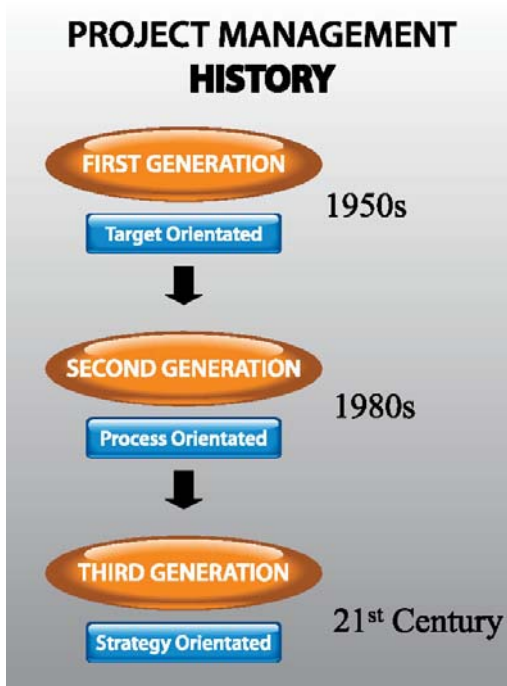


The Changing Face of Project Management

The past fifteen years has seen a dramatic increase in the proportion of work that is undertaken as projects rather than as repetitive operations, or 'business as usual'. This expansion of project-based activity has not been restricted to any one market or sector, but has rather been experienced throughout the private, public and voluntary sectors.



However, as the amount of work carried out as projects has increased, two related things have happened. Firstly, businesses with no extensive history of managing projects have found themselves managing large portfolios of projects and have been able to achieve various degrees of maturity in doing so. Secondly, the demand for project managers has outstripped the supply of qualified specialists, giving rise to both a large number of 'accidental' project managers and a dramatic increase in demand for project management credentials, such as IPMA and Project Management Professional (PMP®) certification. Universities, institutes and training organizations around the world have responded to this demand by offering an increasing number of Masters Degree and Diploma courses in project management, which in turn has led to an increase in research activity.

Two recent trends suggest that we will have to run fast simply to stand still in the race for improved success: the number of competent and expert project managers, and the availability of planning

and estimating expertise.

As more and more work is being performed as projects rather than 'business as usual', the demand for competent project managers is growing faster than the market can supply them. The age profile of project managers in many industries shows many of the most experienced, expert and competent people now approaching the age of retirement.

The International Society of Pharmaceutical Engineers (ISPE) were told at a conference in Paris in April 2007 to expect engineering projects to become significantly more expensive and to experience greater delays, because of the looming capacity 'crisis' of qualified engineers and project personnel.

It is true that there are growing numbers of people seeking accreditation as project managers, but that doesn't address the core questions of competence and expertise which are hard won and

need more than either process frameworks or acquisition of knowledge. The world of project management certification is dominated by two international project management organisations, each with their own Body of Knowledge and accreditation programme. These are PMI (USA) and IPMA (International Project Management Association). The PMI certification programme tends to be a certification of “knowledge” while the IPMA certification system focuses on “competence.” Unfortunately, the implications of these distinctions do not seem to be appreciated or understood by most employers.

Key planning and estimating skills are being neglected

Research has demonstrated that when the planning systems, processes and practices used to develop the project plan are rigorous and proven, and incorporate effective review processes, this proves to be the most important factor in improving project results in terms of cost, time and scope accounts for a 40% improvement in results on its own.

Unless the right people with the right skills, competence and motivation are working together throughout the life of a program or project, encouraged by the right organizational commitment to ‘get it right’ time after time, project planning is simply a matter of ‘going through the motions’

In all but the most straightforward of cases, the acts of planning and estimating call for corporate discipline, for sophisticated understanding of the problems, and for skilled and competent people in the right project roles.

Leading organisations whose business is project management have long recognized the importance of tough ‘interpersonal’ and ‘communication’ skills on the part of their most expert project management practitioners. And secondly, although the ‘human side of project management’ has had fewer words written about it than the more prevalent control techniques, there has been a general tendency to underline how important it is not to neglect the people aspects of managing projects.

The scope of the profession is changing from ‘project management’ to ‘managing projects’

The recent launch of standards for program management, portfolio management and organizational project management, coupled with the tag line adopted by PMI – ‘making project management indispensable for business results’ – make it clear that the scope of work which the profession regards as its ‘field of operations’ has expanded dramatically during the past ten or fifteen years.

Managing projects is a ‘whole organisation’ activity

When the maturity of project management in different industries is compared, the one domain of practice in which all industries share practices of similar maturity is in the management of multiple projects.

No wonder, then, that the practices associated with program management, portfolio management, and organizational project management should receive so much attention in recent



years. After all, much corporate risk is associated with the difficulties of managing the necessary portfolio of change, and legislative initiatives such as the Sarbanes-Oxley has drawn senior managements' attention to the real and severe penalties that flow from failing to manage risk responsibly.

The practice of project management is changing as it rises to meet the new challenges of a broader role nearer to the centre of the corporate spotlight than ever before.