Advances in Project Management

Narrated Journeys in Unchartered Territory

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GOWER
Introduction

The hardest part of starting a new journey is taking a leap of faith right at the beginning …

–Anon.

This book has emerged from the search for refining and redefining the boundaries of project management. While the topics may be briefly mentioned in the various standards and bodies of knowledge, the individual chapters are often reflections on new developments that stretch contemporary understanding, offering new insights and perspectives. In fact, a large proportion of the writing extends beyond widely recognised knowledge aspects to feature a much-needed focus on the skills, attitudes, values and competencies that are needed to successfully deliver projects.

In recent years we have also seen a plethora of new books and articles identifying the shortcomings of traditional methods and proposing alternative arrangements, solutions and conceptualisations. Many of these publications are initiated by practitioners who appear to be dissatisfied by the current state of affairs. Yet, given the range and diversity of such publications it is becoming increasingly difficult to sample, understand and identify all the contributions that may be applicable to us.

The chapters collated in this publication bring together many leading authorities on topics that are relevant to the management of projects. Topics such as sustainability, leadership, governance, programme management, decision making, problem solving, psychology, messy problems and ethics are explored alongside more traditional aspects such as risk, supply chains, earned value and performance measurement.

The main aims of the work are to reflect on the state of practice in the discipline; to offer some fresh insights and thinking; to distil new knowledge;
and, to provide a way of sampling a range of ideas, perspectives and styles of writing from some of the leading thinkers in the discipline.

The content is divided into 21 specific areas. In each area a brief introductory narrative that sets the context and explains the background is followed by a chapter focused on a particular aspect, approach or new way of thinking. Readers who might like to follow up the ideas are strongly encouraged to refer to the books published by the authors of the pertinent chapters which offer greater detail and significantly more content on the relevant topic.

Taken together the book offers both a unique distillation of ideas from a wide range of authors on many topics that extend beyond the bodies of knowledge, and an accessible introduction to further resources in the areas that they would like to explore. As the range of topics extends beyond those normally covered, it is likely that the book will identify new perspectives that readers may not have considered, and thereby suggest additional reading to augment the interests and concerns of practitioners and researchers.

Why Project Management?

Project management is increasingly being recognised as a key competence in many organisations in both the public and private sectors. Trends such as downsizing, reduced management layers, greater flexibility, distributed teams and the challenges of rapidly evolving technology have taken project management beyond its routes in the construction, engineering and aerospace industries and are playing a part in transforming the service, financial, IT and general management sectors. Academic courses, professional training and accreditation programmes are blossoming as practitioners seek to enhance their knowledge, skills and competencies. *Fortune* even rated project management as the number one career choice at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Project management offers the discipline and framework required to help organisations to transform their mainstream operations and service performance. It is viewed as a way of organising for the future. Moreover, in an increasingly busy, stressful and uncertain world it has become necessary to manage multiple projects successfully at the same time.

Project management is a core competence required to deliver change measured in terms of achieving desired outcomes with associated benefits.
With projects increasingly viewed as managing the change efforts of society, project management is called upon to cross functional, organisational and societal boundaries and handle the inherent complexity and uncertainty required to bring about a new reality.

Yet, many organisations have struggled in applying the traditional models of project management to their new projects in the global environment. Projects still fail at an alarming rate. A major ingredient in the build-up leading to failure is often cited as the lack of adequate project management knowledge and experience.

Some organisations have responded to this situation by trying to improve the understanding and capability of their managers and employees who are introduced to projects, as well as their experienced project managers, in an attempt to enhance their competence and capability in this area.

Why Now?

There are many reasons why we need to refocus the discussion on improving the management of projects: modern organisations feature flatter structures, new technologies, rising complexity, greater collaboration and increasing interactions all requiring greater responsiveness. We also need vision and direction to drive our efforts.

The world of projects has changed dramatically. The old models appear less relevant and the dated tools less useful in context. Successful delivery in increasingly competitive and global environments require us to align with organisational strategy, focus on practitioners, and create the right environment to foster the skills and attitudes needed to succeed at the grand challenges facing us.

We seem to live in a faster and more demanding world, characterised by rising levels of uncertainty and ambiguity. Indeed, project management is increasingly called upon to deliver in a world that is connected in complex new ways; where the so-called ‘unknown unknowns’ determine our context. Professor Eddie Obeng defines the new world as a world that can change faster than you can learn. As we engage with an ever-growing portion of this world, it becomes more difficult to satisfy all stakeholders whilst delivering value and benefits in a new and unfamiliar context.
Project professionals have moved beyond delivering incremental improvements to generating deep and lasting benefits meeting the challenge of a changing world. Yet at the same time we are being asked to deliver more with less – more value, more benefits, more stakeholders, extended life cycle and greater sustainability to be delivered in less time, less cost, and with fewer mistakes. The challenge of creating the new capabilities in an unknown environment is only matched by the need to become more inventive in delivering the solutions; generating improvements in the way projects and programmes are managed, risks are handled, subcontractors are overseen and increasingly diverse stakeholder groups contribute and participate. Ours is a world which demands what appears to be the impossible; Advances in Project Management aims to explore how the profession can think and act in this demanding new world.

We live in an increasingly unpredictable and complex environment replete with change, ambiguity and uncertainty. Consequently, there appears to be a greater need to be concerned with defining the new kind of project management required to survive, succeed and excel in this new environment.

The book thus offers insights and ideas about how the profession will rise to the challenges of the new world – climate change, technological advances, globalisation, social networks, public health, security and economic regeneration and growth. The challenges require fundamentally new ways of making sense and shaping a world we neither control, nor fully understand.

Success in the future would require better understanding of the context and deeper engagement with the business. It will also require new ways of developing professionals, making change work and guaranteeing value.

We increasingly talk about the new world and the new realities of the twenty-first century. The new world offers many new challenges that we seem to encounter on a more frequent basis: speed, uncertainty, ambiguity and complexity. Moreover, the new world is increasingly characterised by limited attention, growing collaboration and participation, new social media technologies and the expanding scope and influence of projects. The challenges combined with the new characteristics point to a much-needed departure from project management orthodoxy.

But that leads to many questions. Where do we go next? Indeed, how do we deliver successfully in novel and unstructured situations? How do we manage in uncontrolled environments? More crucially perhaps, how do we move from
managing to leading? How do we involve a more involved world? From the point of view of developing leaders, what skills are essential for success in the new world? And finally, how do we find out?

Many of these questions are addressed through the series of chapters presented in this book. Other questions are identified and explored along the journey as we seek to identify, understand and share new insights and advances.

**Advances in Project Management**

The individual chapters have been selected to feature in the ‘Advances in Project Management’ column published in the *PM World Journal*. The main purpose of this column is to make the ideas and principles of the knowledge and skills required to manage projects more accessible. *Advances in Project Management* was introduced in order to improve understanding and project capability further up the organisation; amongst strategy and senior decision makers and amongst professional project and programme managers. Our ambition has been to provide project sponsors, project management leaders, practitioners, scholars and researchers with thought-provoking, cutting-edge information that combines conceptual insights with interdisciplinary rigour and practical relevance thus offering new insights and understanding of key areas and approaches.

In order to identify the potential authors, a wide range of books and resources have been consulted. Contributions were selected by the editor on the basis of their individual merit, usefulness and applicability. The chapters offered here will feature many leading practitioners, researchers and managers and highlight concepts, ideas and tools that will be of benefit to practising project managers.

To this end, the individual chapters aim to:

1. identify and focus on *key* aspects of project, programme and portfolio management;
2. offer practical case examples of how new applications have been tackled in a variety of industries;
3. provide access to appropriate new models in these areas, as they emerge from academic research.
In other words, the book aims to provide those people and organisations who
are involved with the developments in project management with the kind
of structured information that will inform their thinking, their practice and
improve their decisions. Featured contributions have not been limited to a
particular community, country or association to ensure that a wide variety of
angles and perspectives are covered.

Geography and Scope

People come to project management from many directions bringing with
them their own particular take. Over the years we have witnessed a number
of distinct influences on the development of project management from various
sectors, government bodies, professional associations and even from specific
geographical regions. The publication is meant to be inclusive and offers a
platform to ideas which will be of use to practitioners regardless of where they
are based and whatever the geography of the projects that they are running.

Projects take place in organisations and feature people. Our approach
therefore is to focus on what it takes to manage projects in these settings. The
topics we cover will emphasise the skills, competencies, attitudes and knowledge
that are needed for successful delivery in a wide range of environments and
contexts. We will also endeavour not to get stuck in any particular silo, instead
offering a wider and more inclusive context. Some of our experts come from
other domains and bring organisational, psychological, sociological or other
influences that they can share. The value of this publication therefore is in
integrating the viewpoints and perspectives and offering improved insights
and understanding as a result.

Project management is a dynamic and exciting discipline. Together we can
embark on a journey of exploration in unchartered territories, trying to map
some of our emerging knowledge and understanding. We encourage readers
to engage with the range of topics, and would also encourage those who would
like to share their insights and ideas with the wider community to get in touch
with the editor. We look forward to continuing this discussion and extending
the boundaries of project management.

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