The Potential for A Project Management Framework Standard:
Are we ready?
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Preface

I wrote the original book: "*A Framework for Project and Program Management Integration*" that was published by the Project Management Institute back in 1991 — a quarter of a century ago! That book seems to have stood the test of time; although we do understand a lot more about project management than we did in those days. However, a lot of the valuable insights in that book seem to have got lost in the mists of time and in the frenzy just to get through the PMP exam. It seems that one is expected to learn the rest through experience!

Nevertheless, there has been much discussion in the last few years about whether a project management *Framework Standard* should be established and, if so, what would it look like, and what would be its content? Since I have some opinions on this matter, I thought I would scribble one of my website *Musings*. However, as I dug into the subject, that exercise became much more than just a *Musing*. Here is the resulting paper.

Executive Summary

This paper reviews the potential for developing a comprehensive Framework Standard for the domain of Project Management in its broadest sense. It questions whether the current popular understanding of some aspects of the domain is sufficiently mature to provide a solid foundation for such a standard. Specific issues are raised with recommended solutions. These include:

- The updating of the published definition of "Project Management" to encompass the whole "Domain" of project management, and assigning a new term to denote the management of a "Single Project".
- The recognition that the three areas of study, namely Portfolio Management, Program Management, and Project Management (of a single project), are all separate "Disciplines", and should be treated as such.
- A better understanding of the term Project Life Span (aka project life cycle), its purpose, structure and source of responsibility.
- Recognition that the work of managing a project through its Life Span is not the same as the work of managing the development and creation of the project's Deliverables.
- The framework for the former has a limited number of "Phases" that are applicable to most projects most of the time. However, the sequence and content of the latter, while being integrated into the Project Life Span framework as "Stages", turn out to be significantly different according to the "Area of Project Management Application".
- This second sequence, often referred to as a "Methodology" for creating the product, should also be recognized in the proposed "Framework Standard".
- The recognition that the Project Life Span and the Project Methodology are separate areas of significant "Risk" to the successful outcome of the Project, especially as each has their own distinct "Success" criteria.
- The success of the former calls for delivery of the Product "On Time", "Within Budget" and "Meets Requirements".[1] The success of the latter calls for the Product to perform as required, works well, and satisfies the clients and/or customers.

- The recognition that these two dimensions of "Success" can be, and often are, in conflict. Therefore, it is essential that the respective criteria be established early on in the Life Span of the Project and, in the final analysis, a declaration of which of these has priority.

Introduction

Today, a number of project management experts are thinking that a new Standard Framework for project management would be a good idea. Such a Standard would be designed to encompass all that we know about project management in its broader sense, and present it in some logical and documentable way. That is, it would cover the whole domain of managing projects, namely Project Portfolio Management, Program Management as well as the management of a Single Project.

Obviously, the intent is to show at least how these three areas fit together. Remember, the Standard we are talking about is not the standard for a single project, but one that also covers two other major areas.

However, we think that there are a number of areas that are not yet sufficiently mature in the popular mind, as well as in the existing published Project Management Standards for that matter. We also think that such a Framework Standard is attempting to struggle with too much all in one basket for it to be usefully applied. Hence we believe that we need to apply the well-established technique of "*Work Breakdown Structure*" (WBS) to the term "*Project Management*" itself to better understand what we have, and how to improve our chances of success.

As it stands, Project Management is defined in ISO 21500, First Edition (2012-09-01), not in Section 2 Terms and Definitions, but in Section 3.3, as follows:[2]

> "Project management is the application of methods, tools, techniques and competencies to a project."

This is very similar to the Project Management Institute's definition in their "*A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge*" 5th Edition, as follows:[3]

> "Project Management: The application of knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to project activities to meet the project requirements"

Either way, it is clear that what these authors have in mind is the management of a single project, i.e., "Single Project Management".

However, ISO 21500 goes on to add:

> "Project management includes the integration of the various phases of the project life cycle, as described in 3.10."

Where Section 3.10 states:

> " Projects are usually organized into phases that are determined by governance and control needs. These phases should follow a logical sequence, with a start and an end, and should use resources to provide deliverables. In order to manage the project efficiently during the entire project life cycle, a set of activities should be performed in each phase. Project phases are collectively known as the project life cycle."

And further, that:[4]

> "The project life cycle spans the period from the start of the project to its end. The phases are divided by decision points, which can vary depending on the organizational

environment. The decision points facilitate project governance. By the end of the last phase, the project should have provided all deliverables.

To manage a project throughout its life cycle, project management processes should be used for the project as a whole or for individual phases for each team or sub-project."

All of that is well and good. But we have a problem.

Expansion of the term Project Management

Today we find that two other areas of study are becoming familiar, namely, "Program Management" and "Portfolio Management" and in an attempt to "bring these into the fold", so to speak, these areas are also included under the group heading of "Project Management". No doubt there are good political reasons for doing so, but it does leave us with a clear conflict of logic as things stand.

Either we should find a new name to distinguish between the collective grouping of the three areas together and that of managing a single project; or we should redefine the meaning of "Project Management". Obviously the latter is the easier route.

Moreover, the practices of *Project Portfolio Management (PPfM)*, *Project Program Management (PPgM)* together with *Single Project Management (SPM)* are all sufficiently well understood to recognize each in their own right. That is to say, to recognize each as a separate *discipline.*[5]

Therefore, my proposed re-definition of project management is as follows:[6]
"Project management, in its broadest sense, is the totality of managing projects throughout an organization and at all its management levels. That is, it encompasses *Project Portfolio Management (PPfM)*, *Project Program Management (PPgM)* and *Single Project Management (SPM)*."

This change is needed not because of preference, but because of logic and clarity.

But that's not the only problem.

The Project Management Timeframe

One thing, perhaps the only thing of significance, that distinguishes a project, from corporate "Business-As-Usual" (BAU) is that a project has a beginning at some time and certainly has an ending, with a lot of work in between. The time spanning between the start of the project and its completion is the project's life span.[7] This life span is linear and progressive simply because elapsed time cannot be repeated. You can, however, repeat what you do by consuming more time. That's not a time cycle, that's a repetition of activity.

So the issue now is: What activity?

Section 3.10 of ISO 21500, quoted at the beginning of this paper, is quite explicit about what to expect in the realm of managing a project – any project. In other words, these expectations apply to all projects as described in ISO 21500.[8]

But clearly that's not the whole story. What about the "deliverables" referred to in the penultimate paragraph of ISO 21500, Section 3.10 quoted earlier? That says:[9]

> "By the end of the last phase, the project should have provided all ***deliverables***"
> (Emphasis added.)

What we know from practical experience are several key considerations such as:

1. The work involved in creating the "deliverables",[10] including any necessary intermediate deliverables[11] is the essential part of the project and typically the largest part and the most challenging.
2. This work of creating the deliverables varies widely in content according to the "Area of Application" of the project in question.
3. The potential "Areas of Application" are many and various, amounting to many hundreds, if not thousands.
4. Each Area of Application calls for a wide variety of skills, skills that must be applied in some optimum sequence to be effective and efficient in producing the required product.
5. The application of this "optimum sequence" is increasingly referred to as the "***Methodology***"[12] most suited to the creation of the required product.
6. Moreover, depending on the group of skills[13] involved, different approaches to managing the work are required.

The "considerations" described above make it clear that in the course of any project we have two main sets of "management" to contend with. The first set is the management of the project and its particular set of success criteria.[14] The second set is the management of the creation of the desired product and its success in terms of potential for benefit creation and the satisfaction of the "customer".

In practice, the design of the "Project Life Span" most suited for corporate control purposes is ***not*** the same as the "Methodology" for creating the required product to customer satisfaction. Nevertheless, the two must work in tandem, with the Product Methodology sequence filling in the gaps in the sequence of Project Life Span control.[15]

Project Risk and Success

A not unreasonable question to ask at this stage is: What is the point of it all, and where do "Risk" and "Success" fit in, the two most challenging hurdles for the project manager?

The management of project risk has evolved over several decades into a major industry, with an extensive array of risks having been identified and how to deal with them. However, in our view, there are two basic risks that weigh far above all the others, and that are not always even mentioned. These are:

1. The first risk is the risk to ***project*** success through failure to apply appropriate project management tools and techniques to the conduct of the project through its life span.
2. The second is the risk to ***product*** success through failure to create a product that delivers the required performance, works well, and with which the clients and customers are satisfied.

Of the two, we believe that the second is by far the more serious. Our thinking is that for most projects, that is, with the exception of certain types of product,[16] time and cost failures will eventually be buried in previous years reports and documentation. However, ***Quality*** shortcomings in the product will be evident and felt throughout its life.[17]

The matrix diagram shown in Figure 1 illustrates the potential for project/product failure through failure of either or both Product Methodology and Single Project Management.
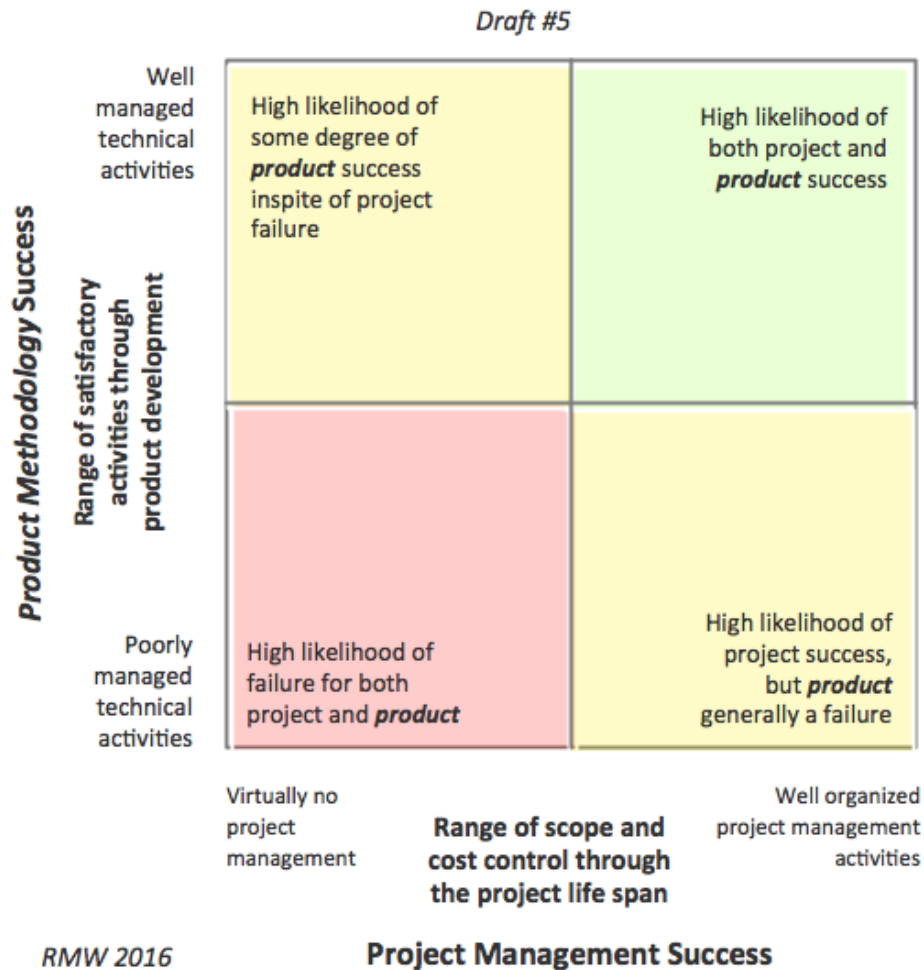
Figure 1: Project Management vs. *Product* **Development**
The Likelihood of Success Matrix

Notes: "Success" in project management has many dimensions, but for purposes of Figure 1:
1. **Project Management Success** means: Project objective, i.e., *product* delivered on time, within budget, and hence carefully tracked, as well as scope changes carefully controlled and documented.
2. ***Product* Success** means: *Product* performance delivered as required, works well and clients and customer satisfied.

Conclusion

This review is not intended to be comprehensive. There are other areas that we have not touched on, for example, the so-called "Front-end" of the Project Life Span and, by implication, the "Back-end". These areas, often conducted by different people at different times, have not been thoroughly explored in the literature. Indeed, many consider that they are not a part of the individual Project Life Span, and responsibility lies elsewhere. Yet decisions made at these times can be fundamental to the ultimate "Success" of a project and its product.

So, before we try to establish an in-depth Framework Standard covering all the aspects of Project-related Management, let us first thoroughly reexamine the knowledge we have gained through practical experience and theoretical testable constructs.

It may be necessary to set aside some well-established mantras and dogma. But if so, that is simply a prerequisite to establishing a firm foundation on which to build a solid and realistic Project Management[18] Framework with which we can then move forward..

For an in-depth view of Single Project Management, see:
http://www.maxwideman.com/papers/first_principles/intro.htm April 2009

End Note References

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[1] Or similar wording.

[2] ISO_21500_2012.pdf, section 3.3 Project Management, p4

[3] PMBOK Guide, Glossary p554

[4] These two paragraphs are added for reference later.

[5] As an example, the profession of "Engineering" encompasses a variety of "disciplines" such as civil engineering, electrical engineering, mechanical engineering, and so on. The efforts of the *Definition of the Practice of Professional Engineering* folks at http://www.peo.on.ca/index.php/ci_id/25827/la_id/1.htm have a similar problem.

[6] Wideman, R. M., unpublished research paper, 2015

[7] The Project Life Span is labeled in much literature as the "Project Life Cycle". This label is illogical because time is not repeatable.

[8] Or, in the words of PMI's PMBOK Guide, "to most projects most of the time."

[9] ISO_21500_2012_E-Character_PDF_document.pdf, Section 3.10, p8 (last paragraph but one).

[10] Deliverables may also be referred to as "products" or "outcomes" or similar, the production of which are the whole purpose of the project in the first place.

[11] Often referred to as "Enabling products" or "Enablers".

[12] As author Patrick Hankinson suggests in his paper http://www.maxwideman.com/guests/explained/note.htm, there are more than 20 such "Methodologies" – See "Choosing the right method"

[13] These skills may vary from "brawn to brain work" with the output varying from Tangible to Intangible. These characterizations only scratch the surface of these study areas of Stakeholder Management.

[14] That is, On Time, Within Budget, and To Specification and Customer Satisfaction (or words to that effect).

[15] That is to say: Congruent with the Phases in the Project Life Span.

[16] The exceptions visualized here are any projects in which the delivery date is paramount, such as any prior announced public occasions or performances, or the delivery of any part that is tied to such a condition.

[17] Unless otherwise reworked to conform to requirements.

[18] "Project Management" as redefined in this paper.