

LIMITATIONS OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT STATE OF PRACTICE AND FUTURE DIRECTION

Mounir A. Ajam,
SUKAD CORP, Houston

Abstract

*Our core objective of this paper is to **help organizations drastically increase shareholders' value**. They can achieve this objective by enhancing the leadership of their product delivery and project performance, which would **enable the realization of the benefits** anticipated at the project's initial approval point. However, this is easier said than done and would require a great deal of courage by executives. Therefore, executives must be willing to disrupt the project management state of practice in their organizations and go beyond the hype and trends. **The executives include the board of directors, need the know-how to recognize the need for disruption**, and to move from what is popular to what is vital for organizational excellence.*

*In this paper, we will explore many of the prevalent trends and hype in project management. Our view does not mean what exists today is not good. However, we would be willing to challenge the current thinking and claim that these trends are not good enough! **Excellence is not built on "good enough,"** hence the need to recognize what works and improve it, and what is not good enough and challenge it. Finally, organizational development and transformation are not about following the masses; instead, it is about creating the winning culture to establish and sustain deep-rooted innovative solutions.*

Keywords : Project Management (PM), PM Office, Adaptive PM, Applied PM, PM Innovation, Organisational PM, PM function, PM certifications, Project Leadership, Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity(VUCA)

Introduction

There are many professional societies operating on a global scale offering PM certification. Leading amongst those are PMI, IPMA, PRINCE2. There are other certification agencies also active certifying PM professionals to set standards of performance. These professional are recruited to manage projects. Project performance however, has not improved. And experience tells us that even in the same organization they are not able to deliver similar performance in repetitive projects. For example, companies involved in thermal power generation have not been able to deliver standard performance in their multiple projects sites. This itself puts doubt about the quality and utility of the existing certification process. This short article attempts to analyze the reasons for the same and ventures to suggest some possible solution.

The questions often asked why project performance is not improving every time the project team is implementing a new project in terms of improving projects' schedules (reduced durations-faster to market), lower cost and higher cost competitiveness, achieving the quality standards and reducing defects, or, most importantly, increased profit.

New concepts like PMO and Agile Project Management are widely talked about and even practiced. But they are also not able to tackle the critical issues in dynamic environment where no two projects are similar in terms of challenges and deliverables. Agility is important and that relates to the business which needs to be dynamic, flexible, and responsive to change, especially in a VUCA (Ref 1 and 2) world.

These raises the questions that Certifications, Agile, and PMOs are hot and trendy topics in the world of project management, but are they direct contributors to organizational performance and the growth of project management? Could they be preventing organizations from seeking a higher standard of practice and for executives' lack of accepting project management as a strategic imperative? In other words, are we settling for less than the optimal outcome?

Organizational Transformation

The possible routes that organizations take for transforming their performance¹ are:

- Professional Certifications, Agile Project Management, Project Management Offices, Change Management, and Technology and Digitization.

But these initiatives may not be enough in delivering project performance when other critical issues such as shareholders wealth creation, sustainability and environmental as well as other societal concerns are of paramount importance in terms of measuring project performance.

Doing the same thing over and over again but expecting different results with every try does not work In other words, many, if not most of these initiatives fail, then why do we continue trying the same things, often under a different label? This brings us to the critical bubbles of exiting project management practices that needs to be relooked at current context and hence a good case for disruption.

The critical bubbles which are candidates for disruptions impacting negatively affecting project leadership are:

- The **business** of generic certifications.
- The **40 flavors of PMOs: PMOs** that often do not have the authority or know-how to transform organizational performance.
- The **confusion about Agile and agility:** Also, the waste of resources on Agile Transformation in the context of managing projects.

Professional Certifications

The Current State

Project management certifications, even the foundational ones, have value and offer some recognition to the holder of a certificate. There are some strict certifications in the market today. However, strict certifications are not well known or famous. for not well marketed.

¹ In the context of project management and product delivery

Some professional associations are focusing on growing the number of certificate holders, which drive revenues, instead of focusing on the effectiveness or contributions of those certifications to organizational excellence. Unfortunately, we have seen some practitioners obtain one certification or another without any experience in managing projects, yet, they claim that they are certified, project managers. These associations must re-evaluate their business model and ethical behaviors before more damage is done to the “profession.”

The professionals obtaining PM certifications are no guarantee for project performance. And the reasons of failure are:

- They are generic, not focused on a given industry. In other words, a generic certification can provide general concepts and guidelines but do not offer a methodology or the know-how to apply in different domains and for different types of projects.
- Knowledge-based, not competency-based. IPMA's certification is claimed to be competency based. However, the processes are not robust enough to differentiate between knowledge and competence. Knowledge is about “I know” or “I think I know,” have the textbook knowledge. Competency is about proving that I know by doing. It is about the difference of knowing scheduling terms versus being able to develop a realistic schedule, a cost estimate, or a project management plan². The existing certification process does not validate that ability.
- Some professional associations do not even validate experience or success. And certification is granted taking a multiple choice examination.

Consequently, **some** of the project management certifications have become a commodity and a pyramid scheme.

The Road Ahead:

Sukad Corporation has developed an alternative model for those organizations that want to excel as they seek **project leadership**.

- Project management is an applied domain, which means **practitioners need to know how to apply the concepts in the real world, on a real project, competently**. Therefore, we need project management certifications that are competency-based. Certifications that can validate experience and abilities in the real organizational context³.
- The certifications must be at multi-levels, from apprentice to expert. Each level would be suitable for a given role. For example, the lower level would be for project management team members. The next level would be for the project manager of

²Simplistically, do you know the theory behind baking a cake (knowledge) or can you bake great tasting cake (competence)?

³ IPMA (International Project Management Association) offers competency-based certification. However, due to many factors, which are outside the scope of this paper, IPMA has not done a great job on the global level to promote the association and its certificates. IPMA is totally absent from numerous countries.

small-simple projects. Another level would be for a project manager who can manage medium to large projects. And one for a director-level who would have the qualifications of leading large and complex or megaprojects⁴.

- Finally, the most critical factor is to recognize that although **some** project management concepts are industry-agnostic, many of them require domain expertise. Therefore, the certifications, at least those at the project manager level, should be linked to an industry or domain. In other words, a PM for Capital Projects versus a PM for Technology-Driven Projects, or Marketing, and similar specialization. This point is where the proposed model deviates from what IPMA and other associations offer today. Further, it links to one of the recommendations at the end of this paper on the need for segmentation in project management.

Agile Project Management

The Current State

Agile is not about managing projects. We think one of the most severe hype in project management is about Agile. There is too much confusion about Agile. Here is a list:

- Most advocates of Agile cannot even define Agile with clarity. They alter and bend the definition to fit their purpose. Further, when they are out of logical rationale, they blame waterfall. These same advocates claim that Agile is applicable in all domains, even on construction projects, yet they cannot offer a single example of how Agile can be used to manage any project from concept to closure.
- Often people confuse agile with agility. In various writing and posts, we see the word “Agile,” but the discussion is about agility, more specifically, business agility. The article or post would be discussing why organizations need to adopt agile practices. Organizations should be “agile” and responsive to change, especially in a VUCA world. However, we must emphasize that this is about business agility and not Agile methods.
- Agile is not a project management methodology, and many would agree that Agile is not even a development method. Sure, there are Agile’s values and principles that apply in software development, such as those outlined in the Manifesto for Agile Software Development. We can agree that some of those principles can apply in non-software setting but during the development (implementation) phase of a project⁵.
- Since Agile is not a project management method, we cannot use it from the beginning (project concept) to closure⁶; or what we prefer to call concept to success. Again,

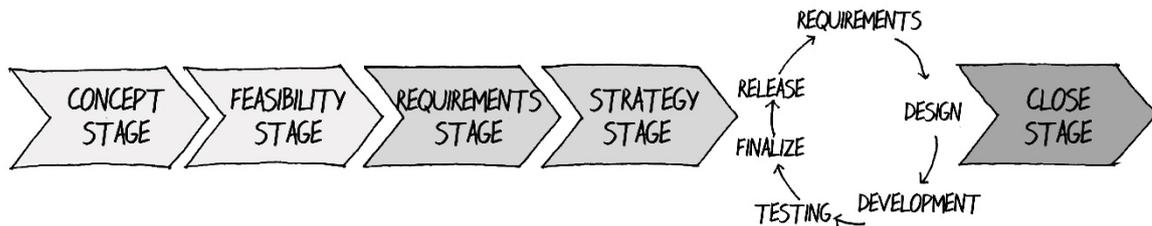
⁴ This would be like the existing IPMA model

⁵ We have a series of videos on the Applied Project Management YouTube Channel (a SUKAD Channel) that discuss methods, methodology, and Agile; https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLiXup1IJ-TNMvGY7q3aix_cZBhMC_lUr

⁶ As a methodological approach, or project life cycle model.

agility concepts can be used on projects but not as a project life cycle methodological approach that guides the team to lead the project across all stages.

- Further, Agile, as in the manifesto, is about the development life cycle; i.e., the development phase of a project;



© 2017 Mounir A. Ajam | Possible project life cycle model integrating adaptive principles

The image presents a project life cycle model (Mounir A Ajam 2017 Project Management beyond Waterfall and Agile⁷,CRC Press) with agile concepts applied when we reach the implementation stage. In other words, the team will follow a standard project life cycle model with stage gates (not shown here). In the strategy stage, the team would have developed a project management plan and in the requirements stage, the team would have established the requirements for the product, i.e., defined the product. Then, when the team reaches the implementation stage, and ONLY if the product can be developed iteratively or incrementally, then the team can follow one of the Agile approaches to develop the product.

The next image is a snapshot of an article with a reflection on failure as a result of using Agile out of context or following that Agile as a magic wand.

UK wasting £37 billion a year on failed Agile IT Projects

Agile Project management initiatives seem to be not working well with IT projects as reported (Ref). If one follows professional online posts, one will notice a rapidly increasing dissatisfaction with Agile and people are starting to realize the hype. Then, should we not disrupt and now, before more damage is done?

The Proposed Solution

The proposed solution was implied in the previous part and should start with the fact that there is no magic wand. What is vital to understand is the need for a change of perspective. Alternatively, should we say go back to the core principle of project management, which is

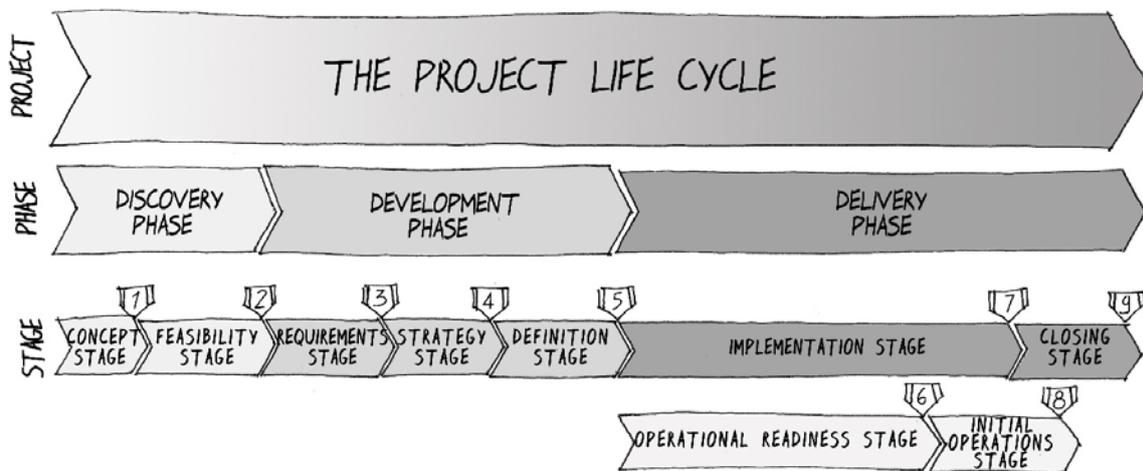
⁷<https://sukad.com/ski/books/project-management-beyond-waterfall-and-agile>

first and foremost, **Project Management has always been adaptive?** By Adaptive, we do not mean Agile⁸. Further, remember: Agility is not Agile.

Therefore, organizations can use agility on any project and throughout the project life cycle, as long as we realize that Agile and Agility are not project management methods. Further, it is vital to note that Agile (development) is not for all projects. If Agile Development can be used, it would be limited to the implementation phase of the projects, as outlined earlier, with the help of the presented image.

Adaptive Project Management, Tailored Methods

Project management has always been adaptive. It means that competent project managers, working in organizations with excellent management maturity, realize that different types of projects need tailored methods, methods that are fit for purpose. These methods must be



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based on project life cycles with stage gates. The number of stages, stage gates, their names, and other factors would be a function of the industry, type of projects, size and complexity⁹. In other words, what we need is something like what SUKAD developed back in 2007 and continue to enhance, the Customizable and Adaptable Methodology for Managing Projects™ (CAMMP™). See image¹⁰. Organizations can use this project life cycle as the starting point for any tailoring exercise.

What organizations need is tailored methods **customized** to a given industry and organization governance. It is then **adapted**(the model) to a given function within the organization, fit-for-

⁸It is a common misunderstanding that people divide the world of project management methods into predictive and adaptive. Predictive referring to “traditional” or “waterfall” whereas adaptive relate to Agile, iterative or incremental. We do not agree with this characterization.

⁹ Please refer to the Project Management beyond Waterfall and Agile book, referenced earlier for in-depth understanding of these concepts.

¹⁰ This image is also from **Project Management beyond Waterfall and Agile** and represent the CAMMP™ standard project life cycle before any tailoring.

purpose for a project type. Finally, the third step of tailored methods is to adjust the customized and adapted model to reflect size and complexity, **project class**.

Naturally, what the above is eluding to is that managing (the methodology) a small-simple facility project in a petroleum company is different from managing a large and complex facility project in the same company. Similarly, managing a small technology project in a municipality is likely different from managing a small technology project in a pharmaceutical company.

Conclusions:

The previous points also support the need for segmentation in project management.

The bottom line, waterfall, agile, scrum, and other concepts are development approaches that are subsets of a methodological approach like CAMMP™. Therefore, organizations need an **adaptive project life cycle methodological approach to manage projects end-to-end, concept to success.**

As a subset of that methodological approach, what to use for product development, “waterfall” or “Agile”?

We say, forget these terms and ask yourself the following: can you deliver the product in increments/iterations or it must be delivered in one ‘big bang’?

If one can deliver a product iteratively or in increment, then iterative/incremental development might have an advantage over the alternative approach. However, if the product cannot be delivered (to the customers) in pieces, then one would follow a sequential development leading to one delivery of the full product.

A closing comment on the Agile Hype! Forget the Agile Transformation; it is an illusion. What organizations need is to accept project management as a critical function that breaks the barriers between business and technology, business and implementation.



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Strategic Consulting Group Pvt Ltd
T- 28/15, DLF City, Phase- III,
Gurgaon-122002
www.strategicconsulting-group.com
info@strategicconsulting-group.com
Tel: 0124 4049831 / +91 9810266758