

Management Science, Operations Research and Project Management

Modelling, Evaluation, Scheduling, Monitoring



José Ramón San Cristóbal Mateo

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Introduction

Owing to its societal and economic relevance, Project Management has become an important and relevant discipline and a key concept in modern-world private and public organizations. Project Management is an academic discipline discussed both in Management Science and in Operations Research. Management Science tends to focus on quantitative tools and the soft skills necessary to manage projects successfully. Operations Research gives the essential scientific contribution to the success of Project Management through the development of models and algorithms. The aim of this book is to fill the gap between scientific research and practical application of that research. The chapters explore the use of the existing Management Science models providing valuable tools for the project modelling, evaluation, scheduling, and monitoring.

This book will provide project managers with the tools and methods necessary to make sound decisions in the complex environments that they face today in order to manage projects successfully. With this aim, the book will include numerous examples of these tools for problem-solving applied to Project Management.

What is a Project?

Generally speaking, a project consists of a number of tasks that must be done for the project to be completed. These tasks have durations, they typically cost money, and they often require non-financial limited resources such as people and facilities. They also have precedence relationships which put constraints on what can be done and when.

Following the definition in BS 6079-1 'Guide to Project Management', a project is: 'a unique set of coordinated activities, with definite starting and finishing points, undertaken by an individual or organization to meet specific objectives within defined schedule, cost and performance parameters'. This concept of project implies:

1. The identification of the system to be transformed.
2. The description of the initial state and the final state that should represent the targets of the project.
3. An organizational framework. Projects need the skills and talents from multiple professions and organizations which usually have something at stake, because failure would jeopardize the organization or its goal.
4. A set of resources.
5. A methodological support.

Projects were traditionally the prerogative of the engineering disciplines, but with the dynamics of business, Project Management has moved into business' main street. A project could be the building of a house, a ship, or the development of a software program, and many others actions such as military campaigns or recovery programmes from natural disasters also meet the criteria of projects.

Dimensions of a Project

Typically, projects have three primary objectives: to finish the project quickly, to consume as few resources as possible (especially, to minimize costs), and to produce a high-quality project. In addition, in certain industries like airlines, railways, etc., some people add a fourth dimension – safety – which is considered to be equally important. In today's highly competitive business environment, Project Management's ability to schedule activities and monitor progress within time, cost, and performance guidelines is becoming increasingly important to obtain competitive priorities. This implies that there are trade-offs that must typically be made when scheduling a project.

The usual decision of Project Management focuses primarily on the time dimension. The typical questions in the mind on any project manager that need to be answered are: how long will the project take to complete if everything goes according to schedule? Which tasks form bottlenecks that prevent the project from being completed earlier? And which tasks have some slack in the sense that they can be delayed to some extent without delaying the project?

The second dimension refers to resources. The project must be accomplished within the budgeted cost. The tasks in a project almost always compete for

resources, whether dollar or non-financial resources, and no real Project Management application can afford to ignore these resources. How to spend money optimally in order to speed up the completion of the project is a typical problem in Project Management that requires problem-solving techniques, such as optimization problems, and decision-making, as well as management skills.

The third dimension, scope, is the most difficult to quantify. The project must meet the performance requirements, and scope must include not only quality but also safety or any other performance measurements. The project manager must know what it is intended to do and what features the project should include.

Who is a Project Manager?

A project manager may be defined as that person who has the responsibility, authority, and the necessary management skills to achieve the project objectives within agreed time, cost, and performance criteria. The project manager must be an effective leader that makes all major decisions based on their individual insights and experience. The issues of interest to a project manager may be grouped under four general headings (Elmaghraby, 1995):

1. Representation and modelling for visualization analysis.
2. Scheduling activities subject to resource constraints.
3. Financial issues, either related to project 'compression' or to cash flows.
4. Uncertainty in activity durations as well as in resource availabilities and/or cash flows, and how to cope with it.

What is Project Management?

The definition of Project Management given by the PM book guide (PMI, 2004) can be used as a starting point: 'Project management is the application of knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to project activities in order to meet or exceed stakeholder needs and expectations from a project.' However, scholars, practitioners, and academic and professional societies have different definitions and interpretations of the subject of Project Management (Kwak

and Anbari, 2009). Behavioural scientists may think of the matrix organization or emotional intelligence; operational researchers may think of network analysis, queuing theory, or optimal plant design; strategic scholars may think of strategic alliances among different organizations during project evaluation.

Project Management is the process of conceiving, designing, preparing, evaluating, scheduling, organizing, monitoring, and controlling the transformation of a system from an initial state, to a specific state, and the motivation of all those involved in it in order to achieve the project objectives within defined schedule, cost, and performance parameters. It is usually admitted that modern Project Management appeared during WWII and was initially dedicated to big military and construction projects. Today, projects seem to have become increasingly common in all kinds of organizations (Mawby and Stupples, 2002). They are increasingly large, complex and constrained, and may involve large numbers of interested parties and professional and technical disciplines. As projects became more and more apparent in organizations, and as they had much larger amounts at stake, it became impossible to sustain them without specific and rigorous methodology. Project Management has then grown up and spread around the world to become what it is today, that is to say, a set of theories, principles, methodologies and practices, sometimes included in standard body of knowledge as Project Management Institute (PMI, 2004) and Association for Project Management (PMA, 2006).

There has been a long debate in the management education community as to whether Project Management is a practice or an academic discipline. In several disciplines such as the Construction, Engineering, and Management disciplines people learn planning, managing, and controlling engineering construction projects to meet the time, budget, and specifications. However, when it comes to the Business and Management discipline, scholars often appear puzzled and unconvinced of the notion of Project Management. Project Management is more applied and interdisciplinary than other management discipline so it is more difficult to justify the field as a distinguishable academic discipline within the academic management community. Kwak and Anbari (2009) identified eight categories that represent the disciplines where one can find Project Management research:

1. Operations Research/Decision Sciences/Operations Management/Supply Chain Management. This refers to the discipline associated with quantitative decision analysis and management principles including

various optimization tools and techniques, network analysis, resource levelling, simulation, etc.

2. Organizational Behaviour/Human Resources Management. This refers to the discipline associated with organizational structure, organizational dynamics, motivations, leadership, conflict management, etc.
3. Information Technology/Information Systems. This refers to the discipline associated with the use of computers and computer systems to process, transmit, store, and retrieve information for better management decisions.
4. Technology applications/Innovation/New product development/Research and Development. This refers to the discipline associated with the concepts of making innovative and technological improvements and the research and development of entirely new products, services, and processes.
5. Engineering and Construction/Contracts/Legal aspects/Expert witness. This refers to the discipline associated with the use and application of a broad range of professional expertise to resolve issues related to engineering and construction, contracts, expert witness, and their legal implications.
6. Strategy/Integration/Portfolio Management/Value of Project Management/Marketing. This refers to the concepts of organizing and managing resources to maximize profit, minimize cost, and support the overall strategy of the organization.
7. Performance Management/Earned Value Management/Project Finance and Accounting. This refers to the concepts and techniques that measure project progress objectively by combining measurements of technical performance, schedule performance, and cost performance.
8. Quality Management/Process Improvement. This refers to the concepts of improving processes, minimizing defects, and reducing costs by implementing continual improvement principles and specific measures and metrics.

In recent years, the range of Project Management applications has greatly expanded. Today project managers have gained recognition and employment

opportunities beyond construction, aerospace, and defence, in pharmaceuticals, information systems, and manufacturing. Project managers are interested in finding out to what extent the Project Management profession would accommodate the needs of any industry. Business organizations are interested in finding out to what extent is the Project Management profession fragmented into industry-specific areas, or to what extent would an academic degree in Project Management accommodate industry-specific needs. Universities and other training institutions are interested in accommodating the needs of both individuals and organizations involved in Project Management.

Following Popper (1972), we reduce the complexity of the world into experiments which may be validated in that they are repeatable and, we build knowledge through regulation of our theories. Management Science, the application of scientific method to management, is far from being a robust body of scientific knowledge in the way say that physics or chemistry is, in the sense that there can be reducible, repeatable, and refutable laws of management (Morris, 2004). Significant parts of Project Management can be developed along 'theory' lines with reasonable scientific rigour. There are examples of Project Management benefiting from scientific knowledge such as network scheduling, linear programming, dynamic programming, or Goldratt's theory of constraints. Project Management is a discipline in the sense that there is a substantial and, in places, significant literature on it. There are defined 'Bodies of Knowledge' on it and there are many people who believe that they practise it and professional societies who promote it and who examine and qualify people in it.

Project Management has become a key concept in modern world of private or public organizations which are considered open and complex systems interacting with the environment and pursuing objectives according to their specific mission and nature (Drucker, 1974; Ackoff, 1970; Simon, 1977). The achievement of such objectives implies structuring the activities of the organizations through projects with specific targets that should be consistent with the adopted organizational objectives (Tavares, 2002).

The current vision of Project Management tends to rely upon the notions of planning and control, to propose models and prescriptions as ways to increase the ability of humans to control complex worlds (Stacey, 2001; Wood, 2002). It emphasizes the role of project actors regarding the issues of time, cost, and scope (Cicmil and Hodgson, 2006). The increasing use of computers has given rise to a new generation of operations researchers devoted to computer applications and expert systems for project planning, control, and risk analysis.