Rational Approach & Reputation of Project Management in Organizations

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Abstract
Project management is the art of managing the project and its deliverables with a view to produce finished products or service. There are many ways in which a project can be carried out and the way in which it is executed is project management. The evolution of organization theories from mechanistic to people based ones has influenced the approaches taken by managers in organizations towards the firm as well as organizing people. While the earlier decades of the 20th century witnessed the rise of the mechanistic of the rational approaches, since the 1970's and particularly in the last decade of the 20th century, there has been a trend towards viewing organizations as interdependent, complex and chaotic. This has led to the adoption of the systems approach of organizations that embraces complexity and uncertainty. However, many managers continue to take the rational approach which views people as building blocks and the organization as a machine leaving little scope for flexibility and adaptability to changes in the external environment (Baecker, 2006, 80). This article considers the reasons for doing so and takes the position that managers would be better served to adopt the systems approach to deal with the challenges of the 21st century.
Keywords: *Managing a Project, Role of Project Manager, Need for Project Manager*

I. INTRODUCTION

The rational approach to organizations is appealing to most managers because of the comfort factor in such an approach. It is common for managers to avoid complexity and ambiguity in their working environment and hence taking an approach that has been described as "being purposeful" which enables managers to work towards "specific goals" as the preferred alternative. Further, the development of organizations in the 20th century has been such that many firms have tight structures with clearly defined hierarchies, command and control bureaucracies. This enables managers to take an approach that is "mechanistic" in nature and which thrives on formalization and standardization (Scott & Davis, 2007, 30). Since this kind of organization structure was the norm across industries and sectors, many managers of the "old school" of management pioneered by Taylor, Weber and others preferred a rational approach which eschews uncertainty and embraces predictability (Beardwell, 2010, 76).

To consider examples of organizations that follow these rational approach in the real world and from a time span of the latter decades of the 20th century to the present, we find that the main difference in the way organizations approach HRM depends on the sector in which they operate and the period in time when they started their operations. To take specific examples, the cases of GM (General Motors) and the United States Government along with the NHS (National Health Service) in the United Kingdom are instances of organizations that practice rational approaches to HRM and this is mainly due to the fact that these organizations have a well-defined structure and are tightly coupled with clear boundaries with the environment in which they operate. Hence, these organizations can be said to be practicing a rational approach to HRM that ties in well with their organizational mission and vision (Van De Van, 2006, 75). The rational approach is particularly preferred by managers where there is top down decision making and the "strategic apex" plans the strategies, directs the execution and monitors the implementation. In these

organizational structures, strategy is not emergent but rather planned consciously and elaborated in a step wise manner.

The organizations that have fixed structures and are machine like in their approach to people and processes are places where managers prefer the rational approach to organizations and organizing. Though this approach is now fading away because of the new emergence of organizational forms and where the interaction of the organization and the external environment is characterized by fluidity and uncertainty, there are still many managers who prefer this approach due to the "hangover" of the old school of thought (Boxall & Purcell, 2003, 91).

It must be mentioned that this rational or mechanistic approach served the managers of yesteryears well and the emphasis on the "technical" aspects of management like measuring the deliverables in clearly defined terms i.e. output of the machine, plant utilization, efficiency and productivity measured in mechanistic terms all contributed to the success of this approach which continues to deliver even to this day though emerging sectors like the IT (Information Technology) sector and the financial services sector have pioneered the open systems approach (Stern and Barley, 2006, 153).

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW
A. *Open Systems Approach to Project Management in Organizations*

When organizations have "flat" structures and consist of coalitions of people coming together with multiple loyalties, intersection of the organization with its environment being characterized by shifting boundaries; the informal nature of the work processes makes use of "open" systems approach towards organizations. The point to note here is that external environments both shape and support the structure and the organizations are viewed as systems with interdependent networks of people and projects some of which are tightly coupled but, most are loosely coupled (Scott & Davies, 2007, 63). This has led to a characterization of organizations which behave like "living systems" and hence the real world of human behaviour manifests in the way the organizations are run. The psychological and emotional aspects of the people working in such organizations are better served by open systems approach and hence, it would be advisable for managers in these organizations to take this approach.

Given the recent trend towards viewing people as assets instead of just another factor of production, managers in service sector companies tend to use the open systems approach. The open systems approach lends itself to malleability and a "shape shifting" nature which allows the organizations to "sense" the market and "intuit" the future trends (Malone, 2009). The "organizations of the future" adopt this approach which relies on dealing with complexity, uncertainty and ambiguity and does not rely on formalized structures alone for decision making and support (Malone, 2009, 93). This approach would be beneficial to managers in all organizations as this lends itself to the complexities of the modern world and the 21st century business landscape which is anything but simple and linear. Companies like Google and Microsoft can be considered as taking an open systems approach to HRM and have permeable layers in the organizational structure which come together for specific projects whose permanence can be measured in months and at the maximum years. Because of this symbiotic nature of the interactions among their units, these organizations and the managers in these companies often practice the open system or natural approach towards HRM. These organizations view themselves as throbbing and dynamic entities akin to a living organism that is in symbiotic relationship with its environment and hence the managers in these organizations favour the open systems approach towards HRM (Salancik, 2007, 19).

The rational approach to organizations is being outdated and though there are many sectors where the approach serves the purpose, the declining importance of traditional industries like manufacturing in the economies of the West has meant that many managers are adopting the systems view. However, the fact that the bureaucracies of the governments are increasing in size and that many developing countries are still in the phase where the manufacturing sector is dominant means that the rational approach is unlikely to fade away anytime soon. Whether managers should prefer one over the other would depend on the industry, the organizational structure and the real world imperatives that they face. Considering that management is situational and context dependent there is no one right way to get the job done and hence managers must "intuit" the approach that they need to take.

B. Components of Project Management and Stakeholder Management

There are several components of project management that encompass the spectrum of project management. Right from the initial setting up of the project to the closure, each phase brings a new set of challenges and components to the art of project management. Specifically, the project manager has to manage the team and take bottom-line responsibility for the deliverables along with managing the stakeholders of the project. If we take each of these components individually, the initial setting up of the project involves establishing procedures and processes for subsequent phases and defining the roles of the team members. In organizations that lay emphasis on processes, this phase is crucial to the success of the project. There are many organizations that subscribe to the SEI-CMM guidelines on processes and these organizations take measures to ensure that they are in tune with the guidelines.

C. Role of the Project Manager

There has been much debate about what the Project Manager can or cannot do. And the argument is also centered around on whether to take a proactive or a subdued approach towards the issues surrounding the management of the project. The proactive approach favours an interventionist and hands on approach that includes intervening in day to day affairs of the project. This approach is manifested in the IT industry where the Project Manager is called upon to involve themselves in the technical aspects of the project that would include participating in design, coding and other activities. This phenomenon cannot be said to be restricted to the IT industry alone as there are several instances in the other sectors where the Project Manager has to get their hands dirty, literally and metaphorically. There are organisations that define the role of the project manager clearly and delineate the roles and responsibilities. This usually happens in Matrix organisations where the structure of the organisation is such that there is lot of emphasis on clarity of the role. Thus, after a review of the literature, it would seem that there is no single answer to the question of whether the project manager has to be at the centre of the universe or like a conductor directing the symphony.

D. Stakeholder Management

In this section, we look at the specifics of managing the stakeholders for the project. Any project has multiple stakeholders that need to be taken care. A stakeholder is someone who has either invested in the project and derives value from the outcome or a third party who contributes to the success and conversely to the failure of the project. The first task before the Project Manager is to ensure that the stakeholders are clearly identified and then their roles and responsibilities demarcated and delineated. The task of identifying the stakeholders assumes importance as there should not be any confusion over who is a stakeholder and who is not. For instance, an IT project would have the stakeholders listed right from the systems and the network administrators to the client and the project sponsor. But, there might be other stakeholders like the staffing team who flit in and out of the project phases as and when they are required. Thus, the need is to establish boundaries and identify the roles of the different stakeholders appropriately. Apart from this, the

project manager must make it a point to ensure that stakeholders are categorised according to their importance and relevance to the project and the start of each phase accordingly. Stakeholder satisfaction should be the bottom-line goal towards which the project managers must work to. Customer satisfaction and customer delight are some of the phrases that are used as an adjunct to good project management and its practice. Customer delight is achieved when one measures up to the needs of the customer and takes appropriate steps to ensure that they are met.

E. *Behavioural Models for Project Managers*

There are several models of behaviour that the project manager can draw upon in his or her work. These include Maslow's need hierarchy theory, Herzberg's Hygiene theory and McGregor's theory X and theory Y as applied to project management. All these behavioural models point to the ability of the project manager to motivate the people in the team towards the common goal of ensuring the success of the project. Maslow's need hierarchy theory postulates that people do not work for money or security alone. According to this theory, once a person fulfils the basic needs of money and security, he or she tends to seek actualization of their potential and engage in what he called "self-actualization". Thus, this theory holds that once an individual reaches a certain stage in life or a position, the pay and other benefits matter less to him or her than the quality of the work that they are doing. When we apply this theory to the real world issues of management, we find that the Project Manager has to ensure that he or she does not concentrate on raising the perks alone to achieve optimal performance from his team members but also keeps giving challenging work to the team members to fulfil their potential. According to our experience and from talking to seasoned project managers, we have found that most team members take great pride in their work and hence challenging assignments are one way of motivating them.

Of course, there has been much criticism of this theory in recent years and experts have pointed to several inconsistencies in this theory and application. The most notable example is that of the skyrocketing executive compensation that belies the hypothesis of Maslow's theory. This is one clear instance of the fact that pay matters more than other variables and job satisfaction alone does not motivate people. In my opinion, it is a fact that people tend to get motivated by perks as well as promise of rewards, monetary and otherwise. So, it is up to the Project Manager to use the notion of reward judiciously without compromising quality or alienating other team members. If we take a look at Herzberg's theory of hygiene, the factors that contribute to the success of the individual can be divided into presence and absence of hygiene factors. The definition is that the presence of good working conditions and salary are things that do not motivate people by themselves. The absence of such factors de-motivates the individual. Thus, the idea here is that hygiene factors are those that do not contribute by their presence but contribute negatively by their absence.

Thus, the project manager cannot be complacent with the fact that he or she has provided optimal working conditions for the team members and expect them to perform at their full potential. The manager also needs to understand that it is his responsibility to take the lead in motivating the team members by holding regular one-one meetings and ensuring that their grievances are heard and accepted. The Theory X and Theory Y holds that people need to be supervised and told what to do (X) and people would work with little supervision and thus do not need to be told what to do (Y). These are the opposing views of the theory of motivation and behaviour. Thus these conflicting and competing views reflect human nature and model the behaviour accordingly. As we discussed, the underlying theory behind the motivation models is the approach that the project manager must take to ensure that the team members and the team as a whole is motivated enough to take action and contribute meaningfully to the project. There is nothing more troublesome than a team that is de-motivated and unable to function cohesively and as a team. Thus, the

primary responsibility before the project manager is to ensure a professional approach towards people management.

F. Role of Project Managers - Should Project Managers behave like Prima Donnas?

This article addresses the question: Should Project Managers behave like Prima Donnas? The question posed is about the role of the project manager and the ways in which he or she steers the project towards successful completion. The thesis statement is about the point that covers a broad range of topics and deals with a set of questions that include how much and how far should the project manager involve himself or herself and the extent to which the project manager has to go in meeting stakeholder expectations and keeping the team intact. It has been said that Project Management is the art of balancing competing demands and determining appropriate interventions whenever necessary. The balancing act is about taking the different stakeholder requirements together and then ensuring that everything falls together for the common purpose of meeting the project deliverables. This then is the bottom-line guideline for project managers: The practice of management for the express purpose of delivering customer delight and stakeholder value. The contention of this author is that project managers and the art of project management is highly contextual and situation dependant that theory can only point the way and it is up to the individual to make the decisions and tread the path accordingly. Real world scenarios often have a way of surprising the most experienced project manager and hence theory can only help to a point in making decisions that affect real people. Thus, one way of looking at the question is that project managers have to combine the science of project management with the art of people and process management to achieve optimal results. Project Management combines statistics and people skills in equal measure and it is incumbent upon the project manager to plan their strategies accordingly.

There has been much debate about what the Project Manager can or cannot do. And the argument is also centred around on whether to take a proactive or a subdued approach towards the issues surrounding the management of the project. The proactive approach favours an interventionist and hands on approach that includes intervening in day to day affairs of the project. This approach is manifested in the IT industry where the Project Manager is called upon to involve themselves in the technical aspects of the project that would include participating in design, coding and other activities. This phenomenon cannot be said to be restricted to the IT industry alone as there are several instances in the other sectors where the Project Manager has to get their hands dirty, literally and metaphorically. There are organisations that define the role of the project manager clearly and delineate the roles and responsibilities. This usually happens in Matrix organisations where the structure of the organisation is such that there is lot of emphasis on clarity of the role. Thus, after a review of the literature, it would seem that there is no single answer to the question of whether the project manager has to be at the centre of the universe or like a conductor directing the symphony. In conclusion, the question of whether the project managers should behave as Prima Donnas need to be answered as something that is contextual and situation dependant. In the fast paced world of organisations and project management, the central role for a project manager ensures that he or she is always in the middle of action and the thick of things. Thus, the art of project management requires extraordinary patience and certain thoughtfulness towards the team and stakeholders. Any management devoid of sensitivity and lack of finesse is bound to result in failure.

G. Project Management is both an Art and a Science

Project Management is both an art and a science. It is a science because project managers need to estimate budgets, draw up schedules, and manage costs and earn profits. It is an art because they have to ensure that the team gets along well and the extra edge that contributes to the success of the project is achieved through efficiencies and synergies. In this context, it is very important for project managers to have good soft skills

like communication, people management, and personality. The project manager is like a conductor in an opera who provides the direction to the individual performers in the team. Hence, he or she has to have exceptional people skills as they are tasked with the objective of carrying the team along with them. Further, project managers need to communicate with different stakeholders including their superiors, the support functions like HR and Admin, and the other interfaces like customers, vendors, and members of other project teams with which their team is interacting. All these aspects call for a superior display of people skills from the project manager. We shall discuss each of these skills in the following sections.

H. Essential Soft Skills for the Project Manager

The first essential skill that the project manager must have is exceptional communication abilities. Since project managers have to interact with the customers, the team members, and associated stakeholders, he or she has to get the point across without communication gaps. There are many projects where the project managers because of limited communication skills often find themselves unable to articulate the problems and the objectives to the stakeholders. It is an axiom in contemporary organizational behavior theory and practice that the project managers must have excellent written and spoken English skills as he or she has to communicate in writing as well as during oral speech about the project imperatives and the project objectives. Apart from communication skills, the project managers have to have superior people management skills. Since the project manager is tasked with the duty of ensuring excellent teamwork and team bonding, he or she must provide the leadership by example and leadership by people management from which the team members can draw inspiration and perform at their full potential. In some multinationals, it is the practice that the people manager is different from the project manager and that this division takes some responsibility off the project manager. However, even in this case, the project manager still has the overall responsibility for teamwork and team cohesion and hence, his or her people skills must be exceptional.

I. People Management and People Enabling

The other soft skills that the project manager must have concern the conflict resolution, team development, and mentoring skills. Conflicts are inevitable in teams as well as with other stakeholders. Hence, the project manager has to be a skilled negotiator and an astute troubleshooter. Further, the project manager has to inculcate teamwork and team bonding and hence, the team development skills must be exemplary. Apart from this, the project manager has to mentor new recruits and those employees who show high potential and pass on some of the tips and the strategies that made the project manager grow to the present position with the objective that the employees with potential would also grow in a similar manner.

J. Bidding as an Essential Skill for Project Managers

Bidding is an essential and vital aspect of project management. Not only do the organizations and the project managers have to engage with the prospective clients by specifying at what rates they would undertake the project but also would need to be aware of how much their competitors are bidding though they might not have the exact information in this regard. Indeed, it is a cat and mouse game as far as bidding for projects is concerned since project managers have to both bid at a rate that is acceptable to the client and at the same time would result in profits to their organizations but they would also have to ensure that they do not lose out on lucrative projects because they either bid too high or too low. Therefore, bidding is considered an important and vital skill that project managers have to possess. Continuing on the same theme, upcoming projects usually entail initial tendering and procuring offering documents wherein the vendors either receive the project information from the prospective clients or are sent the same because they have worked together in the past and hence, are part of the clients' vendor list.

In any case, the process of bidding starts with obtaining the relevant information from the clients and then proceeds to understanding the project requirements, the likely time for completion as well as the expectations from the clients about the delivery schedules. In addition, feasibility analysis is usually done to gauge whether the vendors can indeed undertake the project and whether they have the necessary technical expertise and human resources to complete the project. In all these phases, the project manager has to do a balancing act wherein they balance the need of the clients with that of the internal capabilities of their organization.

Once the tendering and information stage is completed, then the project managers have to get down to the task of preparing bid documents and offer documents which can be considered as the "meat" of the entire process since their costing and the respective bids would determine how much they bid for as well as whether they would be considered for the project and ultimately whether they would bag the project. In this stage, the project managers have to as accurate and as skillful in determining the "**fair value**" or the "**fair cost**" at which they can undertake the project since their bid should not result in losses for them and at the same time, their bids should be competitive meaning that they must match or beat the bids made by their rivals. As mentioned earlier, in this stage, the project managers are essentially working on incomplete information since they do not yet know the offers by their rivals. Therefore, it is advisable that organizations entrust the bidding stage to project managers who are especially skillful and adroit and more importantly, experienced since bidding is a skill that is refined with experience.

In recent years, clients are increasingly preferring fixed cost bids wherein they expect the vendors to bid on their projects on a total cost basis rather than billing them hourly or sequentially for the work done. Indeed, with the recession and the resultant cost cutting measures, clients want the vendors to bid as aggressively as possible so that they (the clients) end up with the best possible terms and conditions. Indeed, with the time and material costing almost discarded, the vendor project managers have to very careful when bidding for fixed cost projects since delays and cost overruns are not covered by the clients. This is the reason why many project managers create "buffers" in their cost estimates since they need these "cushions" for any possible delays and overruns so that they do not incur losses. Having said that, it is also the case that many project managers under pressure to show results often bid unrealistically which can create problems for them down the road later since they have to stick to the bid even if it means that they "squeeze" the employees to the maximum. Talking about aggressive bidding, it has also become the norm for project managers to involve senior management and leadership as well as executive personnel in the bidding process so that the "credibility" of their bids is enhanced.

Indeed, given the fact that personal relationships between the decision makers in the client organizations and the senior leadership in the vendors often "swing" the bids in their favor. While not commenting on the appropriates of this method, we nonetheless want to note that as long as the lower ranks do not have to pay the price for such aggressive bidding, then everything is fair as the business landscape is extremely competitive. However, ***bidding is also about the match between external competitive drivers and internal capabilities***. Therefore, project managers have to ensure that they do not overpromise and under deliver and at the same time, do not lose out to competition. It is for these reasons that we note that bidding is both an art and a science wherein the fine art of balancing competing needs has to go hand in hand with the science of estimating and costing how much the bid amount is. In addition, bidding is also about ensuring fairness to all stakeholders and resulting in a win-win situation where neither the client nor the vendor takes a hit. In conclusion, as wine tastes better with age, similarly, the practice of bidding is something that matures with experience.

Project management includes: identifying requirements, establishing clear and achievable objectives, balancing the competing demands from the different stakeholders and ensuring that a commonality of purpose is achieved. It is clear that unless there is a structured and scientific approach to the practice of management, organizations would find themselves adrift in the Ocean called organizational development and hence would be unable to meet the myriad challenges that the modern era throws at them. Hence, the importance of project management to organizations cannot be emphasized more and the succeeding paragraphs provide some reasons why organizations must take the practice of project management seriously. Without a scientific approach to the task of managing the projects and achieving objectives, it would be very difficult for the organizations to successfully execute the projects within the constraints of time, scope and quality and deliver the required result. In other words, there has to be a framework and a defined way of doing things to ensure that there is a structure to the art of project management.

Thus, project management is about creating structure and managing the project commitments and the delivery of agreed upon results. By using the methods of project management as described in the PMBOK and allied technical journals, organizations can seek to achieve control over the project environment and ensure that the project deliverables are being managed. Managers face what is known as the "triple constraint". This is the competing demands of time, scope and quality upon the project manager's list of things to do and how well the project manager manages these constraints goes a long way in determining the success of the project. Without the use of Project Management, managers and organizations would find themselves facing an unpredictable and chaotic environment over which they have little control. Thus, Project Management is both necessary and essential to the success of the project.

Project Management is too big an area to be covered in a few pages and the attempt is to provide concise and lucid definitions of the various terms and terminologies associated with a project. It is important to note that project management provides a framework within which subsequent actions by the organization can be taken and in this way, it is essential for organizations to adopt the framework provided by the practice of project management.

I.   CONCLUSION

One of the skills that we have touched upon briefly was the customer interfacing skills. Without this skill, project managers might as well find another role for themselves as customer interfacing is one of the key areas of project management. Including the internal stakeholder management, customer interfacing is all about how well the project manager handles customer complaints, proactively prevents customer complaints, and achieves customer delight and customer wow that go beyond customer satisfaction.

In conclusion, Project Management and the practice of the same have become indispensable to the modern day project manager and they form the basis of much of what is achieved during the course of a project. Thus, the idea of a project being managed professionally lends itself to the concepts and processes laid out for the practitioners of the art of Project Management.

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