

Value and Impact of Project Management Bodies of Knowledge on Project Managers' Role and Practice

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Abstract

The key to an effective project lies in its project management. There are certain standards which, if followed, may lead to successful project management - known as PMBOK (Project Management Bodies of Knowledge). This article provides an understanding of the Bodies of Knowledge available for Project Management and their impact on the project manager's performance by collating its positives and negatives. The value and impact of these bodies on project managers' role and practice is studied by focusing on PMBOK authored by Project Management Institute (PMI). The five process groups and the nine knowledge areas are analysed to bring out the helpfulness of these bodies to project managers. This leads us to a conclusion that these bodies collect and organize the best practices available in the discipline of project management and increase the overall profitability, effectiveness and performance of the business. However, PMBOK fails to take into strategy and technology management. So, a project manager must have sufficient talent, skills, knowledge and experience besides the theories presented in the PMBOK to manage project successfully and efficiently.

INTRODUCTION

In today's world every task to be accomplished is taken as a project. Whether the task is related to any social or personal engagement or it is a business solution, in some or the other way we can term it as a project assigned to us to accomplish our part of responsibility. Project Management Institute (PMI) (2004, p. 5) considers a project as "a temporary endeavour undertaken to create a unique product or service." To perform any task in a systematic manner,

management plays a vital role. Similarly, in the success or failure of any project, project management has a significant contribution. Project management constitutes from the two words 'Project' and 'Management', where project can be considered as a task to be performed to produce some output and management refers to the art or skill of getting things done by others. Alternately, we can say that project management is a skillful process of getting tasks done by the team in such a way that right person gets the right job to do and the desired product is achieved. PMI (2004) defines Project Management as the process of accomplishing project requirements by application of skills, knowledge, tools and techniques to different project constitutes. The main challenge of project management is to achieve all the specified project goals (Ireland, 2006) and objectives while respecting the initial constraints (Phillips, 2003). These constraints can include time, budget, scope etc. (Chatfield and Johnson, 2007).

PMI has authored the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) that defines the procedures and knowledge required to be a professional project manager. PMBOK provides some acknowledged standards for effective project management. This documentation provides an understanding of the PMBOK and its impact on the project manager's performance in the field of project management. The paper analyses the different processes and shortcomings of PMBOK.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT BODIES OF KNOWLEDGE (PMBOK)

PMBOK can be defined as the sum total of knowledge available within the area of Project Management (PMI, 2004). According to Haughey (n.d.), PMBOK is an arrangement of processes and knowledge areas that are considered as best practices within the profession of Project Management. PMBOK provides some basic processes and techniques that can be applied in project management without considering the type or size of the project. With the successful implementation of PMBOK, we can achieve uniformity in operations and processes all the organisations to a certain level.

SIGNIFICANCE OF PMBOK IN PROJECT MANAGER'S ROLE

The role of a project manager is very critical and of utmost importance. For effective project management, he requires real time experience and knowledge along with a comprehensive tool kit that helps him in basic concepts of planning, organising, staffing, executing and controlling the operations of a project. PMBOK can be considered as one of these tool kits. An efficient project manager's responsibilities include :

- Developing a project plan that helps him in understanding and

estimating the resources, time and cost required for completing the project.

- Selecting an efficient team on the basis of skills required to produce the desired results.
- Conducting stand-up meetings to evaluate the progress of the project on daily basis.
- Co-ordination of activities among the team members.
- Ensuring that everyone in the team understands his role and is committed to the work assigned.
- Reporting the progress of the project to senior management and providing regular feedback to the project team.
- Taking corrective action on the problems encountered by team members.
- Ensuring that the risk-log has been maintained and plans are in place to minimize the effect of any risk incurred.
- In addition to being an effective leader, he should have the capability to make right decisions under adverse circumstances.

To manage the above responsibilities, the project manager can make use of Project Management Bodies of Knowledge. PMBOK (PMI) is structured into different groups that can reduce risks and can lead to effectiveness of a project. PMBOK defines five process groups alongwith nine knowledge areas that are applicable to all the projects to some extent.

These process groups are as follows :

Initiation : Initializing the project statement of the work and considering what shall happen in the next phases of the project (PMI, 2000).

Planning : This refers to developing a work plan to accomplish the project.

Execution : The goals defined in the planning phase are put into actual implementation.

Monitoring and Controlling : Determining that the project objectives are being met by evaluation of progress and taking corrective actions, if required.

Closing : In this phase, the project plan is closed and delivered to the customer.

PMBOK describes the following nine knowledge areas for projects :

Integration Management : This area provides integration of three main process groups i.e. planning, execution and controlling of the project plan. Project planning methodologies, skills and knowledge of stakeholders, general management skills, knowledge about control system, configuration management etc. are desirable tools and techniques required for implementation of these processes.

Scope Management : This section includes the processes and procedures required to define the scope of the project like scope planning, defining, scope change management etc.

Cost Management : This section explains the processes that are necessary for preventing project from over budgeting like resource planning, cash flow, cost control etc.

Quality Management : This includes the processes like quality controlling, quality planning and quality assurance etc. which are very important for ensuring the quality of the output and for making sure that the project satisfies the reasons for which it was implemented.

Human Resource Management : This constitutes processes that are required for efficient management of all the people involved in the project like organisational planning, staff acquisition and team management. These processes result in development of effective staffing management plan, organizational chart and lead to project improvements.

Communications Management : This knowledge area consists of processes required for communication planning, project meetings, progress reporting, distribution of information etc. These processes are necessary for proper collection and management of project information.

Time Management : This is a very crucial knowledge area as it defines processes required for completing the project within the time limits. These processes include activity definition, sequencing and duration estimation of activities. Processes like development and controlling of the schedule are also underlined in this knowledge area.

Risk Management : This includes risk identification, risk qualification, risk response development and risk response control which play an important role in managing risks. Here, risk identification refers to identifying and documentation of different risks associated with the project. Similarly, risk response development means development of plans and responses to mitigate the identified risks.

Procurement Management : This constitutes the processes that are related to acquiring of goods and services from other parties i.e. from outside of the company. These processes are procurement planning, solicitation planning, source selection, contract administration and contract close-out. These result in development of effective procurement management plan, procurement documents, proposals and contracts.

The different processes of PMBOK integrate together with the knowledge areas to provide quality and effectiveness to the different areas of project management as shown in the figure 1 (Gammon, 2005, p. 9).

	Initiating	Planning	Executive	Controlling	Closing
Project integration management					
Project scope management					
Project time management					
Project human resources management					
Project communications managerial					
Project risk management					
Project procurement planning					

(Adapted from PMBOK® — Making it Work by Peter Gammon Contract to Contract Ltd. 2005)

PMBOK provides knowledge about the skill-set which is very vital for any project manager. This body of knowledge consists of deliverables like scope, time, cost, quality and the knowledge areas which help in achieving the objectives like integration, human resources, risk and procurement etc. (Burke, 2009). Roberts (2009) argues that PMBOK allows project managers to work using same practices across companies that allow people in development or in distribution to manage projects in the same way. He also believes that PMBOK reduces the risk of failure of projects by providing what works and what doesn't. The methods listed within the community of project management can assist people on how to undertake cost, time, scope, human resource, risk management etc. Many authors (Blackburn, 2002; Crawford, 2004; Morris, 2001, 2003; Morris, Patel and Wearne, 2000) have appreciated the efforts of different project management bodies in terms of collecting and organizing best practices in the discipline of project management and considered these bodies to be of great use. Some feel that PMBOK increases profitability (Alkass et al., 1996) and improves the overall performance (Allan, 1993; Brecka, 1994; Najmi and Kehoe, 2000) of the business. Although, PMBOK process groups are accepted by project managers, however, it does have certain limitations.

SHORTCOMINGS OF PMBOK

The limitations of PMBOK have been divided into categories and are discussed below :

Project Definition : Morris and Hough (1987) consider the process of defining the project extremely vital to the chances of delivering a successful project. Also, they feel that the external factors like socio-economic, supply chain, technical, geophysical are much more crucial for the success of the project as compared to control and organisational factors. Project definition must consist of aim, objectives, scope, risks, project constraints (resources, time and cost etc.), key success criteria etc. The model adopted by PMBOK does not take into account the external factors specified by Morris and Hough. Also, Morris (2003) says that PMBOK has nothing specific about the project definition.

Leadership : Maylor (1999, p. 167) defines "leadership as the quality of obtaining results from others through personal influence." The project manager is accountable for making trade-offs to lead the project to a successful finish. These trade-offs can include project budget, resources, scope and time (Mantel, Meredith, Shafer and Sutton, 2011), e.g. if cost is a priority as compared to time, the PM can allow the spillage in schedule to save the cost. The choices of priorities depend upon the kind of project and even the client. Such decisions are taken by the project manager and are of paramount importance. Morris (2003) says there is nothing specific about leadership in PMBOK. The PMBOK does not provide much description of the leadership perspective in terms of theory and practice of project management. It does not differentiate between leadership at the enterprise level and the leadership required for leading a team of people (Cleland, 1995).

Project Strategy : Strategy in the field on project management is the end result of the strategy process which includes two major elements i.e. assessment of current situation and anticipation of the time to come (Maylor, 1999). Project strategy must be in accordance with the organisational strategy. It leads to project success. The project success is not just achieving the stated business purpose and objectives but it also includes satisfaction of needs of stakeholders, users and owners, project team and supporters (Turner, 1993). According to Morris and Hough (1987) Camcorder was over budget and over time but it was a technical success as it was responsible for giving France an aerospace industry. So, it is considered as a successful project. Thus, determining the strategy is an important component of project management. According to Morris (2003), there is no detailed description of project strategy in the PMBOK. It ignores the vital role of development and deployment of strategy in the context of project management.

Technology Management : Technology plays an important role within project management, as there is constant increase in technology dependent work environments. In such environments, technology is used for communication, deployment of project management practices and even collaboration among co-located teams (Anantatmula, 2008). Thus, one of the important roles of the project manager is to manage technology issues like what exactly is the scope of technology in the project or use of which technology will accelerate the progress of the project. But, knowledge on this important aspect is missing from the PMBOK. Morris (2003) also feels that there is nothing on technology management in PMBOK.

TYPE OF PROJECT

Projects can fall into different categories, for example, construction projects, research projects, procurement projects, re-engineering projects, business implementation projects etc. Here, re-engineering projects will produce change whereas research projects will produce knowledge. Projects like warship, Millennium dome fall into the category of construction projects. Project relating to installation of e-commerce will be a business implementation project. The outcomes of projects differ with type of project and hence, the starting point and evaluation criteria of the outcome can also differ. Engwall (1992) argues that the general assumption under PMBOK is that the same project management knowledge can be applied to all kinds of projects irrespective of the type of the industries and the external factors like work environment etc. Therefore, PMBOK contradicts the fact that project planning is dependent on the type of project which can lead to ineffective project management.

Apart from the above limitations, Roman (1986) discusses that when projects are seen as tools instead of organisations it can impact managers' role because a development project is strongly linked to the market share objectives and other organisational level benefits. Morris (2003) specifies that PMBOK has not covered the area of team-based development thoroughly. Morris (2004) also feels that adoption of a body of knowledge will need a manager to draw knowledge not only in strategic, technical and commercial management but also in control, organisation and behaviour management areas.

CONCLUSION

PMBOK can be considered as a theoretical guide for the discipline of project management where theoretical refers to material which is concerned with the ideas and principles on a particular subject (Oxford Dictionary, 2011). As Guide to PMBOK (2004) itself says that the main purpose of PMBOK guide is to provide a

generally overview of what is recognized as a good practice. Therefore, it cannot be considered as a complete reference guide. Due to its recent development it has few limitations but these limitations are always improving in accordance with the growing discipline of project management. Simple knowledge of the theory behind a discipline is not enough for someone to gain expertise in the concerned field. An individual, i.e., a project manager in this case, must have sufficient talent, skills and knowledge besides the theories presented in the PMBOK. True expertise will require a combination of not only theoretical understanding but also real-life working experience in this discipline to become a successful project manager. So, PMBOK can act as a roadmap for grooming a project manager by acquiring the knowledge that most experts in the field of project management agree to. The PMBOK can play a more significant role in improving project managers' abilities and effectiveness to the project if it overcomes its shortcomings that were discussed in the earlier sections.

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