

Chapter 108

CAMES: An Approach to Project Management Based on Action Research and the Ideal Speech Situation

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ABSTRACT

The majority of IT Projects are not successful and fail for non-technical reasons, despite the fact that numerous project management methodologies exist in the marketplace and are now in common use in organisations. As the CHAOS report from Standish Group documents, this remains an important and current issue (Dominguez, 2009; The Standish Group International Inc., 2013). The fact is that for more than 20 years the majority of IT projects have failed; largely as a result of human factors and communication issues. This leads to enormous economic issues for organisations in the public and private sector. This chapter proposes a new approach to project management which addresses the human factor and issues of communication. The proposed approach is novel and applies principles drawn from philosophy and action research to produce an approach which has the potential to radically change the way in which projects are managed. The approach is discussed in terms of practice and the academic literature and is applied to two project simulations.

INTRODUCTION

Current project management methods are based upon predefined best-practices and a predetermined understanding of an enterprise's management information system. They will usually represent project management as a simple, straightforward linear problem and as a series of events, which can be represented and modelled in a Gantt chart, or within a software package. The Standish Group (2013) report

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a slight increase in projects being considered successful, and attribute this to a more fine grained, non-linear solution approach; considering a multiplicity of success factors, which are linked in complex dynamic and networked way. This is contrary to most methods which consider the golden triangle of triple constraints of time, cost and quality to be the predominant success criteria. This chapter will further explore the possibility of considering the rich complexity and multiplicity of project management as a nonlinear problem.

The proposal presented here is rooted in philosophy and sets out to use the concept of the “ideal speech situation” as proposed by Habermas (1990, 2002, 2014). Habermas argued that an ideal speech situation is found when communication between individuals is governed by basic, implied rules. In an ideal speech situation, participants are able to evaluate each other’s assertions solely on the basis of reason and evidence in an atmosphere completely free of any non-rational “coercive” influences, including both physical and psychological coercion. Furthermore, all participants are motivated solely by the desire to obtain a rational consensus. The “ideal speech” situation operates in an ideal world, and sets a series of rules for communication between people. The approach proposed within this chapter sets out to use these rules to enhance and improve communication within the context of project management, and to recognise and act on any departures from these rules.

The rationale for this new approach is that current best practice, expressed in modern project management methodologies does not handle the “wicked problems” which are often caused by humans during the management of projects. A “wicked problem” is one which is difficult or even impossible to solve, as a result of complex, incomplete, contradictory, and dynamic requirements, and often as a result of human factors. The phrase “wicked problem” was introduced in 1967 by Churchman (1967). Handling “wicked problems” is not part of the formal education or training of project managers. This results in the constant re-application of procedures and strategies which have been shown time and again to fail, which also prolongs the number of failing or challenged projects.

BACKGROUND

This chapter presents an alternative approach to project management, named CAMES (Corporate Action Methodology for Enterprise Systems). CAMES offers project managers an alternative approach to managing complex projects and decision making. It starts from the premise that the really important issues of project management lie within the human factors domain; that projects fail because of issues of communication, politics and emotion.

Projects run into problems because of how people act, how they feel about the project and the way it is progressing; and because of what they say (or don’t say) to other team members. How often have we seen emotion enter the arena of project implementation, with team members debating and arguing issues which on reflection, in the cooler light of day, seem trivial? Yet how often have we seen such emotionally charged conversations take the project to a place of no return, to the edge of chaos, and to a point where the project partners can no longer work together? The CAMES approach sets out to recognise and flag up the early signs of such emotionally charged communication, using simple conversational analysis to recognise when danger approaches. It will then highlight these issues to the project manager, at an early stage while there is still time to intervene, change direction and “save” the project. The proposed system will offer the project team an online environment which supports all project communication, monitors that communication and, in simple terms, “measures” the “heat” in project communications.

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