

# Lessons Learnt when Holistically Approaching Project Management

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## INTRODUCTION

Currently, the market pressing needs for delivering cost-effective, interdependent and complex business solutions have challenged project-management practice beyond its original requirements for satisfying time, cost, and quality concerns. Project managers' tasks have increasingly grown, demanding new approaches to help contextualize projects at operational level without losing sight of their strategic goals. Indeed, having a situated view on projects within organizational contexts can make a significant difference in the efficiency and effectiveness of their processes and results.

The reviewed literature shows a strong concern for defining frameworks to better understand the behavioral and organizational aspects involved in the practice of Portfolio and Project Management (PM). However, a more operational framework that could help project managers to situate their projects within contexts of implementation is still missing. This kind of framework could facilitate them to adjust their behaviors to deal with project issues and risks till project closure and also facilitate the improvement of organizational PM capability.

The objective of this article is to present an integrated operational approach for project management that contributes to a better understanding of the impact of the contextual and social aspects that not only influence projects' planning, execution and monitorization, but also shed some light on the role of the involved behavioral aspects. This is preliminary work that requires more research to advance results.

## BACKGROUND

Project Management still represents nowadays a challenge for organizations, despite research efforts during

last decades (Martinsuo, 2013). While practitioners are gradually mastering the involved processes, techniques and tools suggested by the literature and best practices in the field (PMI, 2008), current research is providing some conceptual frameworks to better understand project complexities (Meskendahl, 2010; Söderlund, 2004). However there is still need for operational frameworks that can help situate project dynamics at the operational level. Indeed, light methodological approaches are suggested by literature to help project managers to hold a holistic view on the many factors that affect the management of projects, programs and portfolio within their environments (Rodney, Ledwith, & Kelly, 2010; Söderlund, 2004).

Further, the dynamics of a project management unit, one involving portfolio, program and project management, is still not well understood, since it goes beyond the rational view of achieving strategic goals. Some studies have suggested the rational and intuitive nature of their decision-making processes when coordinating and controlling multiple projects that pursue same strategic goals and share resources to adjust portfolio to organizational circumstances and constraints (Martinsuo, 2013). The lack of more operational frameworks has limited return on invested efforts for organizations, since IT failure rate is still high (Killen, Jugdev, Drouin, & Petit, 2012). Therefore, a better understanding of the situated nature of projects by project-management teams could yield cost-effective insights to achieve a more ambitious goal within project environments: reduce IT failure and improve user acceptance rate while, sharing project knowledge and learning.

The reviewed literature describes the required interplay between behavioral (individual intentions, attitudes, beliefs, contributions) and organizational aspects of contexts (culture, HR policies and procedures, leadership styles and business strategies) (Bredillet, Yatim, & Ruiz, 2010; Walker, 1992). Clearly, more

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research is needed to better understand portfolio and project performance within a holistic but more operational framework.

This kind of framework should cover the interplay among three dimensions: Project-focused management process (strategically and operationally aligned with the other business processes through goals and tasks), People (covering key behavioral variables when performing specific project roles and interacting with people and supporting systems) and Technology (developed to satisfy business and user requirements).

The expected results of such an holistic approach would not only assist project-management team and practitioners to better plan and execute projects, but also gradually build or improve organizational PM capability and contribute to a more open culture to project management concepts and dynamics. This will also serve to guide future research. Next, a conceptual framework is proposed, followed by discussion of its key issues, evaluation method and tools. An illustration of its application, a overall recommendation, future research directions and concluding marks are also presented.

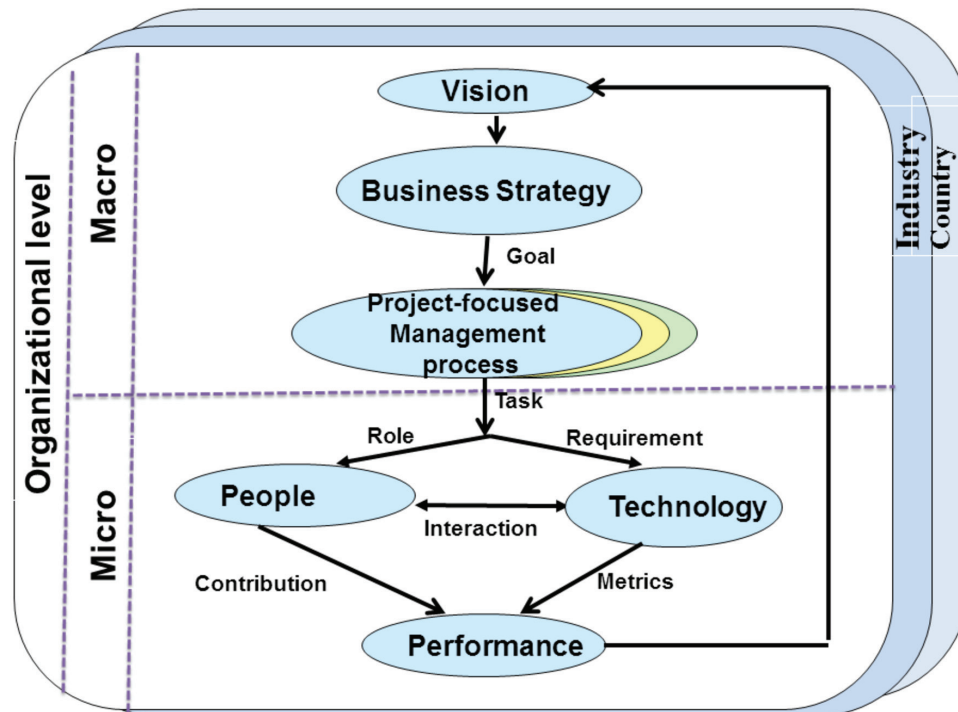
## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The basic assumption underlying this holistic framework for project management, also referred in this article as conceptual framework, is a bidirectional relationship between structure and behavior. Structure drives people behaviors and, reciprocally, people behaviors gradually influence structure (Bandura, 1997; Meskendahl, 2010; Walker, 1992). Figure 1 shows the proposed framework, and next its structural and behavioral issues are further described.

### Structural Issues

This integrated framework involves two organizational levels (macro and micro). The former covers strategic-tactical organizational elements, such as vision, mission, business strategies, goals and priorities, business processes related to project management investments, dynamics and capability-maturity level. It also involves organizational culture, leadership styles and values at the (enterprise, industry-related, and national levels). In this model, vision is proposed as the reference ele-

Figure 1. Conceptual framework (adapted from Rentroia-Bonito, 2014)



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