

## Chapter 18

# Improving Our Approach to Internet and SOA Projects

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### **BOOM**

In the late 1990s, the internet boom required new techniques and practices from project management that were more overtly agile and (perceived as being) outside of the realm of traditional methodologies. At the time, and to this day to a large extent, traditional methodologies had been the single recognised toolset available to a project manager: and then only really addressing the ‘harder’ disciplines required of project managers. During the internet boom project management methodologies (such as PRINCE2, APMP) were apparently, and in some cases deliberately, ditched

in favour of the JFDI (Just Do It) approach to delivering websites and, perhaps more importantly, business objectives (because for the first time, new technology permitted instant delivery).

In reality the swing from one extreme to the other merely served to demonstrate a truism known to project managers but never clearly articulated: that the ‘hard’ methods alone were insufficient to assure project success and that the perceived, structured, rules for applying methodological tools and techniques were being flaunted on a need-to-deliver-now (or else).

Yet still the problem of some projects delivering and some succeeding remained - though it had not escaped the attention of many project

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managers that projects could be delivered without (apparently) following the “rules” of disciplined methodologies: a thought so heretical, it better not be spoken out loud.

## **BUST**

Within a few short years the internet boom was so rapidly followed by bust, and it was in the interests of methodology peddlars to insist that the reasons for bust had clearly been the lack of discipline in project management. Subsequently PRINCE2 and APM exam courses around the world have made, and continue to make, rich these peddlars of project management half-truths.

More than a decade later I (and other experienced programme and project managers) find ourselves asking the question of what we lessons we should have learned from that time. There were many new and genuinely transformational insights that emerged yet curiously, no one else appears to have either recognised or grasped these lessons either, based on the evidence available (and it remains in the interests of project management examination bodies to ignore anything that may threaten their income stream from would-be candidates).

## **LESSONS LEARNED?**

It is clear to me that best practice project management consists of a combination of ‘hard’ PM methods, soft skills (because people, not processes deliver projects) and a ‘project-intelligent (?)’-ability to recognise the specifics of the situation to provide the correct combination of skills necessary to assure project success and deliver a business objective.

Like the internet, a decade later Service Oriented Architecture is challenging many aspects of project management methodology. Having

emerged from many years of speculation there is, perhaps, a mixed blessing with SOAs: while solving one type of problem, it merely serves to create an alternative set. But for the business objective focused professional who manages the risk-reward balance for an organisation success is found in determining which set of problems is more manageable - on the assumptions that (i) we recognise the varying problem sets (ii) we can define them correctly and rigorously and (iii) we can deliver on that promise! And it is in the failure to validate these relatively simplistic but necessary assumptions (at the very start of any projects work) that I focus because we are still not getting the message!

The promises of SOA such as a standardised approach and reusability are accompanied by new challenges such as governance and the integration of legacy environments. In this sense it is like the promise of outsourcing: problems and inefficiencies are taken off our hands, but we simultaneously find new problems and lack the immediate levers of control that we could have used to resolve an in-house development. Yet in the UK (just like the early days of outsourcing) people are heading down that same route of ‘act first, think later!’ And it is exacerbated by the need (or organisations) to see activity (sic not the same as progress) that projects commence with a focus on the JFDI method referenced earlier... even when everyone believes they are following a well-defined structured method.

## **DELIVERING PROJECT CERTAINTY...THE PLAN**

Whether the purpose is SOA (as it was this week when I was reviewing a project health check report for a client) or internet based opportunities, project management methodologies and project planning tools have to assist the practitioner in achieving their goal: to deliver a successful project

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