PM RESEARCH NEWS

Invitation to participate in project management methodology research

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Abstract

Having been practiced in various forms for millennia, project management has become increasingly recognized since the 1950s through endeavors related to the Apollo space program, the Concorde aircraft, the English Channel tunnel and the Sydney Opera House. Many practical works and theoretical papers have been published in attempts to identify factors leading to project success, and issues to avoid in order to elude project failure. Meanwhile many organizations have been collecting project management processes, best practices and lesson learned, and compiling them into structured collections known as project management methodologies. These collections have received surprisingly little academic attention: There are no papers focusing on them, and the few papers referencing them typically leave the concept undefined and unappreciated. This may be due to the concept being considered trivial, or the boundary which appears to exist between project management theory and practice. This is surprising, again, considering the rich empirical data project management methodologies offer for project management research. Project management methodology logics, structures, contents and their connections to organizational backgrounds, circumstances and targets appear especially interesting from the theoretical point of view. The research I am planning to perform is based on two beliefs I have: Clues towards a pragmatic theory of project management can be identified, and the divide between the practical and theoretical fields of project management alleviated by examining organizational project management methodologies. Planning to perform a multiple case study, I am kindly inviting organizations to sign up for participation in my attempt to establish the first generally acceptable theory of project management.

1. Introduction

I am a 45 year old PhD student at the Department of Industrial Engineering and Management at Aalto University, School of Science and Technology, Espoo, Finland. Having started postgraduate studies in 2009 under the supervision of Professor Karlos Artto, I am now commencing the research for my PhD thesis. I have an interest in project management methodologies, and believe there is a connection between project management methodologies and a pragmatic theory of project management.
This is important from the practical perspective, as an improved understanding of project management methodologies is likely to increase their ability to enhance project effectiveness and chances for project success, and from the theoretical perspective as I expect the rich empirical data to allow the first generally acceptable theory of project management to be established.

Having graduated from Aalto University (at the time known as Helsinki University of Technology) in 1992, I have served in a number of project management positions ranging from project engineer to projects director. I am a Certified Scrum Master, and PMP, IPMA Level C, IPMA Level B and PRINCE2 Foundation certified, and looking forward to upgrading my PRINCE2 certificate and acquiring the PgMP certificate. I chair the local IPMA Certification Body (operating IPMA certification in Finland), and head the Finnish Delegation to ISO/PC 236 and ISO/TC 258.

The aim of this paper is to invite organizations to sign up for the proposed research: This means allowing the analysis of organizational project management methodology in order to gain an understanding of the related logics, structures, contents, and their connections to organizational backgrounds, circumstances and targets.

2. The Empirical Study

I am planning to implement the empirical part of research for my PhD thesis as a multiple case study following the framework defined by Kathleen Eisenhardt in her seminal paper Building theories from case study research as published in the October 1989 issue of The Academy of Management Review.

The initial research questions are:

RQ 1: Why do organizations create and employ project management methodologies?
RQ 2: How do organizations structure and populate project management methodologies?

I am looking for eight organizations to participate in the empirical study. Eight cases is considered optimum by multiple case study specialists, however, I am contacting a higher number understanding some organizations will decline this invitation, and some case selection will be necessary for improving the generalizability of the emerging theory. It is necessary for all organizations participating in the research to have a project management methodology, however, there is no need for this methodology to be extraordinary, or to be provided by a leading global supplier: Any project management methodology which provides appropriate service to the organization is well suited for the purposes of this research.

It would be best from theory generalization point of view to have the participating organizations represent polar opposites on following axes: Private – Public; Americas – EMEA/APAC; ICT – Other industries:
Data collection, including one-to-one interviews with the people involved in project management methodology development, methodology management, and methodology use will be carried out with each participating organization. The aim of these interviews, which will be recorded and transcribed, is to collect information from the relevant people. Also, all available electronic and/or mechanic materials on methodology logics, structures, contents and their connections to organizational backgrounds, circumstances and targets will be collected and/or recorded. The empirical part of research will be organized in such a way that each participating organization only needs to invest the interviewees' time to participate in the research. All collected information will be considered and treated as strictly confidential. Applicable confidentiality agreements can be signed, as/if necessary, with all participating organizations. Research results will be published anonymously, and in such a way that it will be impossible to identify participating organizations and/or methodology details from the results.

All participating organizations will receive, in exchange for contributing, a summary of their project management methodology, and an analysis of their methodology according to the results of this research.

There is no exact time schedule for this research, however, my plan calls for the data collection to be implemented by the end of 2012. Relevant details will be agreed to as the list of participants emerges.

Hoping for as wide participation as possible, I kindly ask organizations wanting to sign up to participate and/or needing further information to email me at jouko.vaskimo@aalto.fi.