

The Importance of Political Influence in Explaining Project Management Success Factors

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Abstract

This paper argues that the political power and actions required of project managers to achieve project management success provide a consistent explanation for the emergence of project management success factors deemed critical by project managers in project success factor studies. This represents an important insight for project managers and researchers in understanding the value and nature of project management success factors. For the purposes of the discussion the success factor study by Parr, Shanks, & Darke (1999), which examined critical success factors associated with ERP implementation projects, is used as an example of success factor studies. Two questions are considered: Can the critical project management success factors identified by project managers in project success factor studies such as Parr et al. (1999) be explained in terms of the project manager's power and their actions of bargaining and negotiation? What is the nature of the association between project manager power and the success factors as operationalised within a project?

Keywords

Project management; project success factors; conceptual study

INTRODUCTION

Project managers have been assailed for years by lists of “project success factors”; factors that are said to be essential for project success. For example, *top management support* and *user involvement* are but two of many factors that have been identified. The problem with these factors is that their checklist nature tends to limit application to the project planning stage. Projects, particularly IS projects, can be messy, complex, uncertain, political, subject to changing goals and highly constrained in their access to resources. A project manager can be left confused as to how to operationalise or make sense of these factors in the day-to-day execution of a complex project.

While the positivist project success factor literature often focuses on the project and its conduct as if it were a black box, the interpretivist and practitioner literature examines life from the perspective of the actors in a project, and in particular, the role of the project manager. For example, Pinto (2000) examined the role of politics and political actions in successful project management. The effective use of influence and the application of bargaining and negotiation to achieve project success in the context of political project environments represents the key message of Pinto's paper.

The question thus arises, what is the association between these two means of achieving project success? A useful step in linking these two perspectives is provided by the framework proposed by Fraser & Turner (2002) representing the determinants of reported project success (see Figure 2. below). They proposed that there are three spheres of control and influence over the various project processes and that project managers only have control of the project management process and influence on other project related processes. This paper builds on this framework and demonstrates the link between these the two perspectives – critical success factors and project management power. The project success factor study undertaken by Parr et al. (1999) of critical success factors for Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems implementation is used as a representative example of a recent project success factor study in the IS literature¹. The specific research question addressed in the first half of this paper is as follows:

¹ A more robust approach to this “single focal study” would have involved a list of critical success factors from a range of studies; either specifically drawn from the enterprise systems implementation literature (Motwani, Mirchandani, Madan, & Gunasekaram, 2002; Scott & Vessey, 2002; Somers & Nelson, 2001; Sumner, 2000; Umble, Haft, & Umble, 2003) or from the project success factor literature (Belassi & Tukel, 1996; Cooke-Davies, 2002; Fowler & Walsh, 1999; A. Graham, 2000; R. Graham, 1988; Pinto & Slevin, 1988; Procaccino, Verner, Overmyer, & Darter, 2002; Schmidt, Lyytinen, Keil, & Cule, 2001). However, the ability to synthesise these studies into a coherent set is problematic. This paper specifically argues that the critical factors – represented by necessary and desirable success factors – associated with project management success (as defined by de Wit (1998), where these are identified by project managers, can be explained from the perspective of power. The majority of these studies do not define the criticality of the factors and identify whether they are necessary, Ross (Paper #220)

Can the critical project management success factors identified by project managers in project success factor studies such as Parr et al. (1999) be explained in terms of the project manager's power and their actions of bargaining and negotiation?

Answering the above question, this paper argues that the political actions required of project managers to achieve project management success can explain the emergence of the critical success factors, as represented by the necessary and desirable success factors, in the Parr et al. study. Given this explanation the second half of this paper examines a second question:

What is the nature of the association between project manager power and the critical success factors as operationalised within a project?

A review of the project success literature is provided followed by a consideration of the power and political skills required of project managers as proposed by Pinto (2000). An explanation of the emergence of the critical success factors identified by Parr et al. (1999) from a power and influence perspective is then provided. Two cases of near failure in IT projects are then analysed from a project manager power and influence perspective as a means to further understand the nature of the association between project manager power and the critical success factors. Finally, recommendations for practitioners and for future research are discussed.

SUCCESS FACTORS AS A MEANS TO ACHIEVE PROJECT MANAGEMENT SUCCESS

The Search for Project Success Factors

Project success and failure represent specific instances of project performance at a particular point in time – at the conclusion of a project. The subject of “project success” and the factors that lead to it is a major area of research in the project management literature. Notably, the more embracing subject of project performance – which considers the performance of a project over its lifecycle - remains overshadowed by the interest in project success. Figure 1. provides a simple model of this area of literature. Studies have considered the scenario of project success or failure, including side-effects, and proposed lists of success, failure or risk factors. Researchers have considered:

- What factors influenced project success or failure?
- What factors are critical to the successful outcome of a project?
- What are the measures of project success (or failure)? For example should it be user satisfaction, completion to time, budget and quality or possibly a range of measures?
- How can we measure project success?
- Are we measuring actual project success or perceived project success?

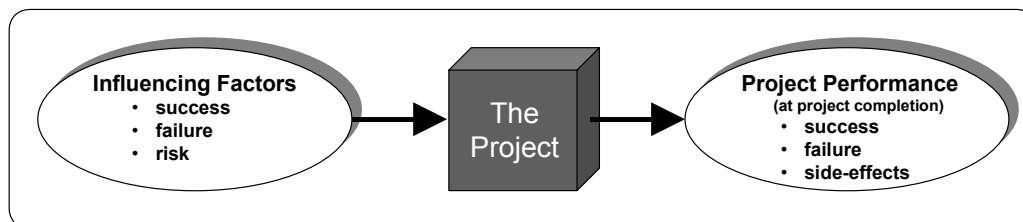


Figure 1. Elements of the Project Success Literature

For many project success studies “The Project” (Figure 1.) is a “black box” and its influence on project success is somewhat irrelevant. Studies such as Belassi & Tukel (1996), Cooke-Davies (2002), Hoegl & Gemuenden (2001), Parr et al. (1999), Pinto & Slevin (1988), Schmidt et al. (2001), Somers & Nelson (2001) and White & Fortune (2002) typify this view. The focus of these studies is on the “Influencing Factors” and “Project Performance (at project completion)” of Figure 1. All of these studies developed lists of influencing factors from prior studies and proposed new lists based upon statistical analysis of data collected via surveys and/or structured interviews. Despite these studies and many more consensus on success, failure and risk factors does not exist.

desirable, or important but not necessary. Further, the studies rarely focus only on project manager perceptions; consequently a range of perceptions including those of the researcher are often encapsulated in the identified factors. Finally, the scope of the project and the definition of “project success” is either unclear or inconsistent across the studies again limiting comparability and synthesis.

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Some of the studies in the project success literature have considered the nature of the project, albeit still as a passive element. For example, Pinto & Slevin (1988) identified factors applicable to each stage within a project: conceptualisation, planning, execution and termination; Motwani et al. (2002), Parr et al. (1999), Somers & Nelson (2001), Sumner (2000) and Umble et al. (2003) examined success or factors associated with ERP systems projects; and A. Graham (2000) considered success factors associated with large development programs.

Most studies identified the roles of the participants (e.g. project managers, executives, consultants etc) from whom the success factors were elicited and/or by whom the factors were ranked. However, few studies have considered the impact of the participant's role on the perception of success, risk or failure; exceptions being Fowler & Walsh (1999) and Procaccino et al. (2002).

Studies have also sought to identify the “critical”, “real”, “major”, “necessary” success or risk factors (Butler & Fitzgerald, 1999; Cooke-Davies, 2002; Parr et al., 1999; Somers & Nelson, 2001; Sumner, 2000; Umble et al., 2003). However, rarely are these terms defined; the strength of the association between the factors and project outcomes is usually unclear. Consequently, the identified factors often include necessary, desirable, important and nice to have factors; or for grounded research studies, only those factors observed.

While definitions and methodology issues limit comparability and synthesis of factors across project success studies, real-world experience tells us that the black box model of project success is problematic; completion of a project is not as simple as cranking a handle and the nature of the project and its environment cannot be ignored. In this light de Wit (1998) concluded that to believe that “one can objectively measure the success of a project is somewhat of an illusion”. Most projects have multiple hierarchical project objectives (strategic, operational, technical, organisational etc.) which may change over time, and success has both subjective and objective dimensions; in which case a single statement of success or failure is unrealistic (Baccarini, 1999; de Wit, 1998). Other problems include: the impact of the time dimension – projects deemed failures immediately following project completion could later be deemed successes; the position of the observer – two parties to a project could have quite different views as to the success of the same project; and scope – the potential for success to be partial or simply unmanageable (Baccarini, 1999; de Wit, 1998). Further, not all projects are created equal. Projects may be initiated with considerable constraints (e.g. inadequate funding or unrealistic schedules) or may be inherently risky such that success is unlikely (Fraser & Turner, 2002). Consequently, it may be necessary to control for such characteristics in order to conduct any meaningful comparisons or analyses of project success (Fraser & Turner, 2002).

A Model of the Determinants of Project Success

In recognising that the black box in Figure 1 represents processes which mediate or transform the factors and other project inputs and thus produce project outputs, a number of authors have sought to describe these processes and to characterise the dimensions of project success (Belassi & Tukel, 1996; de Wit, 1998; Fraser & Turner, 2002). In particular de Wit (1998) made the distinction between *project management success* and *project success*. In his definition, the success of the project management effort is judged against achievement of time, cost and quality criteria; and project success is assessed against the objectives of the project. Using de Wit's definition of *project management success* and *project success* Fraser & Turner (2002) proposed a framework for considering the determinants of reported project success (refer Figure 2.).

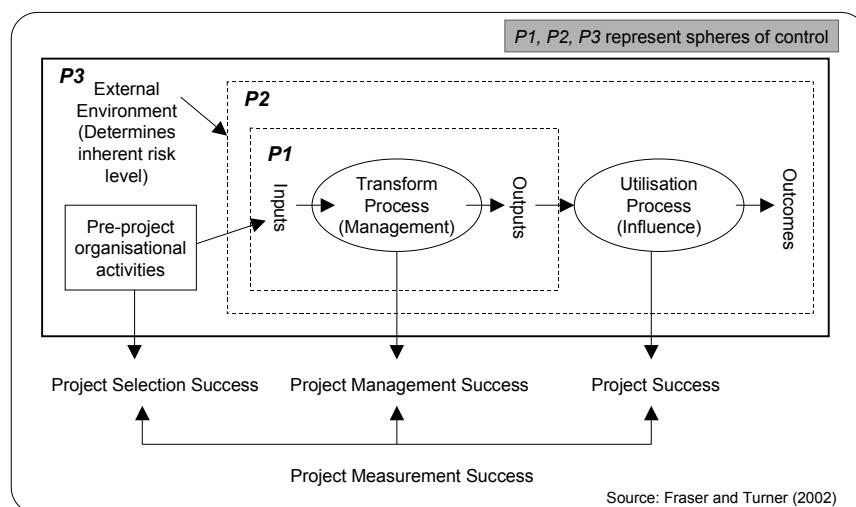


Figure 2. Determinants of Reported Project Success. Source: Fraser & Turner (2002)

The Fraser & Turner (2002) framework comprises two key processes: the *transform* process (i.e. project management process); and the *utilisation* process where the outputs from the project are utilised by the organisation. Important to this discussion is the representation of spheres of control and influence by the project manager – represented by the boxes P1, P2 and P3 on their diagram. They propose that the project manager controls the domain represented by P1. Within P2 the Project Manager can take “independent actions” but can only influence the utilisation of project outputs and project outcomes. P3 is not under the project manager’s control and includes the organisation external to the project and the world external to the organisation.

Obviously this model has limitations, a number of which will be discussed later; however for the purpose of explaining success factors from the perspective of power this framework is a useful starting point. Note that the Parr et al. (1999) study effectively considered *project management success* as defined by P1 and the *transform* process.

POLITICS AND POWER AS A MEANS TO ACHIEVING PROJECT MANAGEMENT SUCCESS

Pinto (2000) considered the role of politics in successful project management and in particular the forms of power available to project managers as they compete for resources amidst a functional organisational structure. Using Graham’s three modes of power²: *authority*, *status* and *influence*, he observed that few project managers have the power of *authority* (i.e. positional power) within the corporate hierarchy to compete effectively for resources due to the transient and detached nature of their projects. Nor, he argued, can project managers rely upon their own *status* or the *status* of the project to secure resources as many projects do not have the visibility or importance to override competing functional unit interests.

Pinto (2000) concluded that for project managers to be effective in delivering successful projects, the use of influence – an informal power base which includes personal charisma, dynamism, expertise and knowledge – is often the only mechanism available. He proposed that project managers use “sensible” forms of political behaviour associated with effective use of *influence*, specifically: negotiation and bargaining; and that project managers avoid political behaviours which represent “naïve”, “predatory” or “self-serving” forms of *influence* that could be destructive to project management performance and projects. Recommendations for building and sustaining *influence* include: “developing a reputation as an expert”, prioritising and establishing close ties with those across the organisation who can provide assistance, developing a network of experts and others who can provide resources, and influencing with sensitivity and appropriate tactics (Pinto, 2000).

In summary Pinto argued that *influence* and the political actions of bargaining and negotiating are key skills for project managers to secure resources and effectively manage their projects for project success.

EXPLAINING SUCCESS FACTORS THROUGH POLITICS

The two preceding sections advocate quite different means to achieve project success. On one hand, the success factor “camp” advocate the need for specific attributes in order for a project to be successful. These are either attributes of the project or attributes of the environment within which the project operates. Rarely does the literature on project success factors identify how such factors are to be operationalised. On the other hand, the judicious use of political power is advised as a means to achieve project success (Pinto, 2000).

This section attempts to reconcile these two perspectives using the study by Parr et al. (1999) as an example project success factor study. This discussion seeks to explain the emergence of critical project management success factors in the Parr et al. study from the perspective of project manager power.

Findings from a Success Factors Study

Parr et al. (1999) sought to identify the critical success factors associated with implementation of ERP systems. Their study proposed a number of factors, some necessary, some desirable and some important but not necessary for ERP implementation (refer Figure 3.). Their research methods comprised structured interviews with 10 project managers who had participated in 42 ERP implementations in Australia and the United States³. Half of the participants were employed by ERP consultancies, the other half in implementation companies. Success was defined as “adherence to time and budgetary constraints”. Although delivery against quality/scope requirements was not explicitly part of their definition of success it could be assumed that the interviewees would have implicitly understood this criterion as well. Factors were derived from the literature and secondly from the interviewees. Techniques were used to elicit factors which contributed to success or failure based upon the

² Pinto (2000) cites Graham as follows: “Graham RJ. Personal communication, 1989.”

³ The interviewees are identified as “Project Managers from within Implementation companies, and Project Managers and Senior Consultants from ERP Consultancy Companies” (Parr et al., 1999).

interviewees' beliefs⁴. A consolidated list of factors was ranked by participants using Likert and Boolean scales as a means to distinguish important from necessary factors.

The success criteria used in this study aligns with the measurement of *project management success* related to the *transform process* in Fraser and Turner's framework and the factors were derived from project managers – those who control the domain of P1 in Fraser and Turner's framework.

Explaining Project Management Success Factors in terms of Political Influence

The question here is – Can the critical factors be explained by examining the project manager's power and their actions of bargaining and negotiation? This paper argues that the political dimensions of project management offer one consistent explanation for the necessary and desirable project management success factors found in the Parr et al. study, although other explanations should not be discounted.

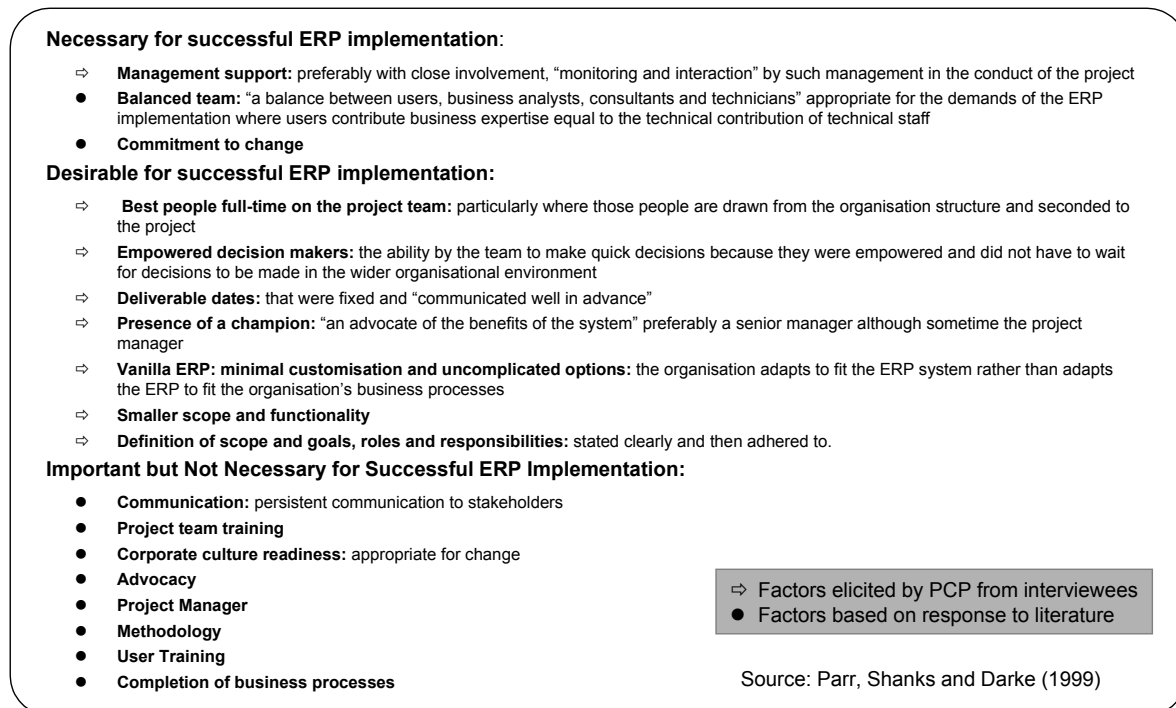


Figure 3. Success Factors for ERP Implementation. Source: Parr et al. (1999)

A project by its nature involves undertaking of a set of unique and complex activities to achieve established goals, constrained by time and budget (Fraser & Turner, 2002). However, these words do not effectively convey the complexity associated with projects. Projects and their environments operate in a state of change, uncertainty and inter-dependency. Business directions and priorities may change; sponsors may depart and organisation structures may alter. Projects are also subject to the perils of forecasting. A project plan represents a future scenario for the project – not necessarily its reality. Inevitably there will be hidden scope, unexpected staff turnover, technical problems, productivity issues etc that impact the schedule, scope, budget and risk profile. Consequently, adequate and appropriate resources (where resources includes people, technology, systems, tools, time, money, data, information and knowledge) and effective deployment of those resources throughout the life of a project is essential for it to operate and complete within agreed (and often revised) time and budget constraints.

The ideal or very lucky project manager would have a level of *authority* or *status* that overrides all other functional managers against whom he/she would normally compete for resources. In this utopia the project manager would simply take control of the resources he or she needs at any point in time, make decisions to suit their requirements and execute the project without the need to bargain. In Fraser & Turner's (2002) framework this equates to the power represented by P1 extending to cover the domains of P2 and possibly P3. At the other end of the scale, a project manager who has *influence* as their only source of power must bargain and negotiate extensively – a time consuming and conflict-generating activity. The goal in this *influence*-dependent scenario must be to either minimise the requirement to bargain or to bargain from a position of strength leveraging whatever influence, expertise, networks, favours, resources or knowledge the project manager has.

⁴ Personal Construct Psychology (PCP)

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Examining the *necessary* and *desirable* success factors of Parr et al.'s study (see Figure 3.), it is clear that a number of these extend a project manager's sphere of control and influence, contribute to a project manager's power to secure resources, or in themselves represent desirable resources:

- "Management support" provides a project manager with the most leverage in accessing all types of resources from across the organisation provided the managers involved have a high position of authority within the corporate structure and the support offered is visible, useful and ongoing. "Management support" confers authority indirectly on the project manager and can confer status on the project itself; bases of power that are the easily understood by the rest of the corporate organisation.
- The "best people full time" and "balanced team" represent resources in themselves, resources that are appropriate (i.e. best people); available when required (i.e. full-time) and aligned to the needs of the project (i.e. balanced team). Both these factors substantially reduce the need to bargain and leave the project manager to get on with the project - undertaking the tasks of deploying, controlling and monitoring the efforts of the resources.
- "Commitment to change" (and the implied commitment to the project) provides the project manager and the project with status and potentially authority useful in the organisational landscape. It can potentially reduce the need to bargain or provide the project manager with some leverage in the bargaining process. If explicitly aligned to the business priorities, commitment may be used to prioritise resources in the project manager's favour.
- A "champion" may be a resource available to the project, may extend the influence of a project manager sideways to the user organisations, upwards to the senior managers or downwards to the team itself. Alternatively, a champion may bargain in place of the project manager using their own influence, charm and organisational contacts to obtain decisions and resources favourable to the project.
- "Empowered decision makers" represents power in itself and the ability to make decisions within the project confines without the need to consult or bargain with others.
- "Vanilla ERP" and "smaller scope" both reduce the need for resources, the bargaining effort and the ensuing conflict. Even "deliverable dates" and "definition of scope/goals/roles/responsibilities" can reduce the bargaining effort although this may not appear self-evident. These factors represent variables associated with the project's constraints or boundaries. They are usually established at project initiation and confirmed and approved by senior managers although they may be revised as the project progresses, again with senior management approval. Consequently a project manager can leverage the imprimatur of senior managers' commitment to these in the bargaining process and then use the constraining nature of these factors as a means to focus the negotiation. Variable dates and goals make negotiation a far more complex and uncertain business and an astute project manager would want to avoid this situation.

Finally, a number of factors were identified by Parr et al. (1999) as important but not necessary. These factors may still be necessary for success from an independent viewpoint, but from a project manager's position they are perceived as not necessary. Notably all the important factors were originally derived from the literature. While the necessary/desirable factors represent multi-purpose forms of power, resources or project constraints useful in managing outside the P1 boundary the characteristics of the important factors are more specific and a direct relationship to power sometimes less clear. Unsurprisingly, from a project manager's perspective "the project manager" is effectively under their control and authority and is not perceived as necessary. One might have expected "methodology" to be viewed as necessary – as like a contract it can represent a form of power if its selection and use is agreed by the organisation. Its absence might be explained by the collective experience of the project managers in forty-two implementations (ranging from 1 to 8 implementations per interviewee). The methodology issues are likely to be well understood and perceived as low risk by the participants to the Parr et al. study. Alternatively, project manager may perceive that factors such as "methodology" and "project team training" may be modified to the project manager's preference via forms of power available through the necessary and desirable factors. "Communication" and "advocacy" may be viewed by project managers as infrastructure to garner power or resources but not actually as power in themselves. Finally "corporate culture readiness", "user training" and "completion of business processes" would seem to represent factors relevant to the *utilisation* process associated with Fraser and Turner's (2002) definition of *project success* – attributes not relevant to the objective of completion within time and budget constraints and *project management success*.

The need to effectively manage the P1 boundary would suggest the importance of other factors not noted by the project managers in Parr et al. (1999) study. For example, there is no reference to the criticality of suppliers who also provide key resources, although the establishment of contracts may negate the need to bargain and provide a form of *authority* for the project manager. There is no direct reference to the project the project managers are running being the right project for the organisation although clearly a number of project managers in the Parr et al. study would be highly biased as they were employees of firms with vested interests in selling ERP

implementation services at the time of the study. All factors noted in the Parr et al. paper contribute positively to a project manager's base of power. There is no mention of factors that negate *influence* and increase bargaining, such as a highly politicised culture where functional managers interfere in project objectives. Again an explanation may be the nature of ERP projects which typically require a major commitment from across the organisation and in doing so may limit political interference by other managers.

Summary: Does Political Influence Explain the Project Success Factors?

This discussion does not deny that there may be alternative explanations for the critical success factors identified by Parr et al. (1999) which could, for example, be related to the conduct of the project team, the nature and influence of the ERP technology itself, the organisational culture or the external environment. However, from the perspective of the project manager and the *transform* process, the need to apply *influence* as a key source of power provides a useful and consistent explanation for the factors observed. It also provides project management practitioners with strategies for garnering power, maximising their power of *influence* and minimising the bargaining effort in order to effectively conduct their projects.

UNDERSTANDING THE NATURE OF THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN PROJECT MANAGEMENT SUCCESS FACTORS AND PROJECT MANAGER POWER: OBSERVATIONS FROM TWO FAILED PROJECTS

The above argument explains at a conceptual level the emergence of critical project management success factors from the perspective of project management power. This represents an important insight for project managers and researchers in understanding the value and nature of project management success factors. Project managers can leverage the power and resources implicit in critical success factors to achieve project success. However, what of real projects? What is the nature of the association between the project manager power and the success factors in the context of operational projects? If we examine real projects that have achieved success will we also find project managers who have effectively used their political skills? Equally, if we examine projects which have failed, will we also find project managers who have failed to effectively use their political skills or did the projects fail because of the lack of the success factors no matter what the political actions were of the project manager? Figure 4. reflects these questions.

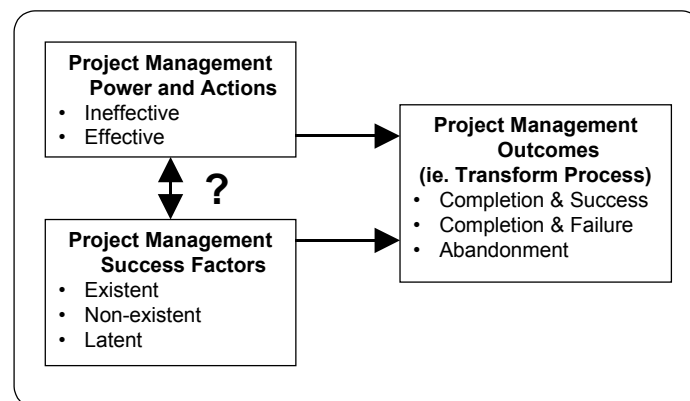


Figure 4. Questioning the association between project management power and project success factors

Observations from Two Failed Projects

In the course of the past eight years, the author has been personally involved in a several projects as a consultant and project manager. Reflection on those projects suggests that a clear relationship between power and success factors is difficult to establish in successful projects. However the situation of impending project management failure (i.e. failure to deliver on time and on budget) in the absence of the necessary success factors (i.e., absence of management support, balanced team and commitment) is one scenario where clearly political actions on the part of the project manager would be expected as a means of averting project abandonment. Further, in putting the project "back on track" the project manager, or more often a consultant called in to rescue the project, would have had to ensure all the three necessary success factors were attained.

Although assessed in hindsight, the author's observations and involvement as a consultant in rescuing two failing projects provide some initial insights. Both projects were in a state of failure prior to completion of their technical deliverables; one - project A - was eventually turned around following external intervention, while the other - Project B - was abandoned at considerable cost. Project A was initially planned as a 9-month system development project with the objective of replacing three existing systems at a budget of about \$1 million. It is

not an ERP project, but as the arguments in this paper are not limited to ERP projects, it is desirable to consider a broader range of projects. Competitive pressures and aging systems necessitated the redevelopment and the proposed system affected a large number of users across the workforce operating in remote locations. Project B was a major systems implementation of a suite of packages (comparable to an ERP implementation) with a budget of approximately \$10 million and a planned 18-month project duration. It was intended to deliver improvements in IT infrastructure, organisational productivity and integration of business operations. Its implementation affected almost every aspect of an organisation operating a complex services business in the public sector.

In examining these two projects the absence of the “necessary” success factors in both projects is striking. However the roles and actions of the project managers are equally of note. Both project managers failed to avert project management failure despite obvious warning signs such as: major scope creep; continual failure to achieve project milestones; major risk occurrence; and requirements for substantial additional budget outlays. In hindsight, it is reasonable to suggest that each project manager was shaped by the organisational environment (represented by the absence of the success factors) which, in turn, limited their ability to access necessary power and resources. Equally, it is reasonable to describe the project managers as inwardly focussed, only managing those aspects of the project under their direct control.

The nature of the missing “necessary” project management success factors also provides some insight into the obstacles faced by the project managers.

For project A, the senior business managers resided in a separate city and the user community were geographically dispersed. The IT program manager who acted as intermediary failed to adequately relay project risks and issues to senior IT and business management. Although the project was initiated with business commitment, this commitment was not sought on an ongoing basis, and management attention was deflected by the planned outsourcing of the IT organisation. While the team included a balance of technical and analyst capabilities, the technical staff, of which the project manager was one, dominated the character of the team. Most project decisions were technical in nature. Concerns over the lack of user involvement by the analysts were not addressed. Following external intervention, the project was completed, but only after senior IT and business management support was re-established, the team structures were re-jigged to be inclusive of all team members, a user champion was seconded to the project on a full-time basis, and regular communication to managers and users was established to ensure commitment.

In the case of project B, the project was initiated by senior management who were not supportive of the project but who were left little choice by their executive board. Over time there were a series of senior management and board changes with later managers having little understanding of the scale and impact of the project. The operational business units were openly against the project. Eventually responsibility for the project became centred in one of the corporate business units. While a steering committee did exist, it lacked terms of reference, was never provided information on the project status and was not representative. In addition, the team was unbalanced being dominated by user-clerical staff on secondment from the organisation. They were expected to operate as systems analysts while the vendor provided mostly off-shore support and the internal IT group were excluded from the project. As the project became increasingly isolated from the organisation scope change became uncontrolled. Eventually, the project manager resigned and the IT organisation took control and initiated a formal project review which led to the project’s abandonment.

Reflecting on the Failed Projects

In reflecting on the two projects above a key issue emerges alluded to by Pinto (2000) in his paper: the problems associated with the detached nature of a project from the organisational structures on which that project depends. Issues in the projects described above include: whether the organisational environment had the potential for the success factors to be operationalised or not by project manager (or third party) intervention and political actions; and the nature of the barriers and obstacles that both limited a project manager’s power and influence and that would have had to be overcome in order to establish the success factors required. At a more concrete level the issue of access between project managers and those with the power to assist is also evident.

In the case of project A, an environment did exist with the potential for management support, commitment and a balanced team. In this environment the project management success factors were latent. What was lacking was judicious use of power and influence by the project manager to convert that potential into real and useful success drivers. Greater influence in the form of proactive risk management and direct communication with business sponsors may have avoided the need for external intervention. By contrast, in project B, the project manager faced a low probability of establishing senior management support and organisational commitment given the project was initiated without these factors. He lacked power and influence. Over time few functional managers understood let alone were interested in assisting the project. In this environment the potential for project management success factors was non-existent.

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Both projects were isolated on a number of dimensions and both project managers suffered from a lack of access to those with power to assist them. The nature of project isolation included geography, security and organisational boundaries including hierarchy. In terms of access the project manager for project B had access to senior managers however the communication does not appear to have been meaningful or regular. In project A intermediaries diluted or miscommunicated the messages. Given such barriers it is not surprising that the senior managers of these projects did not become aware of the depth of the project's problems until the projects were close to failure.

Notably, both projects required external intervention to resolve project management failure. Obviously the recruitment of external consultants to review and fix a project in trouble ensures such consultants have a major advantage over the incumbent project manager – they have the advantage of status and almost always the support of senior managers.

Conclusion

This section has not been able to resolve the nature of the association between project management power and project management success factors. Rather it has raised new issues, in particular the association and impact of organisational structures on both project management power and the ability of an organisational environment to support the success factors.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS

There are a number of recommendations for practitioners which stem from the above discussion and integrate the findings of Pinto (2000) and the project success literature. In summary, project managers should seek to garner power both for their projects and themselves from stakeholders in the organisation who have power. Project managers should:

- **Develop and leverage strategic relationships to those with power in the organisational landscape**
Project managers should develop, maintain and leverage strategic stakeholder relationships - both formal and informal. Such stakeholders should have authority, status and influence in allocating resources and making decisions which affect the project. Maximum leverage requires that relationships be based upon strong rapport and that the relationship has visibility. At a minimum, solid working relationships to sponsors which are unimpeded by geographic, hierarchical and other organisational boundaries should be established and maintained. Champions from the organisation are included in this activity. Such activities should be a top priority for project managers.
- **Develop project status**
Power belongs not only to individuals but also to communities of practice, departments, business units, review boards, steering committees, work centres etc within the organisation. A project with status fares a much better chance of obtaining needed resources from organisational structures. Commitment to change and empowered decision makers permit the project to execute effectively. This requires a number of actions by project managers and their project teams - promoting the project and its benefits as a means to status; gaining formal commitment to the project by sponsors and making those commitments visible; and gaining informal and tacit commitment by the broader organisation to the project's goals, power and outcomes.
- **Develop project manager competence, influence and status**
As Pinto (2000) advises, project managers must develop exceptional skills as bargaining, negotiating and influencing as well as developing networks of those who can assist. However, in the conduct of a project there is also an element of self-promotion, which if backed by competency can lead to trust by those in power and status. However as Pinto (2000) notes – predatory approaches such as blatant self-promotion are likely to fail.
- **Manage projects boundaries and complexities to minimise the bargaining effort**
Problem solving, bargaining and negotiation are a reality of project life. When excessive or ineffective they can derail projects. Clear project boundaries: goals, scope, quality, budget, timelines and risk profile plus adopting a “small scope” approach can minimise risks, effort, conflict and the consequent problem solving and bargaining required. A project manager should ensure commitment to these by those in power, re-commitment whenever change arises and visibility of these.

FUTURE RESEARCH

From the discussion above it is evident that it is possible to explain the critical *project management success* factors from a political perspective and that this is an important insight. There are a number of directions for future research in this area.

Firstly, confirmation of this explanation from empirical research is required. What is the nature of the association between project management power, project management success factors and organisational structures? Is an absence of effective project management influence always associated with an absence of project management success factors and project failure; and vice versa? In such an investigation it would also be useful to obtain the perceptions of other actors and to consider their level of influence and power on the achievement of *project management success* (and in an expanded study on *project success* i.e. the utilisation process) given their role. For example, one would expect a team member to identify the authority and talents of the project manager as critical given the project manager is often key to securing resources necessary for them to carry out their tasks. It would be essential to assess the impact of the project manager and the degree of isolation of the project from senior managers and other stakeholders who can confer power, plus determine the impact of organisational structures in hindering or enabling access to power and resources.

However there are also a number of foundation issues which require investigation; in particular the nature of the *transform* and *utilisation* constructs in Fraser and Turner's framework. From the author's experience there appear to be three different sets of tasks embedded within the *transform* process although the ability to isolate these into independent processes for further study may be difficult. These include *project management tasks* which underpin the initiation, planning, controlling, executing and closing processes of a project; the technological transform tasks – effectively *product development tasks* which produce the technical deliverables (product, system or solution) and include installation of the technical deliverables; and organisational transform tasks or *change management tasks* which position the organisation ready to adopt and utilise the product, system or solution. In terms of the framework proposed by Fraser & Turner (2002) they themselves acknowledge the limitations of their model, the "greyness" of pre-project and post-project domains and that the processes are not necessarily time linear. The boundaries and inter-dependencies of the *transform* and *utilisation* processes also require clarification. As an example, rework and feedback from the *utilisation* process is quite likely to affect the *transform* process.

CONCLUSION

Although there have been dozens, if not hundreds of studies of project success factors in project management, knowledge of project success factors provides practicing project managers with limited advice as to how to achieve project success. The contribution of this paper has been to examine a representative paper from the project success factor literature and to show that project manager power and influence could be viewed as explanatory variables for these factors. The attraction of the power and influence perspective is that this view provides useful advice to project managers attempting to steer real life projects through to their successful conclusion. To test the validity of the power and influence perspective of success factors, this paper examined two failing projects, one of which was turned around and the other of which failed. In both these projects, it is argued that the power and influence perspective which allows an understanding of the importance of the project management success factors provides deeper insights into reasons for project success and for project failure/resolution than one or other perspective alone. This discussion provides the foundations for future research.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to acknowledge the assistance of Associate Professor Peter Seddon from the Department of Information Systems, The University of Melbourne in the critique of this paper.

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