Our Tribute to Rodney – and the importance of Goal Directed Project Management

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Rodney Turner has had great success within the academic field of project management. This issue of IJPM is celebrating his achievements. Rodney has held professorships in different countries (presently at SKEMA Business School, Lille, France and Politecnico di Milano, Italy) and been visiting professor all around the world. He has gotten rewards for his research from both PMI and IPMA. Rodney is the author or editor of eighteen books, (if we have counted it right). We guess more are coming. He also has an impressive list of journal articles and conference papers.

Rodney has played a significant role in the area of project management by being the editor-in-chief for IJPM for many years. His editorials and his work on improving the Impact Factor of the journal have been of great importance to the field of project management.

In the beginning…
But how did it all start? In 1984, we, the authors of this article (Erling and Kristoffer), together with Tor Haug, published a book on project management in Norway. It differed significantly from traditional textbooks at that time, which focused on waterfall models, networks and activity planning. The book promoted a method of managing projects called Goal Directed Project Management (GDPM) (in Norwegian "Målrettet prosjektstyring"). The approach advocated top-down planning; focus on the results (goals) you want to achieve, before planning how to achieve them (detail activities). The book had great success in Norway and is 32 years after, still one of the most sold books in the field.

In Norway at that time Kristoffer and Tor had started a management consultancy firm, which formed a partnership with the Norwegian branch of Coopers and Lybrand (C&L). (Erling was pursuing an academic career and ended up as professor at University of Bergen and later at BI Norwegian Business School in Oslo.) The three authors of GDPM were all keen on getting their book published in English through C&L.

Rodney was at the same time a senior consultant with C&L. He held a DPhil in Engineering Science from Oxford University and had considerable experience in project management from ICI Agricultural Division as a mechanical engineer as well as project manager in the petrochemical industry.

Rodney is asked if he is willing to work with us on an English version of the book, improving the translation, but also given an opportunity to make his own impression on the text. Rodney agrees. In 1987 Goal Directed Project Management is published by Kogan Page (Andersen, Grude, Haug, & Turner, 1987).

Following the publishing of GDPM, Rodney and the Norwegian authors wrote an article in IJPM to give an overview picture of the main ideas of the book (Turner, Grude, Haug, & Andersen, 1988).

Apart from becoming international standard with C&L at the time, the book has been published in nine languages (Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, English, German, Dutch, Italian, Hungarian and Russian). In UK, the fourth edition is the latest (Andersen, Grude, & Haug, 2009). Several with different partners and editors.

In 1989 Rodney becomes Professor and Director of the Project Management Program at Henley Management College. His very successful academic carrier comes to a start. We like to believe that his work on GDPM and our cooperation with Rodney contributed to his pursuing an academic life within project management. Certainly Rodney contributed over the years to the international spread of the GDPM ideology and methodology, through articles, lectures and his handbooks (Turner, 1999; Turner & Simister, 2000).

The main ideas of GDPM
Rodney has often referred to a review of the 1st English edition. It said: "How can this be a book on project management. It does not mention Critical Path Analysis." So it was, but GDPM focused instead on other areas fundamental to project success.

We would like to point out some of the main ideas of GDPM (there have been some additions during the years, but the main ideas have been there all the time):
- A comprehensive method of philosophies, tools and processes, where each component may be used in context or stand alone
- Simple and "nonprofessional" language allowing for broad collaboration
- Not just technical activities, but PSO: Balanced development of People, Systems and Organizations
- Top-down planning: Focus on the purpose/mission of the project, then on the results/goals that need to be achieved, and then on how to do it
- Special emphasis on communication: communicating results with top management, project owner and future end users, and tasks with the project participants
- Milestone plan with milestones on management level, combined with a responsibility chart showing who are responsible for achieving the milestones
- No detailed planning before it is necessary
- Bottom-up control

We shall briefly look at some of the aspects of GDPM.

PSO: Balancing changes to people, systems and organization
The successful project develops people, systems and organization in a balanced way. Companies are in a competitive world facing the challenge of change. Projects are required to help to manage these changes. The most common pitfall occurs when the project concentrates on planning the detail of tasks required, and loses sight of the true purpose, which is to obtain clearly defined goals. The result might be that the project concentrates on the technical change required, and ignores the cultural change.

Rodney has illustrating this point by two stories. Once (back in 2003) he spoke on the last day of a five-day project management seminar. He was told by a delegate that he was the first one to mention people. On another occasion he was doing interviews in an airline company. The interviews revealed that project team members spent their time complaining that the project managers were task-focused, and not people-focused. But the day they themselves were appointed to be project managers, they became task-focused.

GDPM is an approach which balances the technical and cultural objectives. To master change the company has to develop the people (educating, training, motivating), develop the organization (making changing to the organizational structure, improving the relationships

between staff members) and of course also develop the systems (the technical solutions, routines and procedures).

PSO is the same message as is expressed by Leavitt's Diamond (Leavitt, 1965). The model is a framework for understanding the connection between the key factors in an organization (tasks, people, structure and technology), and for building an integrated change strategy. According to this approach, before you bring about change in any one of the four components, you should evaluate the impact on the other three components. To implement change successfully, you need to find the right balance between all of them.

A classic example is introducing new technology. A change in technology means that people need to change too – they'll need training to use the new technology. This may affect the organizational structure, because people might demand higher pay and better positions. The new technology may also change old tasks. For instance, if the change automates old processes, the work that people do, will be different.

Even though people acknowledge PSO and Leavitt's Diamond, there is still a major lack of focus on people development and organizational development in projects.

Value creation and focus on mission achievement
GDPM is, as we have pointed out, focused on results. Management focus should be on what the project should achieve. Traditionally, project success has been viewed as the achievement of intended outcomes in terms of time, costs and quality (design specifications) only. It is now recognized that a broader set of outcome measures are needed. Project success is primarily the achievement of the project's mission or purpose. The mission should be expressed as a future desired situation for the organization/business that is to use the deliveries from the project. The project should lay the groundwork for value creation in the receiving organization.

The project's mission (the future desired situation for the receiving organization) cannot be achieved solely by the efforts of the project itself. It depends on actions from the base organization (the receiving organization) and its utilization of the deliveries of the project. It might also depend on the actions by different external stakeholders.

We need a tool to discuss and determine what the project should do and what others (especially the base organization and external stakeholders) have to do. GDPM has such a tool. It is called Mission Breakdown Structure (Andersen, 2014).

Figure 1 illustrates that the desired future situation of the base organisation has implications on our needs, what will be demanded of the different functions of the base organisation and how we would like stakeholders to feel and behave. Further breakdown into sub-areas is also indicated. The point is to illustrate that the desired future situation may be broken down into smaller units to prepare for a discussion on how to accomplish the aspirations of the base organisation. This will further facilitate discussions on which of these elements should be the responsibility of the project and which the base organisation itself should handle.
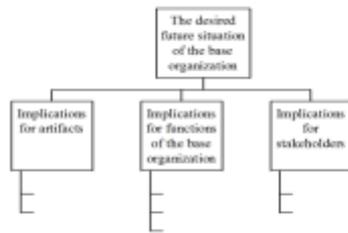
Figure 1 The MBS – the desired situation and its implication for the artefacts, base organization functions and stakeholders

Milestone planning

Many associate GDPM with milestone planning. GDPM is much more than that, but it is also true that milestone planning is a very important part of GDPM.

Planning is the core of project management. Network planning is the pride of the project management profession. Knowledge about network planning distinguishes project managers from other categories of managers. However, network planning does not secure success as it is activity-based. Many unsuccessful projects have very detailed plans. Activity planning at the start of the project might even be harmful (Andersen, 1996).

Instead, GDPM focuses on milestones. A milestone anticipates what the project is supposed to achieve at a pre-set date. It should describe a desired state of affairs, a desired future situation. Milestones are control stations in the project, an opportunity for stakeholders to assure themselves that the project is moving in the right direction. Milestones focus attention on things of concern and interest to the base organization. They allow the project owner and base organization to assess performance. Milestones affecting the base organization will also attract more interest in the project. Everybody can follow its progress – and share in the celebrations to mark milestones.
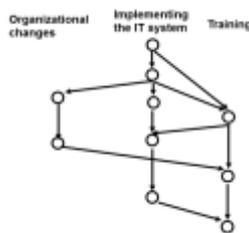

Figure 2 Milestone plan with result paths for an IT-project

Figure 2 is an illustration of a milestone plan. (It is a simplified figure; in practice each milestone will have completion date and text). The milestone plan charts the logical ties or dependencies between milestones. The milestone plan tells us that we cannot achieve a milestone – a described result - before we have reached the previous milestone. Another crucial point is that the planning is done without deciding, before it is absolutely needed and we have the best knowledge, which activities are needed to reach a milestone. This gives flexibility and quality in the activity planning, and reduces unnecessary re-planning. That is

also why milestone plans can be understood by non-experts in the field and enhance communication. It is also why we call the plan a logical plan: it charts the logical interconnections between states.

To show the multidimensional aspect of the project, the milestone plan has result paths. A result path is a sequence of closely interrelated milestones within a focus area. It consists of milestones, each of which helps the project create different predefined products. Interconnections between result paths show that work on the different types of deliverables is interconnected. The number of paths in a plan depends on the nature of the projects. If it is a PSO project, it should have at least three paths. Every path has a name, which tells us what kind of development the project is working on.

Milestone plans represent an effective means of communication between the base organization and the project. The project owner and line managers have a plan they can refer to. It presents a relatively comprehensible picture of what the project is aiming at, and the connections between milestones and project. We also know from experience that milestone plan shortcomings and logical flaws are quickly discovered by management and employees in the base organization, which shows they understand the plan and its implications. When the plan is understood and accepted by the project owner, he/she can use it to monitor progress and take action whenever necessary.

GDPM - State of affairs
It is our view that the principles and methods of GDPM, especially top-down planning based on milestone planning, are not utilized as much as they could have been. Maybe GDPM does not get the right attention it deserves. One of the main reasons is probably that there is no longer a world champion. (Maybe we once more need the help of Rodney.)

For instance, PMBOK® does not refer to the kind of milestone planning GDPM represents. Large projects are based on stage-gate models (Samset, Volden, Olsson, & Kvalheim, 2016). Agile methods took software development projects by storm, and have lately spread to other type of projects (Hobbs & Petit, 2017).

We do not think that all projects should necessarily be planned and organized according to GDPM, but many projects would absolutely benefit from it, especially change projects (where the purpose is organizational changes and/or improving work climate, or introducing new technology) and research and development projects (where the purpose is to develop new technologies, products or services). These are projects where it is suitable with several deliveries (an evolutionary development) and intermediate feedback and where it is impossible to do all the detailed planning in an early phase of the project. A stage-gate model with a single planning phase followed by an execution phase could be disastrous. A milestone plan, with milestones showing how the results develop with several deliveries based on feedbacks and reflections, followed by detailed planning when it is needed, would be much more appropriate.

To support and promote GDPM, companies from several countries have formed GDPM Alliance. Host for the alliance is the organization IPM (Intelligent Project management). Members of the Alliance offer training, consulting, and tools. Homepage is https://certify.gdpm.com/. IPM promotes good practice in project management using GDPM, and certification in the method.

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