

# The Spread of Project Management into non-Project Management Arenas

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## ABSTRACT

Today, the spread of project management in areas that were traditionally considered non-project areas is on the increase. Many organizations have extended project management in areas such as social media and main stream media to improve project communication, cut project costs among other reasons. Though this practice has its benefits, there are considerable barriers to managing projects in traditionally non-project areas. This paper highlights the motivation for and barriers to managing project in non-project areas and the strategy to address the major challenges to the adoption of project management in non-project areas. The paper also suggests how to increase the efficiency of project management in non-project arenas.

**Keywords :** Project Management, Non-Project Arenas, Profitability, Strategy, Lean Management

## I. INTRODUCTION

The world has witnessed increased spread of project management into non-project management arenas starting in the recent past. By definition, non-project arenas can be described as non-project-based organizations or areas that were traditionally involved in project management such as social media platforms. Non-project-based organizations may involve small businesses or even big enterprises that organize their activities differently to projects or programs. Starting from the recent past, there has been a trend of such organizations applying project management practices in their activities and project managers extending their practices to social media platforms as a way of communicating project status, risks and concerns (Simonds, 2012).

The increased adoption of project management practices in non-project arenas can be attributed to the increased realization of benefits of project management in the ever increasing market competition and uncertainty in today's business environment. Dolores (2004), for example, notes that focusing on the needs of a small business could be the skill of the owner but expanding to succeed in auxiliary areas requires project management. This implies that while the business owner

may effectively run the business at its infancy, expansion of the business may require project management skills.

Some of the useful project management skills being applied in non-project arenas include logical framework, budgeting, time, analysis, use of Gantt charts, and progress reports (Golini, Kalchschmidt & Landoni, 2015). Though the trend of adopting project management skills in non-project arenas has its benefits, adoption of project management in non-project-based organizations has been unsuccessful.

This paper seeks to highlight the motivation for and barriers to the spread of project management into non-project arenas. The paper suggests how to increase the efficiency of project management in non-project arenas.

## II. METHODS AND MATERIAL

### A. Motivation for project management in non-project arenas:

There are three motives driving the increased adoption of project management tools in non-project arenas. These include:

1. **Economic excellence:** Faced with the problem of increased competition and unprecedented risks in the current world, all businesses are seeking ways to improve their profitability and efficiency (Turner, 2014).
2. **Institutionalization:** Most organizations, especially Non-governmental organizations, which largely depend on donations, are attempting to be seen to put proper efforts around reputation and satisfaction value
3. **Innovation:** Most organizations are adopting project management practices as a means of increasing creativity and innovativeness in non-project arenas.

According to Turner (2014), increasing profitability, institutionalization and increasing innovativeness in non-project related arenas is today seen to require project management practices such as enhanced communication, competency, positive project management culture, legitimacy, efficiency and organizational learning. Focusing on small businesses, for example, improving profitability and efficiency may necessitate the adoption of lean management. Lean philosophy is a management strategy aimed at eliminating waste in the production process. A perfect example of a non-project based company that successfully improved its profitability through lean management is the Toyota Motor Ltd.

According to principles of lean management, all processes, services or resources that do not add value to the end product or customer is a waste. Since its introduction by Toyota, lean management principles have received wide application in project management. Today, lean management is seen as an ideal management philosophy to reduce cost and maximize profit, which may give a business a competitive advantage. As such, lean management has been attractive to small startups and its principles have been widely adopted in non-project arenas, mainly in production areas to improve profitability.

Still on the issue of maximizing profitability, most non-project related managers have adopted project management tools to control cost and delivery time. These organizational managers find it important to use budgets to fund the various organizational activities. Similarly, non-project managers find it important to set time for the various activities, for example, most organizations are using the time aspect to ensure that

there is no delay in production. The use of timeframes in production has enabled companies meet order demands for their products.

Tightly coupled with budgeted and timely production is increase in product value. This has being enabled by the adoption of project management skills such as progress reporting, product testing, and knowledge sharing among the production team. The progress reports help to evaluate the ongoing processes. Product testing ensures that the product pass quality assurance test just as it is in the software development projects. Product testing, progress reports and product testing are techniques derived from project management to improve value of the product.

### **B. Spread of project management into non-project arenas and the highly spread project management practices:**

The spread of project management into non-project arenas is highly observed in small businesses (Dolores, 2004), social media platforms (Simonds, 2012), non-governmental organizations (Golini *et al.*, 2015) and public sectors (Fitsilis & Chalatsis, 2014). In small businesses, project management techniques are used to increase the efficiency of the business. The reason behind the adoption of project management in small business is that like large companies they offer products and/or services. As such, project management tools are essential to create products and services of high quality. Besides improving the quality of the product or service, project management tools have been used to evaluate the efficiency of small businesses as well as improve profitability.

The other area where project management has taken root is in non-governmental organizations. Previously, most non-organizations paid little attention to project management practices. However, given that most NGOs offer aid to people in via projects or programs, NGOs have been forced to adopt project management to run their programs (Golini *et al.*, 2015). According to Fitsilis and Chalatsis (2014), most NGOs have chosen institutionalization so as to entice the donors.

Though the use of project management tools in NGOs is very common today, not all project management aspects have been embraced. According to Golini *et al.* (2015), the frequently adopted project management aspects are

logical framework, progress report, Gantt chart, cost accounting and risk management). Other project management techniques that appear to be neglected include critical path methods, issue log, and value management system (Golini *et al.*, 2015).

Regarding the adoption of project management into non-project arenas has also been witnessed in publicly managed projects. In a recent study done by Fitsilis and Chalatsis (2014), most small-medium Greek public organizations were found to increasingly adopt project management tools. In Greece, project management tools are used to foster economic and social cohesion (Fitsilis & Chalatsis, 2014). More interestingly, project management techniques have spread to social media platforms, an arena initially not involved in project management.

From a project management perspective, social media is used to improve communication during the project management. Some of the common social media tools used in project management include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, blogs, video, podcasts, and document repositories such as DropBox (Simonds, 2012). Majorly, these platforms are used to enhance communication on projects with respect to project status, risks and concerns.

In its broadest sense, social media covers a whole range of easy-to-use and freely accessible online tools which encourage and simplify communication between an organization and people with similar interests by enabling interactions and exchange of information regardless of geographical distances (Simonds, 2012). Using media platforms, organizations are able to actively engage customers in their projects. For example, via online interactions, organizations can learn the prevailing trends in the market as well as changes in customer preferences. When using agile methodologies, organizations can adjust their product development when customer preferences change during the project life cycle.

Though social media has improved communication on project status, risks and concerns, the use of social media for project communication has its disadvantages. The security level in social media is low. Confidential information about the project cannot be shared via social media. As such, there should be clear guidelines

on what information should be communicated via the social media (Simonds, 2012).

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Barriers to adoption of project management into non-project arenas

The adoption of project management tools in non-project organizations and non-project arenas is hindered by several factors. These include:

1. **Lack of adequate staff:** Project management requires the availability of adequate number of personnel to manage the activities. If an organization chooses to extend project management to initially non-project management, for example social media platforms, it has to hire adequate personnel to manage such platforms. If the company chooses to use several platforms, it must ensure that there is adequate number of professionals to man each platform. Given that some organizations may not have funds to pay for additional workforce, spreading project management into non-project arenas may be difficult.
2. **Lack of competence personnel:** Project management requires people knowledgeable in project management practices. Using the example of blogs, a company must hire a person with knowledge in writing blogs so as to ensure effective communication. Interesting, the person may need to have excellent interpersonal skills and public relations skills so to ensure that the information channeled through these platforms do not damage an organization's reputation. If an organization lacks competent persons in project management, extending project management practices to non-project areas could be significantly difficult.
3. **Lack of specialized departments:** Some organizations may need to extend project management into initially non-project areas but due to lack of specialized departments this may not be possible. This challenge is true when the project involves technical work, requiring highly technical personnel.
4. **Perceived insecurity in some non-project arenas:** As indicated earlier, the spread of project management to non-project management areas poses great risks to project execution. Focusing on social media, the various platforms provide easily

accessible sources of information that project managers can use to communicate project status, risks and concerns (Simonds, 2012). Despite the social media being a tool to enhance communication on project, they pose the danger of online attacks. As such, companies cannot convey project information they deem confidential through these platforms. With cases of online attacks increasing day after a day today, many organizations have remained hesitant on adopting such arenas to manage their projects.

5. **Lack of commitment from organizational leaders:** Success of projects is largely depended on the commitment of the organizational leaders. The implication of this is that for an organization to succeed in managing projects in non-project areas, its leaders must be committed. In respect to this, organizations with committed leaders have successfully moved project management into non-project areas and are reaping the benefits of this practice. Organizations with uncommitted leaders, on the other hand, have lagged behind in this area.
6. **Inability to implement project management principles in non-project areas:** The nature of a project highly determines its implementation success in non-project areas. No matter how organizations try to implement some projects in non-project areas, it could be impossible. This could be impossible due to, for example, security features of the project or its technical features.
7. **Incompatibility of project management practices with the activities of an organization:** Organizations are usually governed by policies that may not allow some project management practices. In a similar way, some aspects of the project management, such as detailed archiving, and compliance with written processes and documentation may not be compatible with an organization's activities (Golini *et al.*, 2015). When extension of project management to non-project areas conflicts with organizational rules and activities, the organization has to forego extending project management to such arenas.

## The Way Forward

The spread of project management practices into non-project arenas seems appealing and will prevail in the future. Similar, the adoption of project management tools in non-project based organizations is anticipated to

continue. This trend will be fueled largely by the benefits that accompany extension of project management to non-project areas. Managing projects in the social media platforms, for example, has shown to improve communication between an organization and people interested in the particular projects. Again, using social media, project managers can efficiently communicate project status, risks and concerns to the stakeholders (Simonds, 2012). In future, the use of social media platforms will provide project managers with tools for engaging project stakeholders. With agile project management emphasizing collaboration between the project team and product stakeholders, social media platforms may increasingly become a useful tool in project management.

Furthermore, the spread of project management to non-project areas and non-project based organizations has helped companies to gain competitive advantage and increase innovativeness. Moving project management in areas that were initially not included in project management is itself an innovative strategy in project management. Managing projects in such platforms is in turn fostering increased creativity and innovativeness as the project managers must come up with strategies to make project management in these areas compatible with organizations policies, and the same time creates products or services of high quality. Importantly, shifting project management to non-project arenas has helped organizations to cut cost, increasing the organization's competitiveness (Fitsilis & Chalatsis, 2014).

Though the spread of project management to non-project areas has desirable outcomes, there are some challenges that need to be addressed. First, project management practices do not fit in all situations. To overcome this challenge, project managers have to maintain high degree of flexibility. Project managers need to understand the market and the organizational archetypes they are working in. This will help to understand how project management practices tie into the organizational strategy. Extending project management practices to traditionally non-project areas blindly will lead to project failure.

The second aspect to focus on when moving project management to traditionally non-project areas is the security of such arenas. The project managers must be sensitive to modern platforms, especially online arenas, where attacks are prevalent today. In respect to this, the

project managers need to develop security strategies when such platforms are involved. For example, organizations need to come up with security policies to govern communications via social media and other online platforms. Clear guidelines of what is to be communicated via these platforms may help improve risk management of projects in these areas.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

Today, project management has spread to areas that were traditionally considered non-project arenas such as the stream media and social media. This trend has brought some desirable outcomes in project management and is anticipated to continue. Extending project management to these areas has helped organizations to improve communication on project status, risks and concerns. Also, managing project management in non-project arenas has helped companies to improve their competitiveness, product value and innovativeness. However, there are a couple of barriers to the spread of project management in non-project arenas. The major barriers relates to incompatibility of some project management practices and organizational policies and perceived security issues in such platforms, majorly online areas. To overcome these challenges, project managers need to adopt project management practices that align with the organization's strategy and develop security policies to govern project management in non-project areas.

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