Critical Thinking

By

Chris Goff

For

Embry Riddle Aeronautical University

**Abstract**

The purpose of this assignment is to meet the requirements of Embry Riddle’s Project Management Capstone course PGMT 690, for their Master of Science Degree in Project Management. This Critical Thinking Paper is analyzing and applying critical thinking skills to evaluating an article that was written in the International Journal of Project Management entitled *Do project managers practice what they preach, and does it matter to project success?* This article was written about businesses having increased the use of projects, but so many projects fall short of expectations or fail entirely. Partly because project management has grown and many organizations saw the use of project management as a viable tool, so projects were enlarged and budgets also increased. This article focusses on the practices of project management tools and whether they are used by the project management field and is this the reason for so many struggling projects in the corporate world. Following my critical thinking thoughts on this article, the article attached as instructed in our assignment requirements.

**Introduction**

The article to apply critical thinking skills is titled “Do project managers practice what they preach, and does it matter to projects success?”. It was published in the Journal of Project Management, Volume 28, Issue 7, (October 2010) pages 650-662. There were several subjects to choose from, but this question was interesting to me personally. I want to make a difference wherever I chose to work, and project management is my field of study. Many people whom I have had the opportunity to speak to who were Project Managers have stated that, “You should learn the “PMBOK methods for the test, but in the work-place things are different”. I wanted to know more about this subject because of those conversations.

**Article information**

Over the past two decades, researchers and project management practitioners have been looking for the reason for project failures and what would make them successful more often. The Project Management Institute has been developing standards for formal and uniform methods of managing projects, in the hopes that projects are managed using these standards and more consistent successes with project management be noticed by businesses worldwide. (PMI, 2004)

Standards have been developed by several project management institutions: Project Management Institute (PMI 2004), Association of Project Management (APM, 2006), Austrian Institute of Project Management (AIPM, 2009), International Project Management Association (IPMA, 209), as well as others. (Papke-Shields, 2010) These standard practices are for the nine knowledge areas: time, scope, cost, integration, human resources, procurement, communication, quality, and risk. (PMI, 2013)

“The purpose of this study is to contribute to both research and practice by providing additional evidence for this linkage as well as a better understanding of the relative use of different PM practices and the effect of context on such use.” (Papke-Shields, 2010)

There were 58 PM items originally distributed to six local project managers who were asked if they understood these PM categories, because there were six items not understood by half, they were eliminated from the study. (Papke-Shields, 2010) This statement lead to thoughts of the project managers and what kind of training they have had, formal, on-the-job or both. A survey link was provided for the regional chapter members to log-in and take the survey, and only 142 members responded. (Papke-Shields, 2010)

**Personal Thoughts**

To begin with their charts, their survey did convince me that project managers are using some standards for controlling time, cost, and scope of projects more frequently than the other knowledge areas of project management. From Figure 1 of the article, they showed a drop-off from the use of PM standards on: integration, human resources, procurement, communication, quality and risk knowledge areas. Not focusing on any one of these knowledge areas would kill a project, but using approved standards enough to get by is not the answer either. By using standards for the other knowledge areas would take some additional time, true enough, but projects would be more likely to have success rates increase for their users. All those knowledge areas would improve the success rate of projects if they were used more frequently by project management and team personnel. I agree with the author on this thought process, using standards for each category of project knowledge area would improve project success, especially communication, but the number of participants in this survey and the method of analysis was not enough proof of their theory. Those who are not convinced this is a viable method of improving the field of project management would not change their thoughts yet.

The survey only used one geographical area and from one large regional charter. From what I understood they sent out a survey to over 1000 members in that charter and only 142 (approximately 10%) responded to the survey. This is not enough participants to establish a good population base for a study on this subject.

The industry categories did not have enough partipants to really determine any significance by the numbers, in this survey. For instance, Table 3 shows that there were 4 responses to the survey from utilities project managers, 6 from construction, 10 from manufacturing, 1 from warehouse and transportation, and 10 from healthcare and social assistance. The largest number was from professional, scientific and technical services, 33 responses from project managers in this category. Without more participation from various industries on this survey, it would be difficult to say how accurate is this survey. For instance, the article stated that there is “…a positive relationship between PM maturity and process success, but only 17 and 15 observations for cost and schedule performance, respectively, no strong conclusions can be drawn”. (Papke-Shields, 2010) To me this just wasn’t enough data to prove their thought from the article.

This article did establish a good point from those who did respond to the survey, much of the project standards are being used. When PMI-type of standards are applied to project knowledge areas there appeared to be a correlation between those practices and a successful project. Table 1: Methods Research, showed that there were standards being used, but not the same standards everywhere. When those standards were being utilized, then success of the project followed. This chart did not state if they were over budget and on-time or not, though. (Papke-Shields, 2010)

Project type was not stated and should be categorized by industry so that the information can be more accurate, at best they are getting mixed results from this study. Some projects are too small to have professional PMs managing them, it would be a waste of resources. Having medium to large-scale projects would be more likely to require the use of project managers, and their numbers would be more useful in this study. Different industry’s numbers may be more interesting food for thought, from upper management and other important figure-heads, which would help the field of project management and the thoughts on their usefulness to the corporate world. In my opinion, this survey should have gone all over the country to gather information on this subject, and there should have been thousands of participants to categorize the different types and sizes of projects in the comparison. These statistics, categorized into industry and size of projects, would have made more sense and been better information to prove their point. At best, it showed an interesting view-point, not proof of whether project managers are practicing what they preach and not whether it matters.

In my opinion, the author never even addressed the second part of the title, “Does it matter”. I do think that the project management knowledge areas and using a standard for organization usage is a key factor. If they were used, then the probability of project success would be increased, significantly.

**Project Success Reasons**

From a different study on the subject related to project management, which is project success, Johnson writes about “Recipe for Success”, established in 1998, that there are five reasons for project success:

1. Executive Support – This is possibly the biggest killer of projects. The lack of executive support impedes progress of projects, and positive support pushes projects through.
2. User Involvement – This used to be the biggest reason for project failures. Having project professionals has improved this major problem, likely the use of standards.
3. Experienced Project Manager – Projects are more successful with an experienced project manager as the leader of the project.
4. Clear Business Objectives – Having better controlling measures and objectives is attributed to more experienced project managers.
5. Minimizing Scope – Scope creep is a project killer. Minimizing the scope of projects is just as important as reaching milestones, maybe more now more than ever. (Johnson, 2001)

Using PMI Standards should improve all five of these factors relating to the successes of project management. Consistent use of the PMI standards will allow teams to know what their tasks are, in a knowledge area, and with repeated use will help each member to become more efficient each time they work together. If this proves to be true then upper management will be more prone to support project management.

“Although there is not yet one single document capturing the “formal body of project management knowledge” ([Cicmil and Hodgson, 2006, p. 114](http://www.sciencedirect.com.ezproxy.libproxy.db.erau.edu/science/article/pii/S0263786309001239" \l "bib9)), there is some commonality among standards in terms of PM practices. Yet we do not have a complete picture of which PM practices are being used and the relative use of those practices.” (Papke-Shields, 2010) To me this is a true statement of project management altogether. There will always be more to learn about project management, it will always be evolving.

**Conclusion**

I believe most of the PMI Standards are written (i.e. PMI Standards for Communication), I have found them on the internet and free to PMI members. I found them during an assignment and have been using them since, for virtual team assignments, as a guide. There are many different institutions that have appropriate PMI Standards or similar (World-wide). The author provided enough proof to convince me that if an organization chose a standard for their guide, then more consistent project success would follow. I already believed in the knowledge area standards before I read the article, this must be seen and proven to the corporate world. It is up to Project Managers to use those standards consistently, which would improve all the knowledge area functions in projects as they are being accomplished. This would lead to more project success, and in turn win upper management over to get more support for their projects and methods in the future. Upper management study the numbers also, they will know what the improvements, costs, and probably why they have improved. This would help with the number one reason for project failure, executive support, while improving all other project knowledge areas. Also, if Project Managers do not practice what we preach, then how can we call ourselves project management practitioners and it should matter, not only in principal but in the success rates as well.

Reference:

Frese, R. and Sauder, V. (2003). Project Success and Failure: What is success, what is failure, and how can you improve your odds for success? Retrieved from <file:///C:/Users/Chris/Downloads/Project%20Success%20and%20Failurepdf.pdf>

Johnson, J. (2001). Collaborating on Project Success. Software Magazine. Retrieved from <http://www.softwaremag.com/L.cfm?Doc=archive/2001feb/CollaborativeMgt.html>

PMI. (2013). A Guide to the Body of Knowledge (POMBOK Guide), Project Management, Inc. Newtown Square, Pennsylvania.

**Attachments**

Do project managers practice what they preach, and does it matter to project success? *International Journal of Project Management, Volume 28, issue* (7), 650-662. (PDF).

<file:///C:/Users/Chris/Downloads/1-s2.0-S0263786309001239-main.pdf>