



A broader approach to organisational project management maturity assessment

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Abstract

Around the new millennium, organisational project management maturity was a frequently occurring topic both in international conferences and professional journals. Many of the maturity models were published during this period. The response from professionals was largely positive, although there was also criticism in the literature. Many organisations, at the same time, have made investments in applying maturity models with little return in improved success rate achieved on their projects. Currently, this topic also attracts more attention coupled with challenging criticism. Central to this criticism are the inherent mechanistic approach and the subsequent narrow focus of the maturity models. The primary aim of this paper is to introduce a broader approach to project management maturity assessment, deduced from project management literature, which might address the criticism regarding the existing models, while it has the potential for developing more appropriate maturity models.

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1. Introduction

Nowadays, it is broadly accepted by both academics and practitioners that projects are the means by which organisations implement those beneficial changes which are implied in their strategic objectives. Revealing the strategic role of projects was pioneered by Cleland (1990) and it was continued by many authors (e.g. Andersen and Jessen, 2003; Cooke-Davies et al., 2009; Grundy, 1998; van den Honert, 1994; Kwak and Anbari, 2008; Leybourne, 2007; Mc Elroy, 1996) throughout the past decades. Because of the turbulent operational environment in which organisations operate, the strategic role of projects implies that organisations need to manage the implementation of a portfolio of projects which encompass both single-projects and project programs (Görög, 2011). Thus project management has become an issue which needs to be considered at organisational level (c.f. Aubry et al., 2008). This need led to the concept of organisational project management maturity at the end of the nineties (c.f. Cooke-Davies, 2004). Many of the maturity models were introduced around the turn of the new millennium, and many project management maturity related papers were published during this time. Currently, the topic of maturity seems

to attract an increasing interest again; for example, Iqbal (2013) provided an overview of the existing maturity models recently, while Pasian (2011) and Torres (2014) devoted their PhD thesis work to project management maturity. At the same time, International Journal of Managing Projects in Business devoted a special issue to the topic of project management maturity in 2014.

The concept of project management maturity of organisations stems back to the concept of process maturity (Cooke-Davies, 2002a; Cooke-Davies and Arzymanow, 2003). First, the Software Engineering Institute of Carnegie-Mellon University implemented their Capability Maturity Model (CMM) in order to improve software development efforts (c.f. Humphrey, 1992).

Skulmoski (2001) considers organisational project management maturity as a certain kind of organisational receptivity to managing projects. At the same time, Andersen and Jessen (2003) say that organisational project management maturity is an indication or a measurement of an organisation's ability to deal with projects. Kwak and Ibbs (2002) emphasise that organisational project management maturity needs to reflect the actual level of dealing with projects. The outcomes of such a comparison highlight both the advantageous and disadvantageous

project management related aspects of organisations (Ibbs et al., 2004).

Andersen and Jessen (2003), with reference to the Webster dictionary, state that an organisation can never mature in any literal sense. Similarly, Cooke-Davies (2004), with reference to the Collins dictionary, states that organisational maturity is first of all a potential of an organisation rather than an actual quality of the organisation. Based on the above considerations, the noun maturity in this paper implies the state of being prepared (as an organisation) for implementing a portfolio of projects in a consistent manner, and both efficiently and effectively. Thus, the level of organisational project management maturity indicates the actual state of being prepared for implementing a portfolio of projects.

At the time of the introduction of the maturity models, the expectations were very high. Academics and practitioners seemed to believe that these models would bring better project performance in general. Cleland and Ireland (2002) stressed the importance of maturity models in achieving more efficient and effective operation at organisational level. Duffy (2001) emphasised the strategic importance of using maturity models in terms of strategic positioning of organisations. Kerzner (2005) also states that project management maturity is one of the decisive factors of strategic management since it can contribute to using the organisational resources more efficiently and effectively. Rad and Levin (2005) pointed out that assessment of project management maturity could provide a mechanism for organisational competency health.

In accordance with this belief, the availability of these models not only provided tools for maturity assessment but they somehow almost forced organisations to manage their projects better (Grant and Pennypacker, 2006; Pennypacker and Grant, 2003). However, Wheatley (2007), then Albrecht and Spang (2014a, 2014b) stressed that there is no one certain optimum level of maturity which may be appropriate for each organisation. In addition to this, Torres (2014) pointed out that there is no one right improvement road map applicable for each organisation operating in different industrial and organisational context.

Based on an extensive literature survey, Torres (2014) identifies three primary roles of maturity models in the organisations, namely, (a) assessing the current state of maturity, (b) providing guidelines to reach higher level maturity, and (c) benchmarking with other organisations. He also collects the potential values of the maturity models, such as (a) strategic value, i.e., higher level maturity is a competitive advantage; (b) benchmarking value, i.e., highlighting the needs for developing the maturity status; and (c) performance value, i.e., higher level maturity leads to better performance.

Although there were expectations in terms of better, i.e., more successful project management due to the use of project management maturity models (e.g., Cleland and Ireland, 2002; Grant and Pennypacker, 2006; Kerzner, 2005; Torres, 2014), these models do not consider directly the implications of project success criteria in their underlying approach. Since project success is a multifaceted phenomenon, a broader approach to project management maturity assessment is needed.

The aim of this paper is to introduce a broader approach to assessing project management maturity of organisations drawn from existing project management literature. In order to achieve this end, revealing the main features of the existing maturity models, and highlighting the views found in literature on these models are needed. The author believes that his proposed approach could lead to higher potential for increasing success rate of projects in the organisations.

To achieve the aim of this paper, the author adopts the assumption that based on

- a broader view on the concept of project success (and the associated success criteria),
- the concept of organisational project management (and the associated project governance structure).

A broader approach to assessing organisational project management maturity could be formulated.

The paper is organised as follows: The following section is a literature review on organisational project management maturity models. It provides a general overview of the existing maturity models and highlights the main features of these models, while it summarises the outcomes of the use of maturity models in organisations to assess their maturity level, then the associated critical remarks found in the literature are introduced. Following this section, the underlying concepts of the proposed broader approach to the project management maturity assessment is introduced. This section is followed by revealing the implications of the previously introduced concepts, then the framework of the proposed maturity models is introduced in brief. A summary and conclusions section highlights both the theoretical contributions and the practical implications of the proposed broader approach to the organisational project management maturity assessment. Finally, limitations and the likely further research are emphasised at the end of the paper.

2. Literature on organisational project management maturity models

This literature review has a twofold aim. One of them is to highlight the main features of the existing maturity models. The other one is to reveal the shortcomings of existing approaches to maturity models found in the literature.

Both the advent and the beginning of the new millennium saw a certain proliferation of organisational project management maturity models. Estimations suggest that the number of these models exceeds 30 (c.f. Cooke-Davies, 2004; Pennypacker and Grant, 2003); however, Iqbal (2013) identifies roughly 60 different models. Cooke-Davies (2002a) defines three types of the maturity models: (a) those that focus on the project management process (i.e., the implied knowledge areas), (b) those that focus on the technical process of developing the project outcome (e.g., software development process), and (c) those that focus on organisational maturity in the wider sense. Brooks and Clark (2009) classify the existing maturity models based on the: (a) delineation of the term maturity, (b) the knowledge area considered in the models, and (c) the scope of the

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