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

Abstract

"Goal Directed Project Management" is a book that has had great success. The article tells the story behind the English version. Rodney Turner played an important role in having the book published in English. He later promoted and spread the ideas presented in the book. Rodney's work on the book was probably of great importance for his decision to choose an academic career. The main ideas of the book are presented.

Keywords

project management, milestone planning, mission breakdown structure, pso

In the beginning...

Rodney Turner has had great success within the academic field of project management. This issue of IJPM is celebrating his achievements. But how did it all start? We will highlight in this article that in some ways, we contributed significantly to getting Rodney interested in an academic career. To explain how, we need to go back to 1984.

We (Erling and Kristoffer), together with Tor Haug, had published a book on project management in Norway. It differed from traditional textbooks at that time, which focused on waterfall models and activity planning. Instead our work advocated top-down planning; focus on the results (goals) you want to achieve. The book was successful in Norway, and the authors were of course eager to have it published in English.

Rodney started his education in Auckland, New Zealand and finished by getting his DPhil in Engineering Science at Oxford University, UK. He was introduced to project management while working for ICI Agricultural Division as a mechanical engineer and project manager in the petrochemical industry. By the mid 1980s, Rodney was working as a management consultant for Coopers and Lybrand and doing consultancy work across many industries.

At this time in Norway, Kristoffer and Tor had started a management consultancy firm which entered into partnership with the Norwegian branch of Coopers and Lybrand. Erling was pursuing an academic career and ended up as Professor at the University of Bergen and later at BI Norwegian Business School in Oslo.

Through Coopers and Lybrand, the three Norwegian authors connected with Rodney and asked if he might be willing to work on an English version of the book, checking the translation and making his own impression on the text. Rodney agreed, and in 1987 *Goal Directed Project Management* was published by Kogan Page (Andersen, Grude, Haug, & Turner, 1987). The book is often referred to as GDPM.

After the book was published, Rodney and the three Norwegian authors wrote an article in *IJPM* to give an overview of the main ideas of the book (Turner, Grude, Haug, & Andersen, 1988).

In 1989 Rodney became Professor and Director of the Project Management Program at Henley Management College. His very successful academic career had clearly started, and we like to believe that his work on GDPM, and our cooperation with Rodney, play some role in his pursuit of an academic life. 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

As for the book that started it all, GDPM is still very much alive and well. It has been published in nine languages (Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, English, German, Dutch, Italian, Hungarian and Russian) and in UK, the book is on its fourth edition (Andersen, Grude, & Haug, 2009), although Rodney contributed only to the first edition.

When discussing GDM, Rodney often refers to a review of the 1st English edition which stated: "How can this be a book on project management. It does not mention Critical Path Analysis?" And indeed, it does not. Instead, we looked at other areas we considered fundamental to project success. While there have been some changes over the years since the first edition, the main ideas of GDPM are:

- 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 different aspects of GDPM.

PSO: Balancing changes to people, systems and organization

We use as a paragraph header the words that Rodney used to present this idea in the *IJPM*-article, and we argue that the successful project develops people, systems and organization in a balanced way.

Companies are in a competitive world, facing the challenge of continuous change, and projects are required to manage those changes. The most common pitfall occurs when the project focus is on planning the detail of tasks required, and less on defining clear goals. The result of this is that while the technical change required might be achieved, the cultural change needed is often ignored.

In the past, Rodney has illustrated this point by way of stories. Once (back in 2003) he spoke on the last day of a five-day project management seminar. He was told afterwards by a delegate that he was the first person to mention people. In another account, he told of doing interviews in an airline company which revealed that project team members spent their lives complaining that the project managers were task-focused, and not people-focused. But, on the day they themselves were appointed to as project managers, they also became task-focused.

GDPM is an approach which seeks to balance the technical and cultural objectives at the heart of projects. To master change the company has to develop people (educating, training, motivating), develop the organization (making changing to the organizational structure, improving the relationships between the staff members) and, of course, to develop systems (the technical solutions, routines and procedures).

A classic example is the introduction of new technology. A change in technology means that people need to change too. They 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 example, if the change automates old processes. As a result, the work that people do will be different. That said, even if we have PSO, or other frameworks, we continue to experience a lack of focus on people development and organizational development in projects.

Value creation and focus on mission achievement

GDPM has always focused on results and on what the project should achieve. Traditionally, project success has been viewed as the achievement of intended outcomes in terms of time, cost and quality (design specifications). 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 receiving the deliverables 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 of 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 for what we need from artefacts, 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 responsibility of the base organisation itself.

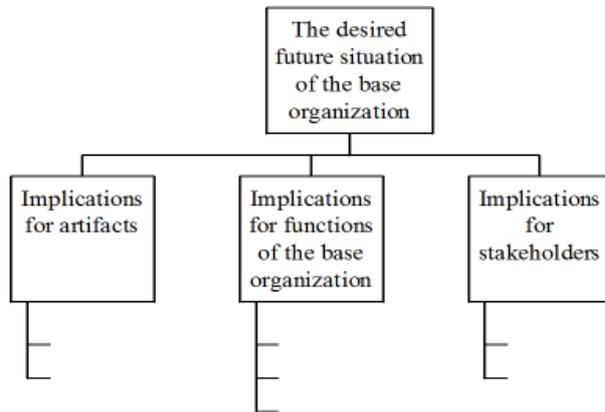


Figure 1 The MBS – the desired situation and its implication for the artefacts, base organization functions and stakeholders

Milestone planning

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

Planning is at 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. 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, and leaves activity planning to when it is absolutely necessary, and we have the best knowledge of what is needed. This increases the quality of activity planning considerably. 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 evaluate performance. Milestones affecting the base organization will also attract more interest during the project. Everybody can follow its progress – and share in the celebrations that mark milestones.

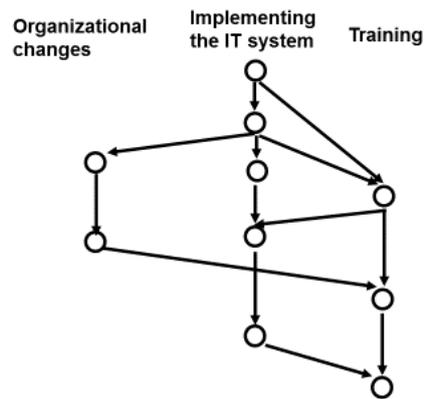


Figure 2 Milestone plan with result paths for an IT-project

Figure 2 is an illustration of a (simplified) milestone plan. The milestone plan charts the logical ties or dependencies between milestones. The milestone plan tells us that we cannot achieve a milestone (we cannot finish the work) before we have reached previous milestones. Another crucial point to note is that milestone plans are prepared without deciding which activities get us through the different milestones. That is why milestone plans can be understood by non-experts in the field. It is also why we call the plan a logical plan: it charts the logical interconnections between states.

To show the multidimensional aspects of the project, the milestone plan has result paths. A result path is a sequence of closely interrelated milestones. 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 for, and the connections between milestones and the 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 milestone planning, are not utilized to their full potential. They do not get the right kind of attention. 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. However, recently, these methods have spread to other types of projects (Hobbs & Petit, 2017).

Maybe not all projects should be planned and organized according to GDPM, but many types of projects would absolutely benefit from it, especially change projects (e.g. where the purpose is organizational change and/or improving work climate) and development projects (e.g. where the purpose is to develop new technologies, products or services). These are projects with several deliverables (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 under these circumstances. A milestone plan, with milestones showing how the results develop with several deliverables based on feedback and reflection, followed by detailed planning when needed, would be much more appropriate.

To support and promote GDPM, companies from several countries have formed GDPM Alliance. Homepage of the Alliance is <https://certify.gdpm.com/> But we need a world champion. Maybe...once again, we need Rodney's help to make these points.

To conclude, we are grateful for our past collaboration with Rodney, and for the role we played in Rodney's early career, and we look forward to sharing inspirational thoughts on the outstanding challenges for GDPM and projects in the future.

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