Advances in Project Management [1]

Enduring Lessons in Project Management? [2]

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The purpose of this paper

In 1997 when *The Project Workout* [1] was first published, it included ten lessons from working with and learning from large organizations which claimed to be undertaking projects well. Obviously, for those lessons to result from research done in 1995 and appear in a book in 1997, they needed to have been practiced long before that. I have since incorporated these lessons in my work in many organizations and they are mostly unaltered in the later editions of the Workout books [2] [3].

This paper goes through the ten lessons and then compares them to the 12 principles which were derived from a study [4] undertaken in 2022/23 to see if the lessons are still relevant today. The outcome of the analysis is that there is remarkable alignment between the 10 lessons in this paper (dating from the mid-1990s) and the 12 principles from the recent study (2023) which does indeed point to the lessons being enduring.

Look for what works and why, then check they still work

The objective in creating the lessons I have used over the past 25 years was to 'learn from the best' and continually verify those learnings as time moved on. A number of industries are highlighted in the research, in both growing and mature markets, including:

- aerospace;
- construction;
- computer hardware;
- telecommunications;
- manufacturing;
- management consulting;
- systems integration.

There is a marked similarity in approach taken despite the diverse industries. They were all using a 'staged' or 'phased', 'cross-functional' framework within which to manage their projects. The number of stages differs from organization to organization, but all invest (a stage at a time) a

[1] *The PMWJ Advances in Project Management series includes articles by authors of books on new and emerging concepts in program and project management published by Routledge. Robert Buttrick is the author of The Programme and Portfolio Workout: Directing Business-Led Programmes and Portfolios (Routledge, 2020) and The Project Workout: The Ultimate Guide to Directing and Managing Business-Led Projects (Routledge, 2019).*

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finite amount of the organization's resources to obtain more information across the full range of activities which impact the project's outcome, namely:

- market;
- operational;
- technical;
- commercial and financial.

They then decide on whether the project should continue, needs modifying or terminating.

There, however, the similarities between organizations end and the individual culture and the nature of the different industries and their outputs takes over. Figure 1 illustrates how any process or approach (including project management) sits within a context of culture, systems and structure; alter any one and it will affect the others. This single observation means that although project management in many organizations might be similar in principle, the culture and behaviours which make it work (or prevent it working!) can be very different.

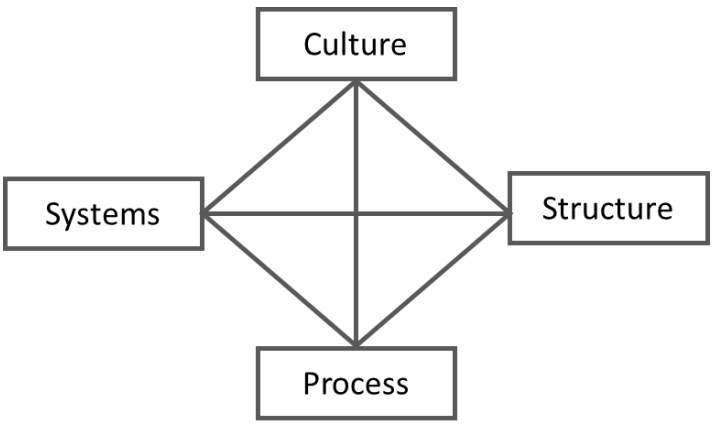

Figure 1 Cover all four bases

Many organizations deal with problems by adding more process, but logically, if a proven process or approach breaks down, the fault could lie outside the process itself in one of the other aspects of the organization. Similarly for cultural reasons, a process which works in one organization might not work everywhere else. One CEO told me. "We know our process is logical and has worked well; if it stops working, assuming it's not an IT failure, we look first at the people rather than at the process." Another organization had a very effective gating process, which totally failed when a new management team took over the organization and decided it wasn't necessary. It was reinstated after six months of subsequent pain and financial loss.

It was also notable that certain industries are excellent in particular aspects of managing projects as a result of the nature of their business. Often, they take this for granted. For example:

- *"Concentrate on the early stages"* is a message which came across loud and clear, but it is the organizations that rely on bids or tenders for their business which really put the effort in up front as the effect of failure is immediate and obvious: they lose the bid or, in the longer term, their accounts show the money they are losing.

- *"Manage risks"* is another message. The only company to tell me, unprompted, that it is excellent in risk management was in avionics. However, the company did not claim to use very sophisticated risk-management techniques, but rather, designed its whole approach with a risk-management ethos. It cited its staged project life cycle as a key part of this. Risk management is far more than having a risk register.
- *"Measure everything you do."* Organizations which need to keep a track of man hours in order to bill their customers (e.g. consultants, system development houses) also had the most comprehensive cost and resource planning and monitoring systems. These provided not only a view of each individual project, but also enabled them to collate and summarize the current status for all their projects giving them a quantum leap in management information which most other organizations do not have. Interestingly, 25 years later, most organizations still don't have that capability.

The lessons and their implications

Overview

The lessons are summarized below and are described more fully on the following pages. The quotations are from those directly people involved the original study in 1995. They can be found in detail, in the latest editions of the Workout books [2] [3].

The first seven lessons apply throughout the life of a project:

1. Make sure your projects are driven by benefits which support your strategy.
2. Use a simple and well-defined framework, with a tailorable, staged approach, for all projects in all circumstances.
3. Address and revalidate the marketing, commercial, operational and technical viability of the project throughout its life.
4. Incorporate selected users and customers into the project to understand their current and future needs.
5. Build excellence in project management techniques and controls across the organization.
6. Break down functional boundaries by using cross-functional teams.
7. Use dedicated resources for each category of development and prioritize within each category.

The next three lessons apply to particular stages in the project life cycle:

8. Place high emphasis on the early stages of the project.
9. Build the business case into the company's business plan as soon as the project has been formally approved.
10. Close the project formally to build a bridge to the future, to learn any lessons and to ensure a clean handover.

1. Make sure your projects are driven by benefits which support your strategy

"If you don't know why you want to do a project, don't do it!"

All the organizations can demonstrate explicitly how each project they undertake fits their business strategy. The screening out of unwanted projects as soon as possible is key. At the start, there is usually insufficient information of a financial nature to make a decision regarding the viability of a project. However, strategic fit should be assessable from the beginning. Not surprisingly, those organizations which have clear strategies are able to screen more effectively than those which do not. Strategic fit is often assessed by using simple questions such as:

Will this product ensure we maintain our leadership position?

Will the results promote a long-term relationship with our customers?

The less clear the strategy, the more likely projects are to pass the initial screening: so there will be more projects competing for scarce resources resulting in the company losing focus and jeopardizing its overall performance.

2. Use a simple and well-defined framework, with a tailorable staged approach, for all projects in all circumstances

"Our usual process is our fast-track process."

As discussed earlier, use of a staged framework is found to be well established. Rarely is it possible to plan a project in its entirety from start to finish; there are simply too many unknowns. By using a number of defined project stages, it is possible to plan the next stage in detail, with the remaining stages planned in summary. As you progress through the project from stage to stage, the end-point becomes clearer and your confidence in delivery and outcomes increases (see Figure 2). It is apparent that organizations are striving to make their project frameworks as simple as possible, minimizing the number of stages and cutting down the weight of supporting documentation.

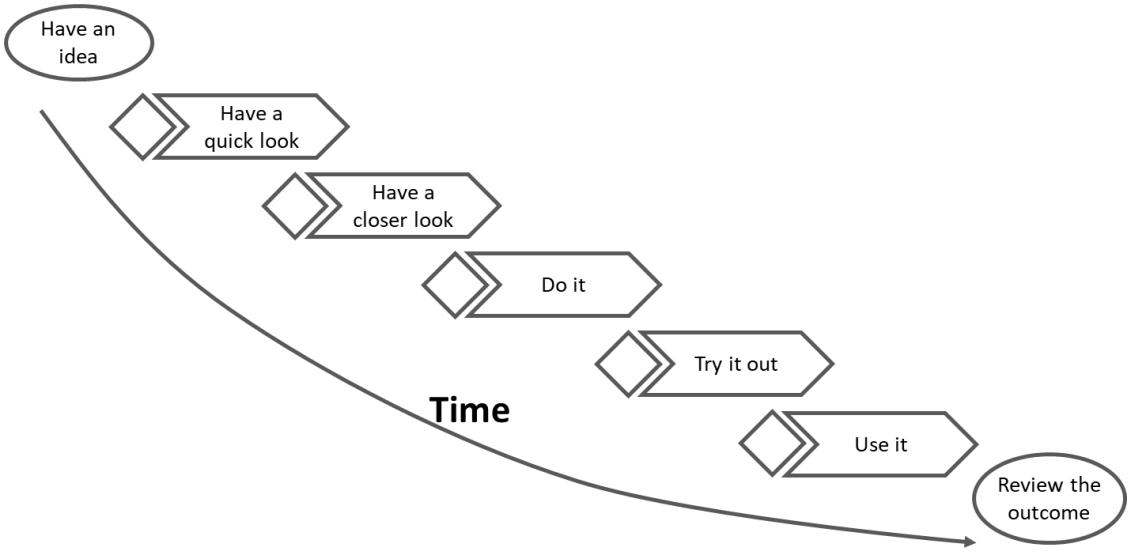

Figure 2 A simplified example of a staged project framework or life cycle

Further, in many organizations, the same generic stages are used for all types of projects (e.g. for a new plastic bottle and for a new manufacturing line; for a project of £1,000 cost to one of £10m cost). This makes the use and understanding of the framework very much easier and avoids the need for learning different frameworks and processes for different types of projects. This is particularly important for those sponsoring projects or who are infrequently involved in projects. By having one basic tailorable, framework they are able to understand their role within it and do not have to learn a new language and approach for each situation.

What differs is the work content of each project, the level of activity, the nature of the activity, the degree of risk, the resources required, and the stakeholders and decision makers needed.

A common criticism is that a staged approach slows projects down. This was explored and found not to be the case. In contrast, a staged approach is believed to speed up desirable projects. One relevant point is the nature of the decision to start a new stage of a project, often called gates. Some organizations use them as 'entry' points to the next project stage rather than the more traditional 'exit' point from a previous stage. This simple principle has the effect of allowing a stage to start before the previous stage has been completed. In this way, stages can overlap without increasing the risk to the business, provided the gate criteria are met. Note: this is the approach now taken in BS 6079 [5], ISO 21502 [6] and GovS 002 [7].

The existence of so-called 'fast-track' processes to speed up projects was also investigated. In all cases, the organizations say that their 'usual process' is the fast track. Doing anything else, such as skipping stages or going ahead without fully preparing for each stage, increases the risk of the project failing. The message from the more experienced organizations was that 'going fast' by missing essential work slowed the project down; the amount of rework required was nearly always much greater than the effort saved. When people talk of fast tracking, what they usually need is raising the priority of a project, so it is not slowed down by lack of resources.

3. Address and revalidate the marketing, commercial, operational and technical viability of the project throughout its life

"We are very good at slamming on the brakes very quickly if we see we cannot achieve our goals."

All the organizations address all aspects throughout the life of a project. No single facet is allowed to proceed at a greater pace than the others as, for example there is little point in:

- having an excellent technological product which has no adequate market rationale relating to it and cannot be economically produced;
- developing a superb new digital staff appraisal system if there are no processes to administer it and make it happen.

As all aspects of a project need to be considered a multi-disciplinary team approach is essential (see lesson 6). When using a staged approach (see lesson 2), as the project moves forward, the level of knowledge should increase, and the level of risk should decrease. The only exception is where there is a particularly large area of risk and work may be brought forward in order to understand the problems and manage the consequences as part of a planned risk-management strategy.

The ability of organizations to stop (terminate) projects is seen to be important. A problem in any one aspect of a project (e.g. market, operations, technology and finance) can lead to termination. For example, one company, which had a product leadership strategy, killed a new product just prior to launch as a competitor had just released a superior product. It was better to abort the launch and work on the next generation product, than to proceed with releasing a new product which could be seen, by the market and technical press, as inferior. If the company had done so, its strategy of product leadership would have been compromised.

Naturally, the gates prior to each stage are the key points for revalidating a project. The best organizations also monitor the validity of the project between gates and are prepared to stop it if their business objectives are not likely to be met. At all times, the project sponsor needs to be able to demonstrate that the project is likely to realise the required benefits within whatever constraints are imposed. Figure 3 shows this using schedule, cost and scope as example constraints being balanced in order to realize the benefits.

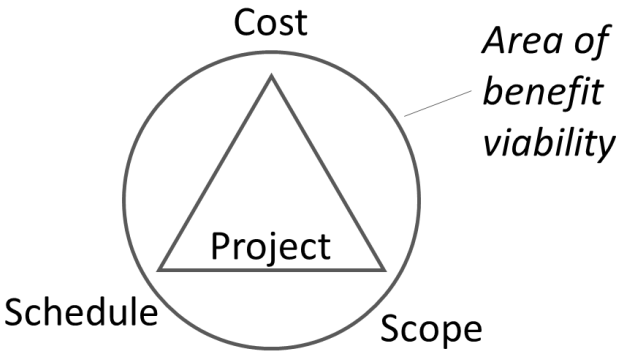

Figure 3 Ensure the project is always viable; example using three constraints

4. Incorporate stakeholders into the project to understand their current and future needs

"The front line customer interface has been and is our primary focus."

The involvement of stakeholders, such as users and customers, in projects is seen as essential in all stages of a project. Usually, the earlier the involvement, the better the result.

Consultancy-oriented organizations must, by the nature of their business, talk to customers to establish their needs. Yet even these organizations say they often misinterpret the real needs of the customer, despite great efforts to avoid this. Where project teams are more removed from their users or customers, there is even greater scope for error.

Many innovative ways have been used to obtain this involvement including:

- focus groups;
- facilitated workshops;
- early prototyping;
- simulations.

Involving the stakeholders is a powerful mover for change, while ignoring them can lead to failure. When viewed from a stakeholder's perspective, a project may be just one more that the stakeholders have to cope with as well as fulfilling their usual duties; it may even appear irrelevant or regressive. If stakeholders' consent is required to make things happen, ignore them at your peril!

5. Build excellence in project management techniques and controls across the organization

"Never see project management as an overhead."

Good project management techniques and controls are prerequisites to effecting change. Project management skills are still most obvious in the engineering-based organizations, particularly those with a project/line matrix management structure (see lesson 7). However, other organizations had taken, or are taking, active steps to improve this discipline across all parts of the business.

There must be appropriate and proportionate project management guidance, training and support for all staff involved in projects, including senior managers who sponsor projects or make project-related decisions. Core control techniques need to include planning, managing risks and issues, controlling changes, schedule, costs and reviews.

Planning (Figure 4) as a discipline is seen as essential. If you have no definition of the project and no plan, you are unlikely to be successful. It is virtually impossible to communicate your intentions to the project team and stakeholders.

Further, if there is no plan, phrases such as 'early,' 'late', and 'within budget' have no real meaning. Planning should be seen to be holistic, encompassing schedule, cost, scope and benefits refined in light of resource, external constraints and risk.

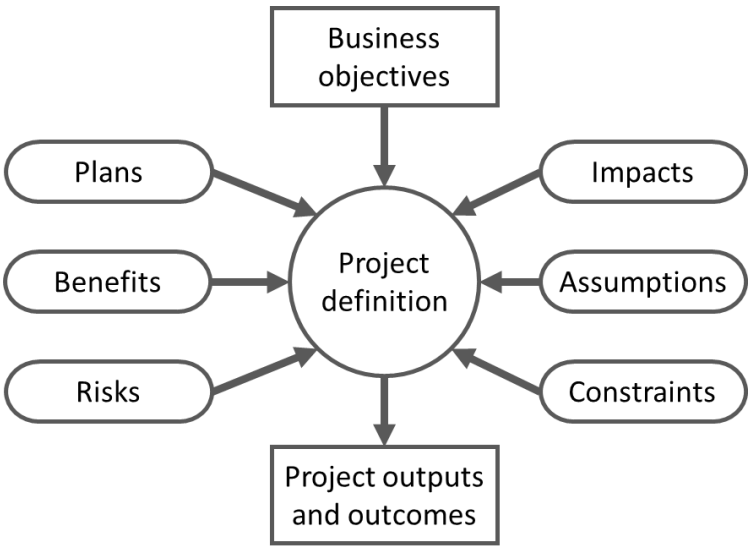

Figure 4 Planning and definition

Risk is particularly mentioned; using a staged approach is itself a risk management technique with the gates acting as formal review and decision points where risk is put in the context of the business benefits and cost of delivery. Projects are risky and it is essential to analyse the project and its outcomes, determine which are the inherently risky aspects and take action to reduce, avoid or, in some cases, insure against those risks.

Despite good planning things rarely go smoothly. Unforeseen issues do arise which, if not resolved, threaten the success of the project. Monitoring and forecasting against the agreed plan is a discipline which ensures events do not take those involved in the project by surprise. This is illustrated by the project control cycle in Figure 5.

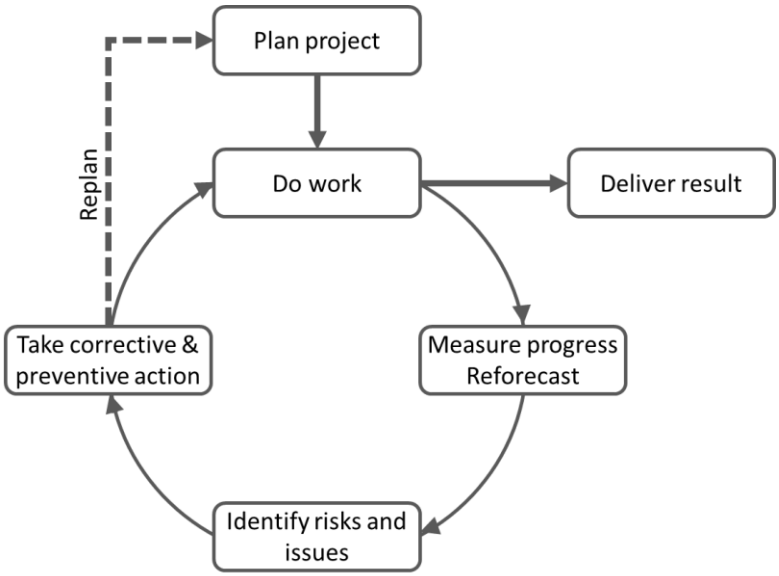

Figure 5 The control cycle

The appropriate frequency for the cycle depends on the project, its stage in the project life cycle and inherent risk. Monthly is considered the most appropriate by many of the organizations, although in certain circumstances this is increased to weekly or even daily.

Such monitoring should focus more on future benefits and performance than on what has actually been completed. Completion of activities is evidence of progress but is not sufficient to predict that milestones will continue to be met. The project manager should be continually checking to ensure the plan is still fit for its purpose and likely to realize the business benefits on time. Here, the future is more important than the past.

It is a sad fact that many projects are late, or never reach completion. One of the reasons for this is 'scope creep'. More and more ideas are incorporated into the project's scope resulting in higher costs and delayed delivery. Controlling change is critical to ensuring the benefits are achieved and the project is not derailed by good ideas or good intentions. Changes are a fact of life and cannot be avoided. Good planning and a staged approach reduce the potential for major change but cannot prevent it. Changes, even beneficial ones, need to be controlled to ensure that only those enabling the project's outcomes and benefits to be realized are approved.

Contracting industries are particularly good at controlling change as their income is directly derived from projects – doing 'that bit more' without checking its impact on their contractual obligations and profit margin is not good business. Why should it be any less so when dealing with 'internal projects'?

A thought: lesson 5 says use "good project management tools and techniques," BUT it is only one of ten findings which provide the full environment for projects to work. Is this why some organizations say, "We do project management, but it doesn't work for us?"

6. Break down functional boundaries by using cross-functional teams

"No one in this company can consider themselves outside the scope and influence of projects."

The need for many projects to draw on people from a range of functions means that a cross-functional team approach is essential (see Figure 6). Running projects in business areas/departments with coordination between them always slows down progress, produces less satisfactory results and increases the likelihood of errors. All the organizations recognized this and have working practices to encourage lateral cooperation and communication rather than hierarchical. In some cases, this goes as far as removing staff from their own departmental locations and grouping them in teamwork spaces. In others, departments which frequently work together are located as close as practical in the organization's premises. Generally, the closer people work, the better they perform. Although this is not always practical, closeness can be compensated for by frequent meetings and good communication.

Cross-functional teamworking, however, is not the only facet. It was also seen that decision making has to be on a cross-functional basis too. Decision making and the associated processes was an area where some of the organizations were less than satisfied with their current position. Either decision makers took too narrow a view or insufficient information was available.

Another requirement of cross-functional working is to ensure both corporate and individual objectives are not placed in conflict. For example, one company found that team members on the same project received different levels of bonuses merely because they belonged to different departments.

The more departmentally focussed an organization is, the more difficult it is to implement effective project management. This is because project management, by its nature, crosses an organisation's departmental boundaries. To make projects succeed, the balance of power usually needs to be tipped toward the project and away from line management. For a 'traditional', department led company, this is often a sacrifice its leaders refuse to make, at the expense of overall business performance. This is a fundamental reason why portfolio management fails in some organizations.

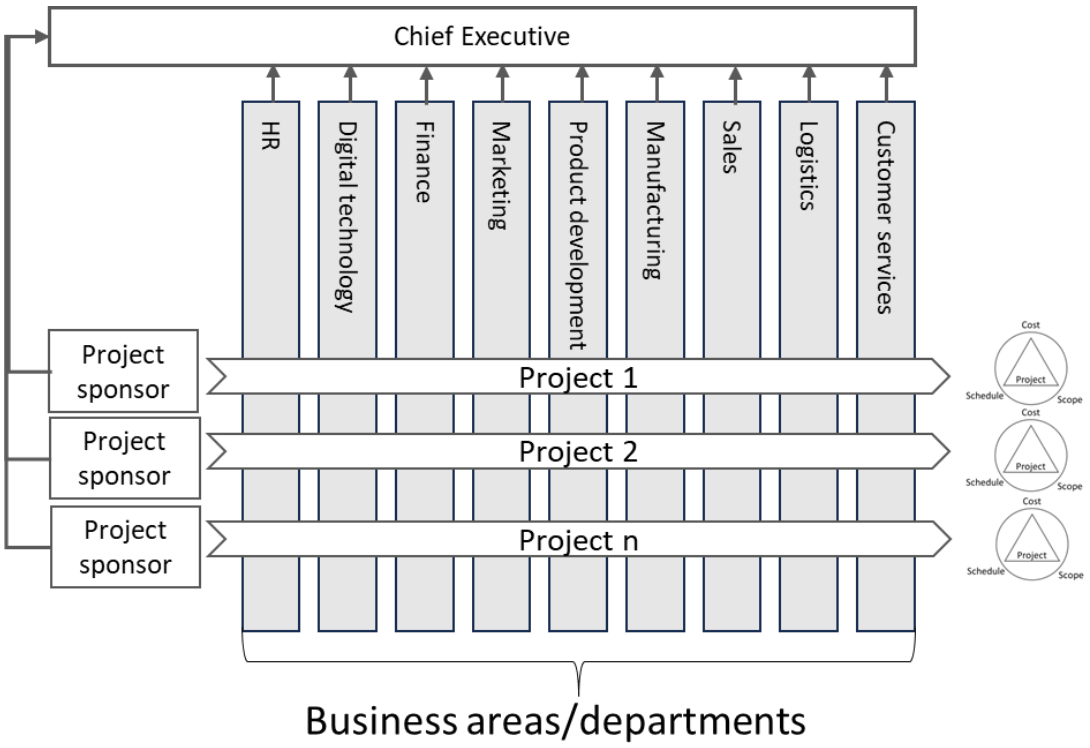

Figure 6 Working across functional boundaries in collaborative teams

7. Use dedicated resources for each category of development and prioritize within each category

"We thought long and hard about ring fencing (dedicating) resources and decided, for us, it was the best way to minimise internal conflict."

The management and allocation of resources was acknowledged by many organizations to be a problem. There is often continual competition for scarce resources between projects. One company said that at one time this had reached such a level that it was proving destructive. The impact was often that too many projects were started and few were finished.

This problem can be dealt with in two separate ways, both of which have their merits.

The first approach is to apply dedicated (separate) resources for each category of project (such as for product development) and take this principle as deep as possible into the company. In this way, potential conflicts are limited while decisions and choices are more localized. In fact, the more separate and dedicated you make your resources, the more local decision making can be, providing a project only needs to draw resources from that single pool. The downside of such an approach is that you might need to continually reorganize and resize your resource pools to meet demand. In a fast-moving industry, this can mean you may have the right number of people but they are deployed in the wrong places. It can lead to continuous reorganizations (does that sound familiar?). Most traditional, functionally organized organizations follow this approach.

The second (and extreme) approach is to have all staff in a single pool (shared) and use effective matrix management support tools for resource allocation and forecasting (see Figure 7). This method is adopted by many consulting and engineering organizations. In one case, a person may work on up to ten projects in a week and there may be 300 projects in progress at any one time. It is very effective, conceptually simple and totally flexible. Major reorganizations are less frequent, but it is also the most difficult to implement in a company with a strong functional management bias and requires information systems which are set up to work in a matrix.

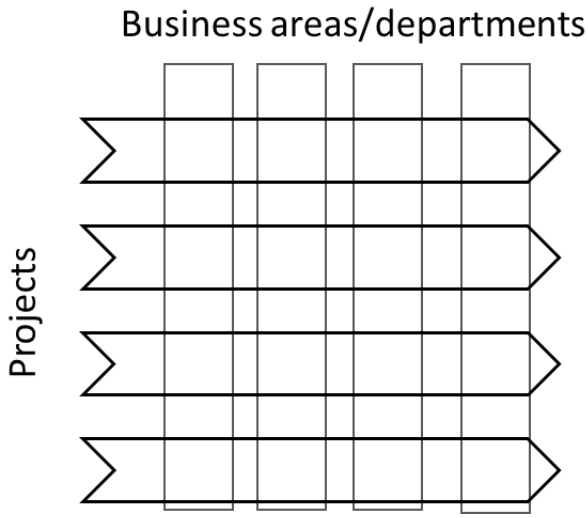

Figure 7 The matrix and resource pools

In practice, a hybrid between the two extremes provides the simplicity of purely functionally based organizations with the flexibility of full matrix-managed organizations. The implication is, however, that the resource management and accounting systems must be able to view the company in a consistent way from both perspectives and many chief financial officers are not interested in that!

8. Place high emphasis on the early stages of the project

"Skipping the first stage is a driver for failure."

All organizations see the early stages of a project as fundamental to success. Some cannot stress this enough. High emphasis for some means that between thirty to fifty percent of the project life is spent on the investigative stages before any final deliverable is physically built. One American company had research data explicitly demonstrating how this emphasis significantly decreased time to completion. Good investigative work means clearer objectives and plans; work spent on this is rarely wasted. Decisions taken at the early stages of a project have a far-reaching effect and set the tone for the remainder of the project. In the early stages, creative solutions can slash delivery times in half and cut costs dramatically.

Once development is under way, however, it is rarely possible to effect savings of anything but a few percent. Good upfront work also reduces the likelihood of disruptive change later, as many changes to projects are actually reactive to misunderstandings over scope and approach rather than proactive decisions to change the project for the better. The further you are into the project,

the more costly change becomes. So called 'agile' approaches are often beneficial if applied appropriately.

Despite the wisdom of this lesson, there is often pressure, for what appear to be all the right political or commercial reasons, to skip the investigative stages and 'get on with the real work' as soon as possible (so-called fast tracking, see Lesson 2). Two organizations I dealt with found through bitter experience that you can't go any faster by missing out essential work. One told me, "Whenever we've tried to leave a bit out for the sake of speed, we've always failed and had to do more extensive rework later which cost us far in excess of anything we might have saved."

9. Build the business case into the organization's business plan as soon as the project has been formally approved

"Once it is authorized, pin it down!"

Projects are the vehicles for implementing future strategic change for an organization. The best organizations are always sure the projects they are undertaking are highly likely to produce what they need and fit the organization's wider objectives. In all cases, organizations had far more proposals for projects than they could handle. It is, therefore, essential to know what future resources (cash, manpower, etc.) have already been committed and what benefits (revenues, cost savings, etc.) are expected. Unless this is done the 'gap' between where the company is now and where it wants to be is not known, making the choice of projects to fill the gap more difficult (Figure 8).

Organizations handle this by having set points in the project life cycle at which cost and benefit streams are built into the organization's financial and business plans; usually at the gate where a business case is approved and the project authorized to continue.

Clearly, financial planning and resource systems need to be able to be updated at any time as projects' timescales do not usually reflect fiscal quarters. Also, any such systems must be seen as a part of the business and not an 'add-on' outside the usual pattern of planning, forecasting and accounting.

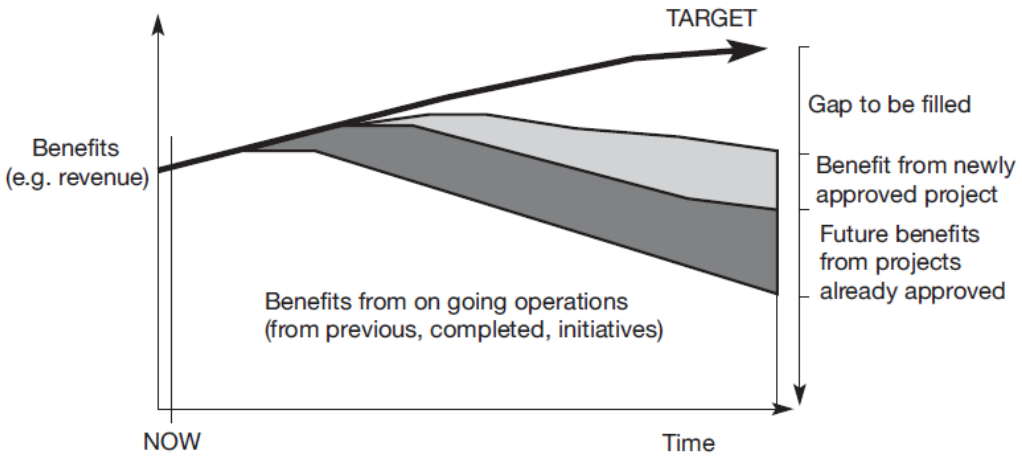

Figure 8 Build your projects into your business plan

10. Close the project formally to build a bridge to the future, to learn any lessons and to ensure a clean handover

"We close projects quickly to prevent any left-over budget from being wasted."

Closing projects quickly and formally is essential for some organizations. For example, low margin organizations must close the project accounts down to ensure no more time is spent working on completed projects, no matter how interesting! Their tight profit margins simply won't allow this luxury. Sometimes the legacy is vital to retain; for example, components in an aircraft can be in service long after the project team has dispersed or home team members have retired! Not to have full records on these critical components for times of need is unthinkable.

Organizations should have a formal closure procedure which usually takes the form of a closure report which highlights the outstanding issues, ensures explicit handover of accountabilities and makes it clear to those who need to know that the project is finished.

Another key reason given for formal closure is to provide of an opportunity for learning lessons and improving the working of the company (although this should be happening throughout the project's life!).

Are the lessons enduring?

In 2022/23 a study [4], published in the Project Management Journal, was undertaken to determine whether a set of project management principles can be identified to serve as a common framework for developers and publishers of project management standards and guides. In that paper the term 'principle' was taken to be "A fundamental truth or proposition that serves as the foundation for a system of belief or behaviour or for a chain of reasoning." As such they set out the mindset to be followed when overseeing, directing and managing a project to inform shared assumptions, values and group norms.

Twenty-two project management standards and other consensus documents were reviewed, including ISO 21500, ISO 21502, BS 6079, ANSI/PMI 99-001-2021, GovS 002, PRINCE2 and the bodies of knowledge for APM and PMI. These revealed a common understanding across the globe of the requirements for effective project management and the work resulted in a set of 12 principles, listed in Table 1.

Table 1 The principles of project management [4]

1	**Strategic alignment**: aligning a project's objectives with the organization's strategy ensures that the project's outcomes contribute to achieving the organization's objectives.
2	**Continuing justification**: on-going confirmation that a project is justified contributes to achieving objectives and avoiding waste.
3	**Continuous improvement**: capturing, sharing, and applying experience and lessons learned from previous work improve current and future project performance.
4	**Governance**: adopting a proportionate and appropriate governance framework enables the organization's governing body to control the work and manage the risks.
5	**Resilience**: embracing adaptability enables project teams to accommodate and manage change.

6	**Risk**: ongoing management of risks, in terms of opportunities and threats, maximizes positive impacts and minimizes negative impacts to the project and its outcomes.
7	**Team structure**: maintaining a clear team structure with defined roles enables team members to understand one another's responsibilities and ensures that role holders with delegated authority can be held to account.
8	**Teamwork**: collaborative working as teams among individuals with diverse skills, knowledge, and experience enables them to accomplish shared objectives efficiently.
9	**Organizational values**: upholding organizational values and codes of conduct creates a culture of respect and trust
10	**Management**: defining, planning, monitoring, and controlling work maximize the likelihood of achieving project success.
11	**Flexibility**: tailoring the ways of working to the context of the project maximizes the likelihood of success.
12	**Stakeholder engagement**: engaging stakeholders at a level commensurate with their needs, expectations, and impact fosters trust and contributes to the project's success.

The principles paper includes a narrative to support each of the principles. The descriptions of the lessons described earlier in this paper were then compared to the twelve principles from Table 1 and, where appropriate, aligned with the underpinning lessons. The result is shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Alignment of principles to lessons

		1 Make sure your projects are driven by benefits which support your strategy	2 Use a simple and well-defined framework with a tailorable staged approach, for all projects in all circumstances	3 Address and revalidate the marketing, commercial, operational and technical viability of the project throughout its life	4 Incorporate stakeholders into the project to understand their current and future needs	5 Build excellence in project management techniques and controls across the organization	6 Break down functional boundaries by using cross-functional teams	7 Use dedicated resources for each category of development and prioritize within each category	8 Place high emphasis on the early stages of the project	9 Build the business case into the organization's forward plan as soon as the project has been formally approved	10 Close the project formally to build a bridge to the future, to learn any lessons and to ensure a clean handover
1	Strategic alignment: aligning a project's objectives with the organization's strategy ensures that the project's outcomes contribute to achieving the organization's objectives.	■								■	
2	Continuing justification: on-going confirmation that a project is justified contributes to achieving objectives and avoiding waste.			■					■		
3	Continuous improvement: capturing, sharing, and applying experience and lessons learned from previous work improve current and future project performance.										■
4	Governance: adopting a proportionate and appropriate governance framework enables the organization's governing body to control the work and manage the risks.		■								
5	Resilience: embracing adaptability enables project teams to accommodate and manage change.			■							
6	Risk: ongoing management of risks, in terms of opportunities and threats, maximizes positive impacts and minimizes negative impacts to the project and its outcomes.					■					
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8	Teamwork: collaborative working as teams among individuals with diverse skills, knowledge, and experience enables them to accomplish shared objectives efficiently.						■				
9	Organizational values: upholding organizational values and codes of conduct creates a culture of respect and trust						■				
10	Management: defining, planning, monitoring, and controlling work maximize the likelihood of achieving project success.					■					
11	Flexibility: tailoring the ways of working to the context of the project maximizes the likelihood of success.		■			■					
12	Stakeholder engagement: engaging stakeholders at a level commensurate with their needs, expectations, and impact fosters trust and contributes to the project's success.				■						

Nine of the ten lessons were found to support one or more of the twelve principles. The alignment is not perfect and not 'one to one' but, a reading of the detail in the principles paper and the lessons in this paper shows a good alignment of intent. On the other hand, one of the ten lessons was not covered by the 12 principles:

- **7. Use dedicated resources for each category of development and prioritize within each category**: this lesson derives for the portfolio management approach as the early editions of *The Project Workout* did not just deal with one project at a time, but put those projects in the context of everything else an organization is doing. In the latest editions, this is covered in *The Programme and Portfolio Workout*. It deals with one of the hardest aspects of project management, namely obtaining and holding on to resources, be they people, equipment or facilities. The Principles paper is solely focussed on the management of a project, so this is outside its scope.

Notice that most of the 10 lessons go further than the remit of an individual project sponsor or project manager neither of whom is likely to have the authority to create the environment for the lesson to be applied successfully in an organization. This emphasizes that the management of projects has to be part of a way an organization is run and not an 'added extra' to be run independently.

Conclusion

There is a remarkable alignment between the 10 lessons dating from the mid-1990s described in this paper and the 12 principles from the study in 2023, which does indeed point to the lessons being enduring. If a person applies those lessons todays, they would still be valid and valuable.

The emphasis on certain aspects has shifted, for instance towards flexibility and adaptive approaches, and the language used has changed over the years. For example:

- in 1995 the terms 'portfolio' and 'programme' did not have the definitions commonly seen today, say, in the international standards; for example, the early Project Workout used 'business programme' for 'portfolio'.
- the term 'tailoring' was not established and synonyms like 'adapt' were used;
- the management of societal and organisation change was not commonly recognised as a discipline, the work was just considered a part of doing the project;
- the agile manifesto for software development first appeared in 2001 and the plethora of terms derived from it did not exist.

Yet the lessons are still relevant as they are independent of the type of output, methods, processes and tools used.

A sceptic might say that projects still go wrong, does this mean that the lessons are wrong? Not at all. Things go wrong for many reasons, mostly to do with corporate leadership, a dysfunctional culture, behaviours and such like, although, sometimes nature plays a part, as does politics. I have worked on projects where the construction site has been bombed, the temporary works flooded, where a government has changed and where a company has reversed its strategic direction, all leading, one might say, to the projects failing. Alternatively, if looked at correctly,

and applying Principle 5 (resilience) and Lesson 3 (continuous viability) this meant the project had to be rethought or terminated, either way saving pouring money down the drain to no effect; in other words, a successful business decision was made in its new context. That's life; be prepared and live it.

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About this article

This article is adapted from Chapter 2 of the *Project Workout [2].* The book is aimed at both project sponsors and project managers, and works through the life cycle of a project from initial idea to successful result, using the lessons as the touchpoint which should always be applied. The practical approach is enhanced throughout the book with a series of 'Workouts': exercises, techniques and checklists to help put the book's advice into practice. The revised, 5th edition contains a wealth of new material on governance, monitoring and control, resource and information management and working with standards, such as ISO 21502, BS6079, PRINCE2®, APM Body of Knowledge and PMBOK® Guide. The companion to this book, *The Programme and Portfolio Workout [3]*, deals with directing and managing whole portfolios of projects, making sure everyone in an organization is working towards the same goals; together these books provide what is needed to ensure projects succeed.

About the Author

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Robert Buttrick is an independent advisor on portfolio, programme and project management, specialising in business-driven methods, processes and standards. Recent clients include the UK's Cabinet Office and Infrastructure and Project Authority, Network Rail, and AXELOS. He is a Visiting Teaching Fellow at the University of Warwick, a member of the British Standards Institute's committee MS2 for project management and is a UK Principal Expert on the equivalent ISO technical committee, TC258 (dealing with international standards on portfolio, programme and project management.)

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Robert is a Master of Business Administration (Henley Management College), a Member of the Chartered Institute of Marketing, Chartered Engineer and a Member of the Institution of Civil Engineers. In 2010, Robert received a Distinguished Service Certificate from the BSI for services to national and international project management standards, and in 2013 he was made an Honorary Fellow of the Association for Project Management.

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