

Project Management, a practical guide

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Third edition

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Preface

Each from our own discipline, we have been working in different organisations to implement and professionalise the project management over the past few years. We observed an increasing need for practical handles and instruments: How are you doing it now, what steps can you take, and what methods can you use? Existing literature only gives a limited response to these questions. With the first edition of this book, we tried to provide an answer to these practical questions.

Our greatest challenge lays in the fact that most literature on project management concerns either methods and techniques or social skills, while we have learned that the combination of both is the essence of project management. We want to do justice to both aspects in this book by following the life cycle of the project.

Now, many reprints later, we are still surprised by the numerous reactions of project leaders and clients. They provided ideas, additions and possibilities for expansion. We have enjoyed implementing these suggestions in this new edition. It turned Practical Project Management into what it should be: a book from the workplace, for the workplace.

In order to keep it all manageable, the work now consists of two books. This first book focusses on the methods, techniques and the cognitive skills. The social project skills are discussed peripherally. It is the other way around in the second book. They are both independent books which speak for themselves and can stand on their own. Together, they contain the practical project management essence.

Enthusiasm was not enough. We also required methods and techniques to complete this book. Special thanks are due to our partners, Yvonne Zeegers and Nicolette Zijlstra, for the fact that they let us explore our other passions, and to our colleagues who provided extensive advice.

We hope that this book can provide practical support and form the basis for further development for as many people as possible who are looking for the art and science behind managing projects.

Project management itself has not changed in the past few years. However, the acceptance and the application thereof have. A project-based approach has become an accepted method of working. Ideas behind it have been captured in methodologies such as Prince2, and these can be used as standards within organisations. Project management is no longer something you occasionally engage in, but it has become a profession in which you can grow. Thanks to professional associations such as IMPA (International Project Management Association), competences for project management have been defined. The work floor imposes more and more demands on projects and the management thereof. Projects must be implemented faster. The environment of projects has been very important for their successes. These developments demanded a new updated version of this book. The value of a book like this depends on what you can learn from it. A lot can be learned and experienced when it comes to managing projects. The book focusses on the main aspects and the most valuable subjects which you can apply directly. In addition we would like to hear (t.gevers@kpnmail.nl and mail@tjerkzijlstra.nl) whether this book helps you and what improvements still can be made. We wish you a lot of fun managing projects!

Ten Gevers and Tjerk Zijlstra
Soesterberg, 2010

Introduction

Projects are nothing new. In fact, they are almost as old as the history of mankind. From the construction of the Maya temples in Guatemala and the Pyramids in ancient Egypt to the establishment of factories in the industrial revolution, we can see works with clear project-like characteristics. They all had a specific identifiable end result, a clear start and end and a unique approach with a whole of related activities.

Project management as a management discipline also has been around for a considerable number of years. In the past, the focus was on technical sectors such as shipbuilding, the construction industry, space and automation. Later, the scope of project management expanded. Organisations in sectors such as services or the government started with project-based work to promote a targeted and efficient approach to certain problems. The focus shifted to projects aimed at very different areas, such as product development, research, innovations or a change in organisation and policy. This made projects part of the responsibilities of an increasing number of people. Often, it concerns projects related to the integral business operations which influence the primary processes of an organisation. The successful execution of such projects is therefore of vital importance to an organisation.

These developments greatly encouraged the growth of project management. From a collection of systems and techniques in which planning techniques dominated, it has grown into an integral approach which offers significant possibilities to organisations and employees when applied consciously.

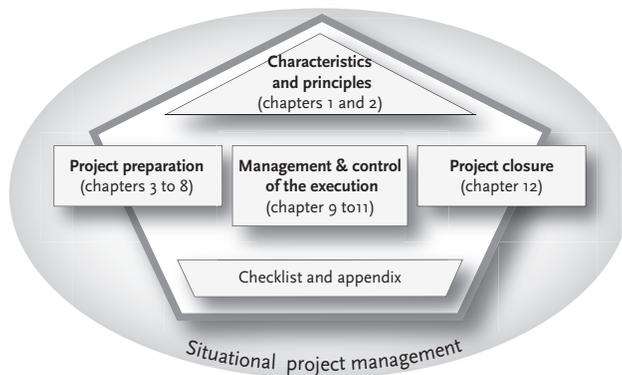
The book provides practical insight into this methodology. It is intended for everyone involved in projects:

- **The project leader or project manager.** You have been asked to start or lead a project, or have been doing this for some years and want to check and brush up on your knowledge.

- **The project assistant.** You are involved in the execution of a project as an expert and want to know what this way of working means to you and how you can support the management thereof.
- **The manager or client.** You want to use a project-based approach to solve an issue and wonder how you can manage this.

Practical Project Management 1 is a solid practical guide to the targeted establishment and controlled realisation of many different types of projects. The examples mainly come from small to medium-sized projects in the newer areas of application. The book does not focus on one particular type of project. In this first part, the focus is on methods, techniques and the cognitive project skills. The social project skills are only discussed briefly. This is the other way around in part 2.

The structure of this book follows the logical line of a project: from the preparation to the conclusion. The focus always lies on actual steps, combined with handles and techniques that are immediately applicable. Overly detailed nuances and theoretical considerations have been avoided as much as possible. But, the book goes even further. The workplace might be difficult. Combining theory and practice is the issue. This is why we discuss some of the most common pitfalls in each chapter. We also give suggestions on what to do when you are confronted with them in order to make the best out of this situation and still achieve a good result. You will find a Checklist at the end of each chapter.



Structure of this book

This book can be divided into five sections. In the first section, we give basic information on the right context of project management. Chapter 1 provides insight into the characteristics of projects and project-based work. Chapter 2 discusses the management of projects and provides a number of useful models that allow the control of projects.

In the following chapters, we describe the project preparation. Chapter 3 indicates which steps you take during the project preparation, who you involve and what instruments can help you. Methods and techniques to phase, design and plan your projects are discussed extensively in chapters 4, 5 and 6. Handling project risks is discussed in chapter 7. The project manager captures all this information in the project plan. The way to integrate all this information is described in chapter 8. Chapter 8 also describes how you garner support for the project plan and how you handle clients and other stakeholders.

Project management is more than proper preparation and sensible use of methods and techniques to design a project. Starting up a project team, managing the execution and monitoring the progress determine the result of your project to a large extent. These subjects are discussed in chapters 9, 10 and 11. An often short but important phase in each project is the project closure. We discuss this phase in chapter 12, which concludes your project.

Finally, the annexes provide concise information on the structure of the business case and a summary of the tasks of the main players in projects: the client, the project manager and the project assistants.

The provided methods, techniques and skills for managing projects are no static rules. They are tools available to you to design and manage your projects in a sensible but especially tailored manner. Only then you will have optimal, situation-focussed project management.

We wish you a lot of fun reading this book and especially successful and dynamic projects!

1 Characteristics of project-based work

*Before you start to act,
your mind must be free of doubt.*
F.M. Dostojewski (1821-1881)

Project-based work is already popular, but is still increasing in popularity. This is not a surprise. Project-based work has proven its value and made a very substantial contribution to the effectiveness of organisations. It is a powerful approach which can greatly increase the ability of organisations to address the ever-faster changes and developments and makes better use of human and financial resources. There are a lot of corresponding expectations, sometimes even too many.

An insurance company was so enthusiastic about the ‘project-based work’ phenomenon that the board decided to introduce it throughout the whole organisation. All activities were arranged in projects, new structures were developed and project managers were appointed. After the dust had settled slightly, people came to the conclusion that everyone did the same things as they did before, but now it was called ‘project-based’.

One of the main causes for a situation like above is that people often have different ideas about the terms ‘project’ and ‘project-based work’. This is why we will discuss these terms in this chapter. We will discuss what a project is and is not, what types of projects there are and what the characteristics of project-based work are. Finally, we will determine the factors for success and failure for projects.

1.1 What is a project?

There is a wide variety of projects and an equally wide variety of definitions of what a project is. In this book, we use the most common definition used in the Netherlands. Our experiences teach us that everyone thinks they know it, but we will repeat it to be sure. A project is a series of (coherent) activities and tasks that:

- must deliver a specific **end result**;
- have a clearly defined **start and end** and are therefore temporarily;
- must be achieved within set restrictive **preconditions**;
- are achieved with **one client** or customer connected to the end result.

This definition describes the minimal requirements to be called a project. The following characteristics are often of interest:

- projects contain unique (or uncommon) elements;
- projects require the use of multiple skills: employees from different disciplines and departments cooperating to reach a common result;
- projects entail risks and uncertainty: they are new and people are not sure whether the outcome will be achieved.

A project is therefore a new, temporary partnership meant to reach a one-off renewal, improvement or change. After which it is often included in the routine operations. Projects can be:

- developing and implementing a new logistics system;
- setting up a trade journal;
- developing a structural plan for the city centre.

Projects are not:

- using and maintaining a logistics system;
- exploiting a trade journal;
- setting up a construction committee.

There is a large variety of projects. We distinguish between different types of projects. The figure below shows this.

Technical projects focus on changes in technology or in the physical environment of the organisation. They often allow for estimates and planning. This is why we call them ‘hard’ projects. **Social projects** focus on the people in an organisation and the culture of the organisation. They are more difficult to achieve and often cost a lot more time, hence the term ‘soft’ projects. Other types of projects, such as **policy, research and organisation projects** are halfway between the hard and soft projects and include a combination of technical and social elements. **Joint projects** represent the main part of the projects that are currently being realised. This book mainly discusses these projects.