Chapter 2

Elaborating the Project Management System: Influence on Project Managers

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ABSTRACT

This chapter elaborates on the perspective of project management as an organizational capability, crucial for strategy execution and hence necessitating the attention of senior management. The author builds on the work on Project Management System (PMS) by Narayanan and DeFillippi, who developed the PMS concept to describe the context created for project managers by the senior management of a firm in response to strategy shifts. This chapter develops this concept further by detailing how PMS influences the conduct of project managers: their competencies, successful resource acquisition practices, ways to access information and knowledge, behavioral challenges, and career opportunities. The chapter also indicates some key practical implications for project managers: the need to be aware of the organizational context, understanding the strategic logic of projects, the need to speak the language of senior management, and mapping information networks.

INTRODUCTION

Projects are an important characteristic of today’s economy, and the project form of organization is increasingly a fact of organizational life. Partly as a result, project management vocabulary is now filled with terms such as ‘mega projects’, ‘project management office’, and ‘projectification.’ Although much of the discourse is confined to project and project team levels, there is growing awareness that project management is an organizational capability, with significant strategic import. As pointed out in the award-winning book by Linden et al. (2016), this awareness is leading the scholarship to cast projects within a strategic framework, a point of view that emphasizes the role of projects in strategy execution.

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At the same time, there is a widespread sentiment among the project management community that in corporations the strategic role of project management is under appreciated. Consider the conclusion advanced by Antonio Nieto-Rodriguez, the current chairman of the Project Management Institute:

*My research shows clearly why project management has not been relevant and the consequent disregard of the discipline by senior leaders. For most of the project management community, this is a painful discovery; but it helps to understand the reason for this indifference. For many strategists, this lack of the awareness of the importance of project management explains the problems with strategy execution. Only when project management is recognized as being vital to strategy execution will companies begin to more effectively achieve their goals. (Nieto-Rodriguez, 2016)*

There is thus a wide chasm between the recognition of the strategic importance of project management and the operations of organizations, with project execution often being far removed from strategic functions of organizations. This chasm is partly the result of an absence of adequate frameworks to chart the linkage between senior managers and project management practitioners. There is currently no well-understood and well-accepted language between the senior managers and project managers, let alone an appreciation of how senior managers influence the execution of projects.

The central ideas of the chapter are schematically presented in Figure 1. Broadly, this chapter will argue that senior management’s choices about the firm’s project management system (PMS) create an organizational context that constrains, facilitates and evolves project managers’ actions, sets the tone of interaction between senior managers and project managers and may prompt project specific actions by senior managers. This chapter will make use of Narayanan & DeFillippi’s (2012) model of Project Management System (PMS) to highlight how PMS’s facilitate or constrain project managers’ behavior. The framework will also provide a language to link project management and strategy, addressing the chasm between the practitioners of the two functions.

The chapter is organized as follows. The next section summarizes the central concepts of PMS, the stages through which PMS in corporation evolves, and critical factors in senior managers’ choice of

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**Figure 1. A framework for the chapter**
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