Developing Organizational Project Management Capability: Theory and Practice

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ABSTRACT

This paper traces the evolution of conceptions of project management from the use of tools and techniques on stand-alone projects to the conceptualization of project management as an organizational capability. Working from the premise that project management is a socially constructed field of practice that has developed through the conversations and deliberate efforts of practitioners, principles of discourse analysis are used as a framework for studying the extent to which practice reflects the espoused theories of organizational project management capability development. The actuality of practice is represented by periodic reports over a five-year period by the "owners" of project management in an organization with an expressed commitment to development of organizational project management capability and is analysed with reference to the related espoused theories of practitioners as represented in the project management literature, including bodies of knowledge, standards, and guides.

Keywords: organizational project management capability; theory and practice

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Introduction

Project management as a field of practice has been brought into being through the conversations, writing, and collaborative activities of practitioners, consultants and academics with a shared interest in dealing with phenomena that are perceived to have similar characteristics and challenges (Parker, 1992).

As project management evolves in this way as a field of practice, there is often an interesting tension between practitioners and academic researchers in project management, with the practitioners claiming that the discourse in the field is too theoretical while the academics claim that it lacks theoretical foundations (Betts & Lansley, 1995; Koskela & Howell, 2002; Shenhar, 1998). Although, in a strict sense, the academics are correct, the field is rich in espoused theories of practitioners (Argyris, 1995; Argyris & Schon, 1977). Project management is constructed by the actions and interactions of practitioners, consultants, and academics/researchers through their use of language, communication of beliefs, and interaction in social situations (van Dijk, 1997), and as represented in written and spoken language, cultural artifacts, and visual representations (Hardy, 2001). Discourse analysis, the systematic study of texts, provides a useful framework for gaining an enhanced understanding of the nature and evolution of project management theory and practice. This paper uses the principles of discourse analysis as a framework for study of the relationship between espoused theory and practice concerning organizational project management capability. In this analysis, the actuality of practice is represented by periodic reports over a five-year period by the "owners" of project management in an organization with an expressed commitment to development of organizational project management capability. The practitioner experience is presented against a backdrop of the evolution of conceptions of project management from the use of tools and techniques on stand-alone projects to the conceptualization of project management as an organizational capability. This evolution is presented through discussion of the espoused theories of organizational project management capability as represented in the project management literature, including bodies of knowledge, standards, and guides.

Background

Discourse analysis provides a way of studying phenomena through interactions and the use of language in order to gain new insights and understanding. From this perspective, discourses are considered constructive in that they "bring reality

into being by making social relations and material objects meaningful" (Hardy, 2001). Discourse and its effects are therefore constantly shaping and being shaped by their context and by other discourses. This paper looks at two related discourses. The discourse chosen as representative of espoused theory (Discourse 1) is the discourse evidenced and constructed by talk and texts through the project management literature and in the form of standards and guides. The discourse representing practice (Discourse 2) is that of owners of project management in one organization over a four-year period. This discourse operates within, and is influenced by, the wider context of Discourse 1.

In undertaking an analysis of this nature, important elements are the choice of talk and text, and the location of discourses in their historical and social context. According to van Dijk (1997, p. 4), we may need:

- Theoretical notions that define the beginning or the end of text and talk
- Their unity or coherence
- Inter-textual relations between different discourses
- Intentions of speakers or writers
- Settings, time, place, and other aspects of the communicative context.

It is important to know something about who is talking or writing, as what is said is the negotiation of meaning and will be affected by the interests and power relations of the various actors and groups of actors. For example, practitioners in organizations may express desire for a common language with shared meanings for use in relation to projects. Consultants and project management associations, however, may have a commercial or proprietary interest in encouraging specific or more diverse terminology and meanings. In organizations, the specific interests and agendas of the actors will influence what they consider important and the ways in which they present it. What they say may be influenced by issues of ego or concern that what they say may be reported by others. A further and related consideration is the need for reflexivity (Hardy, 2001), whereby the researchers reflect on their role and the influence that their own interests and choices will have on interpretation and outcome.

This discussion on discourses is organized into three sections:

- **Section 1: Evolution of Concepts of Project Management** provides an introduction to Discourse 1 through an overview of the historical and social setting for both espoused theory and practice.
- **Section 2: Conceptualization of Organizational Project Management Capability** gives brief coverage of the relevant espoused theories of practitioners.
- **Section 3: Practitioner Experience in Developing Organizational Project Management Capability** describes the specific texts and context of the discourse relating to the actuality of organizational project management capability development (Discourse 2).

Evolution of Concepts of Project Management

Project management can be seen as a socially constructed field of practice that has developed from tools and techniques designed to support the management of major projects, from the conversations of practitioners and from their deliberate efforts to define a field of practice through definition of a distinct body of knowledge and associated standards. Fundamental to this is recognition of projects as phenomena with shared characteristics.

The first signs of project management as a distinct field of practice were the network analysis and planning techniques, like PERT and CPM, that emerged in the 1950s for use on major projects in construction, engineering, defense, and aerospace industries (Kerzner, 1979; Morris, 1994; Stretton, 1994a). Users of these tools and techniques recognized shared interests leading to the formation of project management professional associations in the late 1960s, initially to facilitate knowledge sharing between practitioners.

The mid-1990s were a crucial point in the development of project management standards and related certification programs. Indicative of the conception of project management at this stage in its development, all of the emerging standards focused on stand-alone projects and individual project management practitioners. The Project Management Institute issued *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge* in 1996, and in the same year the Association for Project Management in the U.K. issued the Third Edition of its *Body of Knowledge.* The Australian and United Kingdom governments endorsed performance-based competency standards for project managers in 1996 and 1997, respectively. The British Standards Board also issued their *Guide to Project Management* in 1996. The International Project Management Association issued their *IPMA Competence Baseline* in 1998.

From the mid-1990s onward, interest in project management grew progressively stronger, with a move towards the concept of project management as an organizational capability, fuelled by a series of articles in *PMNetwork* by Paul Dinsmore (1996a, 1996b, 1996c, 1996d) who has consistently acted as a chronicler of project management practice. In this period also, an interest in benchmarking of corporate project management practices emerged. Two notable initiatives were the PMI-supported Fortune 500 Project Management Benchmarking Forum, which was formed in the mid-1990s, and the Human Systems Knowledge Network, which started collecting organizational project management practice data and facilitating knowledge sharing between corporate owners of project management in 1993. Both initiatives have contributed to the development of the concept of organizational project management capability through publication and conference presentations. Meanwhile, the majority of key project management professional associations have broadened their attention from facilitating the knowledge sharing and professional development of individual practitioner members to engaging and

addressing the needs of what they term "corporates" either as a new class of membership or in other ways as key stakeholders.

This change from focus on the individual project and practitioner to project management as an organizational capability reflects the wider adoption of project management and a change in the nature of the concerns and conversations of this broader group of practitioners. When the project management associations first developed, the conversations between members involved senior project managers of large and often high-profile projects. As the disciplines developed on these major projects have been adopted *"to cope with the management of employees involved with irregular assignments and to apply a structure to complex and discontinuous undertakings"* (Hodgson, 2004, p. 82) in finance and other sectors, the actors and their context have changed. There are now many conversations taking place at many different levels. The shift can be seen in the membership and participation of the project management associations, which are now dominated by consultants, trainers and relatively junior project managers and team members. Staff and leadership of the associations conduct conversations with the senior management of "corporates," who may have no direct experience in management of projects. The managers of major projects whose shared experience and interactions led the development of the field until the early to mid-1990s now tend only to appear as the occasional invited keynote speaker at a conference. With a change in the actors and their context, the nature of the discourse has changed.

The desire of senior practitioners to share and codify their experience in management of major projects has been replaced by the desire of relatively junior practitioners for training and certification for career advancement and the desire of senior managers for guidance in development of organizational capability, one aspect of which is the project management competence of their personnel. This change in focus has been accompanied by practitioner- and association-led initiatives for development of standards and guides that structure understanding of organizational project management capability. A key issue is recognition that in this broader application, projects in organizations are rarely isolated from environments that organizations must balance the re-sourcing of portfolios of projects, and that more than one project may be responsible for the delivery of the same strategic goal or set of outcomes or desired benefits.

Conceptualization of Organizational Project Management Capability

The previous section has given a brief overview of the historical and social setting of the field of project management. It focused on the evolution of the concept and context of project management through the interactions of practitioners. The current section will focus on the evolution of the concept of organizational project management capability (OPMC) as a specific discourse within the wider field of project management. The intent is to provide the context for the following examination of a specific organizational discourse as a basis for comparing espoused theories, represented by Discourse 1 with theories in use or practice (Discourse 2), and to test whether development of OPMC in practice reflects the espoused theories as presented in the literature and standards for practice.

Extension of the focus of project management beyond the individual project to encompass multiple projects, programs, portfolios, and enterprisewide approaches has changed the context, the actors, and the nature of conversations between them. The changing nature of the discourse is reflected in the commencement of development in 2005, by the Project Management Institute, of standards and guides for Program and Portfolio Management and the development, by the Association for Project Management in the United Kingdom, of *A Guide to Governance of Project Management* (Association for Project Management, 2004). Another strong voice in the conceptualization of project management as an organizational capability, has been the development and promotion by the U.K. government of a project management methodology, PRINCE2, initially designed for use on IT projects but further developed for wider application. Although the standards and guides for management of individual projects focused on project-related practices relating to time, cost, quality, risk, human resources, communication, and procurement, the shift toward project management as an organizational capability has been accompanied by interest in benefits management and governance which are featured in both PRINCE2 and Managing Successful Programs (MSP), developed and promoted by the U.K. Office of Government Commerce, ostensibly to help public sector organizations to improve their efficiency, gain better value for money from their commercial activities, and deliver more successful programs and projects.

Development of the Project Management Institute's Organizational Project Management Maturity Model (OPM3®) commenced in 1998 and was released in 2003 (Project Management Institute, 2003). During this time, it generated its own discourse with several hundred volunteers taking part in the discussions, the talk, and the text surrounding its development. Although the content of OPM3 is not widely known beyond those who were involved in its development, and because it is potentially too diverse (with more than 600 "best practices," more than 3,000 "capabilities," and more than 4,000 relationships between capabilities [Cooke-Davies, 2004]) to have clear impact on the construction and conceptualization of practice, it has already had a pervasive influence on the discourse by institutionalizing the notion of project management maturity. As early as 1998, the PMI Standards Committee established a standards project that was initially conceptualized as a guide to creating organizational environments to support management of projects[1]. Both Graham and Englund (1997) and Dinsmore (1999), who was a member of the PMI Standards Committee,

contributed to development of this concept. However, early development of OPM3 was influenced by the discourse in software engineering around capability maturity (Humphrey & Sweet, 1987; Paulk, Weber, Curtis, & Chrissis, 1995), and the consequent emergence of a number of project management maturity models in the mid-1990s (Cooke-Davies, 2004; Cooke-Davies, Schlichter, & Bredillet, 2001; Pennypacker & Grant, 2003), so it is not surprising that the initial idea was re-formulated as an organizational maturity model.

In Europe, the concept of organizational project management maturity has been reinforced by the work of Roland Gareis who has been a leader in promotion of the concept of management **by** projects (Gareis, 1992a) rather than the traditional concern with management **of** projects. In the early 1990s Gareis talked of project-oriented companies performing "simultaneously small and large projects, internal and external projects, and unique and repetitive projects to cope with new challenges and potential from a dynamic business environment" (Gareis, 1992b). He also talked about the need to support the performance of projects with adequate strategies, structures, and cultures.

Through the discussions, conference presentations, and papers of consultants, academics and practitioners, project management as an organizational capability has become an important focus for discourse in the field. Strongly associated with this are ideas of assessment and development in terms of capability maturity. As Cooke-Davies suggested, maturity models "seek to do for organizations seeking to implement strategy through projects what 'bodies of knowledge' have done for individual practitioners seeking to improve their ability to manage projects" (Cooke-Davies, 2004). Interestingly, while there is much written about maturity models, the focus is not so much on the content as on the concept of maturity itself. Although the concept of maturity is generally accepted and much discussed, the aspects of capability that are assessed in the various maturity models (the OPM3 team examined more than 30 extant models (Cooke-Davies et al., 2001), and other approaches to organizational project management capability are, in the literature, often left unstated. When looked at they have strong similarities and some differences. However, while interpretations may differ across industries, application areas and regions, the concept of organizational project management capability and of maturity of that capability has become a widely accepted feature of the discourse.

Another strong emergent theme in organizational project management is the project or program management office (PMO), an organizational entity established to provide coordination or support for management of a number of projects or programs. Although it is generally agreed that one size does not fit all, there is some consistency in the types of functions provided, as found in studies reported by Crawford (2004b), Hobbs and Aubry (2005), and Dai and Wells (2004). See Table 1.

Examination of a number of studies of trends and topic coverage in the project management journals (Betts & Lansley, 1995; Crawford, Pollack, & England, 2006; Kloppenborg & Opfer, 2000; Morris, 2000; Morris, Patel, & Wearne, 2000; Themistocleous & Wearne, 2000; Urli & Urli, 2000; Zobel & Wearne, 2000), the content of a number of the maturity models and other publications relating to aspects of organizational project management capability, reveals common themes. Clearly, the *PMBOK® Guide* both reflects and has had a pervasive influence on the rhetoric of both management of, and by, projects, as integration, time, cost, quality, human resources, communications, risk, and procurement appear consistently in both the general project literature and, in one form or another, in many of the maturity models. From an organizational perspective, they are generally associated not only with project processes, but in some cases at program or portfolio level as well.

Program and portfolio management are emergent themes in the literature. Associated with this is strategic alignment of projects and programs with organizational aims. Further, increasing application of project management to internal projects—particularly in business—changes and, in the financial and government sectors, has raised interest in benefits management and governance, both of which have also been highlighted by the wider discourse on corporate governance. Leadership, performance management, and top management support, including the role of the project/executive sponsor have also attracted increasing interest in recent years. Appendix A of this paper presents topics and themes that are representative of the espoused theories of project management in general, and for organizational project management capability in particular.

Practitioner Experience in Developing Organizational Project Management Capability

The previous section has presented the discursive context, which might reasonably be expected to influence people in organizations as they discuss and take action to develop corporate project management capability. In taking action, they will be drawing ideas from a range of sources and may influenced by this wider discourse in formulating and articulating plans and actions.

Alvesson and Karreman (2000) stated that "with a lot of discourse talk, it is sometimes rather unclear what 'discourse' refers to" (p. 1140). As with any study, there are multiple discourses. This study is specifically comparing two identified discourses—the conceptualization of organizational project management capability as represented in the standards, journal articles, conference papers, and presentations produced by the project management community (Discourse 1); and the practice of organizational project management capability development as represented in the reports of practice in one organization over a four-year period (Discourse 2). There are other discourses that influence the actors in the organization that is the focus of study

Hobbs & Aubry, 2005	Dai & Wells, 2004	Crawford, 2004
Monitoring and controlling project performance	Providing project administrative support	Planning and control support reporting
Development of PM competencies and methodologies	Developing and maintaining PM standards and methods Providing PM consulting and mentoring Providing or arranging PM training	PM methodology and standards PM tools PM competency and career development
Strategic management		Linking projects to strategic goals
Multiproject management	Providing human resources/staffing assistance	Resource management
Organizational learning	Developing and maintaining project historical archives	Audit/review Lessons learned and continuous Improvement Communications and PM community
		Purchasing and contract administration

Table 1: Functions of a project or program management office

and that should be acknowledged. Although discussed and referred to as apparently coherent entities, organizations are themselves an emergent property of discourse. Within each organization, there will be a number of competing discourses; for instance, between functional divisions. Organizational representatives whose voices contribute to the specific discourse under study (Discourse 2) will be influenced by the talk and text of their organizational environment and, as they may come from different disciplines—such as engineering, IT, human resources, accounting, or business administration—their world view and language may be influenced by the discourse in these fields. Each of these overlapping and intersecting discourses potentially shape and are shaped by one another. The boundaries between the various discourses are permeable, and the definition of a particular "discourse" is therefore a theoretical distinction. As van Dijk (1997) said, the definition of the beginning or end of text and talk is a theoretical notion.

Approach

The approach taken can be described as a long range/determination position (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000) in which it is assumed that dominant and widespread discourse—in this case, the wider discourse on organizational project management capability—"shapes both how to talk about subject matter and the meanings that we develop about it" (p. 1138). The focus of concern is a perceived general tendency relative to the research question which is the extent to which the reality of practice reacts to, reflects, and/or influences the espoused theories of organizational project management capability and its development.

Data: Text and Context

The text that has been selected as the basis for this analysis of organizational project management capability development in practice is a transcription of reports made several times a year by organizational representatives attending knowledge-sharing workshops as members of the human systems project management knowledge and benchmarking networks. Membership is entered into on an annual basis so that there is continuity in participation in workshops, a process that facilitates ongoing conversations. Although there are usually a number of attendees at workshops that have not been there before, there are always those who have attended on more than one occasion, often over a number of years. The relationship between many of the participants has developed beyond acquaintance, to friendship, and there is considerable background knowledge about other organizations and the history of their improvement initiatives. Regular attendees are familiar with the process and with one another, and this creates an environment in which new attendees are quickly influenced by a culture of open sharing of knowledge and experience. All organizations represented can be assumed to have a shared and active interest in improving their organizational project management capability as they have made a financial commitment to membership. In fact, the networks have the characteristics of an effective community of practice (Hildreth, 2000; Wenger & Snyder, 2000).

One of the characteristics of an effective community of practice is a common language. For members of the human systems networks, this is provided by the corporate practices questionnaire (CPQ), a tool used for assessing, auditing, and benchmarking of corporate project management practices. Each member uses this and other assessment tools to baseline their corporate project management capability, to develop a plan for improvement and then, through further assessments, to

demonstrate results. Although not conceived as a "maturity model," as described earlier in this paper, the CPQ can be considered in this light, and results can be mapped to CMMI (Chrissis, Konrad, & Shrum, 2003), OPM3 and other maturity models. The CPQ has been shaped by, and shapes, the discourse of network members. It was first developed in 1994, by members of the network, and has subsequently been continuously used and developed by them. As the instrument is used by all member organizations as a basis for their capability improvement programs, its language is familiar to all participants. It provides a common language that is widely used by network members and therefore forms an important aspect of their discourse. It both constructs and is constructed by the talk and text of network members.

Workshops of the network are designed to provide members with an opportunity to address specific issues that are of concern to them, to learn from other members, and to share and create knowledge relating to organizational project management capability. The members select the themes and topics for the workshop in a process that relies upon discussion and negotiation. Although the format of workshops varies, there has been one consistent element—a report by member representatives, usually at the start of each workshop, on current concerns and project management improvement activities and achievements since the last workshop. As member representatives verbally deliver their brief reports, they are directly transcribed onto computer, following the wording presented as closely as possible, and this is projected to enable on-the-spot corrections or amendments by members. Only on rare occasions have members requested that any information be suppressed, sometimes because of information embargoes affecting public companies, and sometimes because the information shared could be of a commercially sensitive nature. These transcribed reports are made available to all members by e-mail and via a member intranet as part of a workshop review report. It is the text taken from the talk of member representatives that forms the basis for the following analysis.

Methodology

The transcripts of verbal reports from one of the member organizations have been selected to represent Discourse 2, the development of organizational project management capability in practice. The organizational text was chosen at random from more than 20 possible sets of text. Selection of a single case study allows in-depth analysis of the text in order to examine the extent to which the theory in use or actuality constructed by the discourse (Discourse 1) reflects the espoused theories as documented in the literature and standards (Discourse 1). A significant feature of the chosen discourse (2) is that the text does not just represent one point in time, but is representative of a four-year period. So, by looking at one organization, it is possible to examine the characteristics and development of the discourse over time as it interacts with and affects both global and local context (van Dijk, 1979, p. 19).

The transcripts of reports have been coded by two researchers and analyzed using proprietary text analysis software. Both a priori and emergent codes were used. The a priori codes were chosen as representative of the espoused theories of project managers and researchers as presented in the project management literature and standards. These codes were based on 48 topics identified from review of topic coverage in project management journal articles (Themistocleous & Wearne, 2000) and project management standards and guides (Crawford, 2004a; Crawford et al., 2006). To this were added a number of terms representative of organizational project management as outlined in the conceptualization of organizational project management capability section of this paper. A small number of emergent codes represent recurring themes in the transcripts of reports that were not clearly covered by the a priori codes and which became evident to the researchers as they reviewed the text. These codes related both to characteristics of the text (e.g., nature of language used) and the context (e.g., business change/restructuring) (Appendix A). Where text related to more than one topic or theme, multiple codes were applied. For instance, if cost was mentioned in the context of organizationwide project management processes or methodology, the text would be coded both for "Cost Management" (6) and "PM Policies, Processes, Methodology & Tools" (58).

Context

To maintain confidentiality, the organization whose report transcriptions have been selected for analysis will be referred to as The Organization. Reports cover from 2000 to 2004. At the start of this period, the IT division, tasked with improving their performance in management of projects, joined the Network to enable them to establish a baseline for performance using the Network's assessment tools, to identify strengths and weaknesses and to develop an improvement plan. Within a year of joining the Network, the IT capability of The Organization was outsourced. Following a presentation to representatives of a number of divisions, The Organization decided to continue its membership of the Network. Initially, this was driven by the internal audit function of The Organization, which saw a strong linkage between the performance of projects, particularly related to change, and the financial performance of the organization, and were therefore very supportive of organizational improvement to manage projects.

Throughout this period, The Organization has had over 20,000 employees, and a number of local and globally distributed subsidiary companies. It is an extremely complex organization and the part directly participating in the Network has a number of divisions or business units. As often happens, "ownership" of Network membership was required to be held by one division, and this changed from time to time during the period of membership. As Network membership requires the nomination of one or two key representatives, these

representatives and the guests they bring with them to Network meetings will change from time to time. Other reasons for change in the individuals participating are staff changes including resignations, retirements, promotions, and relocations. However, there is generally a reasonable degree of consistency, and this was the case with The Organization. The main changes were from the IT division, to the internal audit function, and then to representatives of the corporate program office when it was formed in 2003.

Analysis

The relationship between the reality of practice (Discourse 2) and the espoused theories of organizational project management capability and its development (Discourse 1, Appendix A) was first analyzed by comparing the recurrence of themes from Discourse 1 in the transcripts of reports from The Organization (Discourse 2). The focus of their reports was current concerns and project management improvement activities and achievements at various times over a four-year period.

The most popular themes or topics for The Organization, over a four-year period, were:

- PMO/support office
- Reporting
- Project management policies, processes, methodology, and tools
- Benefits management
- Project management competence and career development
- Governance
- **IT/software**
- **Business change**
- Management by projects
- Organizational learning.

Of these themes, only PMO/support office; reporting; project management policies, processes, methodology and tools; benefits management; and project management competence and career development were mentioned in every year. Emergent themes relating to context are marked in bold, indicating that business change and IT/software were significant issues for The Organization at one time or another during the period of study. All of the most popular topics/themes are with organizational project management capability rather than with individual projects.

Topics and themes mentioned but with lower frequency and not in each of the four years were as follows in Table 2.

Other topics and themes listed in Appendix A were not evident in the text. This initial analysis confirmed that the reality of practice reflects the espoused theories of organizational project management capability and its development. The only topics and themes not mentioned in practice are maturity and ethics/rules of conduct. Improvement programs were generally implied and improvement in a general sense mentioned occasionally, but no coherent approach to capability improvement was evident in the text. Analysis of trends over the period of study will be covered in the following, more detailed discussion.

Discussion

A preliminary analysis of key themes in the text indicates a relationship between the discussion of organizational project management in the literature and standards (Discourse 1) representing espoused theories and the expressed concerns and project management improvement activities and achievements of "owner" of organizational project management capability in The Organization. It is particularly interesting that the majority of the themes identified in the text did relate to organizational project management capability and that terms more directly related to management of individual projects, specifically time/schedule and cost did not feature strongly even in the context of organizationwide application. The following discussion will deal with each of the popular themes, and will include treatment of changes in emphasis of each of these themes over the period of study.

Organizational Project Management Capability

PMO/Support Office

This was the most important and recurring theme in the text, appearing in every year of the study period, but peaking in 2003 when an enterprise program office (EPO) was established. The concept was first mentioned in 2000 in the context of a "pilot scheme where the project office works with the project manager before startup of a project as a way of improving project performance and delivery." The voice at this time was that of the IT division prior to the outsourcing of this function. In 2001, there was reference to "each division setting up their own PSO or each providing similar services" and the impact of the Network discourse was evidenced by a report that

Mentioned More Than Once	Mentioned Only Once
• Project monitoring control • *Sponsorship* • Risk management • Quality management • *Program management* • *Community* • Strategic alignment • Project initiation/startup • **Outsourcing** • Project Closeout/finalization • *Benchmarking* • Information/communication Management • Stakeholder/relationship Management	• *Top management support* • *Resource management* • Requirements management • Quality management • Estimating • *Culture* • Cost management • **Contractors**

Note: Items marked in bold are emergent themes. Items in italics relate to organizational project management rather than the managemant of individual projects.

Table 2: Lower frequency topics and themes

"a couple of the business units that attended the last workshop have used that input in setting up their own PSOs." In 2002, the discussion continued to refer to divisional project support functions. In 2003, an Enterprise Program Office was established based on a written recommendation to management by the internal audit function "to improve commercial outcomes of projects across [The Organization]."

Near the end of 2003, the representative of The Organization (including representatives of internal audit and one or two divisions) reported that there were "good early signs." Indicative of the different views that exist even within one organization, there were varied perceptions of the expectations, roles, and function of the EPO. While the divisions were looking to it for "solutions and support," it was perceived by some as "more financially and reporting driven," yet earlier it was claimed that the purpose was to "go well beyond reporting," operating in "a more low profile way, responding as required to the circumstances that arise in order to keep the wheels turning." Others described the intended role of the EPO as "looking at a high level vision for projects" including the "financial side from business plan and business case to business implementation review and getting this across to the project managers who often come from an operational background." A concern was expressed that many projects were not defined as such, were funded from operational budgets, and did not have "visibility." Also near the end of 2003, there was mention of an "intranet site that sets some high level policies in terms of projects—business plan, business case, benefits realization, status reporting formats and planning guidelines."

Although the EPO was only established in early 2003, there was already mention in that year of "difficulties in terms of management buy-in to support continuity," and also of the set-up of divisional support offices. In 2004, the participation in the Network changed. Internal audit was no longer participating in the network, and participation was largely by a small number of committed and interested individuals. Messages became mixed—varying from a recap of the formation of the EPO in 2003, to expressions of concern, on more than one occasion, that it was a "diverse organization" and that there was "no clear central program office." By the end of 2004, the role of the EPO had been refocused on support of organizational change initiatives and was restated as that of consolidating "reporting (cost and benefits) and monitoring of KPIs" of the change initiatives. It was stated that the EPO, now apparently a somewhat different entity than had been set up at the start of 2003, was "charged with increasing execution capability" of the organization.

Reporting

Discussion of reporting peaked in 2004. Up until this time, it was primarily discussed in passing as one of the roles of the EPO, although there was mention of a "home grown project tracking system… plus Web-based project reporting system from the central server," which would enable a central registry of projects. Little more was said specifically about reporting until 2004. Early in the year, they were "looking at the reporting of small projects—which together are to deliver significant benefit and add up to a considerable cost" with "concerns about data integrity in reporting." These and other concerns appear to have influenced a move to implementation of software to provide integrated project reporting across the organization.

PM Policies, Processes, Methodology, and Tools

Discussion of this topic was fairly even throughout the period of study, but peaked in 2004, as did the volume of discussion in general. In 2001, although senior management had "given authority to achieve consistency in PM processes," the organizational representatives reported a "challenge to apply a project/program discipline across the group" as they had "pockets of project managers with different processes and governance." This was further addressed in 2002, in the context of reviewing methodologies that were "different across various areas." They were "aiming to get people to use the same methodologies," but by 2003, they were meeting resistance and finding that "some of the processes appear too cumbersome to project managers." However, there were other indications that the pressure to perform was increasing as well as a concern that project managers were "just getting projects done quickly so that benefits can be realized—often without due process."

By 2004, they had initiated a specific project to establish a "standard methodology through the entire life cycle of projects" across the organization and the earlier concern about "cumbersome" processes was reflected in a desire for "minimum governance and reporting." A sense of tension between desire for corporate control and standardization and corporate pressure for performance, allied with project management reluctance to follow process, emerges from the text.

Benefits Management

Benefits are referred to in each year of the study period but with increasing emphasis in 2003 and 2004. Benefits tracking is first mentioned in 2000. In 2001, there is mention of the rollout of a tool for benefits realization and reporting "with interesting feedback." Benefits are discussed in association with "definition, development and monitoring of KPIs" and value of project benefits is related to total project "spend." This discussion has a board-level dimension, reflected in the statement (2002) that the "board has realized how much is spent on projects so are focusing on linking to benefits" with attempts to "express project benefits in relation to P & L on the balance sheet." The corporate project management representatives were concerned, however, that senior management "doesn't recognize what is required to improve scoping and benefits reporting." Throughout 2003 and 2004, there is increasing reference to "benefits realization."

PM Competence and Career Development
This topic has a number of subsidiary themes, including the following:

- Training
- Mentoring
- Human factors
- Competence
- Career development
- Accreditation.

Training and competence are the predominant subthemes. As early as 2000, there is an expressed aim to achieve professional accreditation of project managers across the organization and there is reference in 2002 and 2003 to application of project/program discipline and need for professional training of project managers, many of whom are *thrown into the position.* One reason given for concern with competence of project managers was that they had "a couple of projects that could have gone better and this has highlighted need to improve project management on a formal level." Saying that some "projects could have gone better" was an understatement, as the organization, like many others, had experienced a number of significant failures. Throughout 2004, there was continued reference to assessment of competence to "get an organizational benchmark" and to providing a "development program for all individuals."

Governance
Reference to governance begins in 2001 and peaks in 2002. This timing is interesting as it coincides with a number of regulatory initiatives aimed at improving governance such as OECD (OECD, 2004) Principles of Corporate Governance, the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002, aimed at protecting investors by improving the accuracy and reliability of corporate disclosures, and the Basel II New Accord, revising international standards applicable to financial institutions, released in January 2001 (Basel Committee on Banking Supervision, 2001). The focus on corporate governance, as part of a wider discourse, clearly has an influence on the language and activities of people in The Organization at this time. Although governance must have been in place prior to this time, it seems that the term started to become popular to cover a range of activities that might well have been referred to in a different way previously. In 2001, The Organization representatives recognize that there are different approaches to governance throughout the organization and in 2002 identify a "split between project governance and business-as-usual governance." Although it is seen as important, there are three references to a desire for "minimum governance," which appear related to the expressed concerns not to burden the project management community with "cumbersome" processes, especially if they may stand in the way of "delivery."

Governance potentially represents an instance of the influence of practice (Discourse 2) on Discourse 1, as it is a relatively new theme in the project management literature. While governance was mentioned in the study text from 2001 onward, governance only began to appear as a theme in conference presentations in 2004, as did the Association for Project Management's guide to governance of project management (Association for Project Management, 2004).

IT/Software
Apart from reference to outsourcing of the IT division in 2000, there is no reference to IT/Software until 2002, when the "rollout" of a project to provide a standard project management methodology to cover the "entire life cycle of projects" across the organization is first mentioned. As this progresses, there is mention in 2003 of concern with "linking with ERP systems… streamlining reporting, improving efficiency." An intranet site is mentioned along with concern that "PMs may not be aware of it, may find it cumbersome, may be concerned that it is all financially driven" because it does not deal with such "project management issues such as stakeholder management" and there is "confusion as to the process to follow." Reflecting these concerns, there are subsequent references, on several occasions, to "relaunch" of the intranet site. In 2004, discussion of the intranet site and standard methodology are overtaken by focus on the identification of software that will provide enterprisewide "project and program perspectives." In selecting the software, they expressed a desire for "full integration of reporting and other functionality" and confidence that the supplier was a "market leader in development of this kind of project." It was clearly also important that the software providers were "very amenable to making changes" and "easy to deal with."

Management by Projects
An organization-wide approach to project management is inherent in much of the general reporting from the representatives of The Organization, as already discussed above. In each instance, when they refer explicitly to projects as a way of doing business, it is associated with direct or implied reference to senior management. In 2001, there is reference to the CEO seeing the organization as "becoming more project focused" and in 2002 of "senior executives taking project management seriously." Underlying this is an ongoing concern with retaining senior management support, a concern that is shared and well documented elsewhere (Thomas, Delisle, & Jugdev, 2002). Therefore, any instance of expressed senior management support is reported as an achievement.

Organizational Learning
Organizational learning comprises both knowledge management and lessons learned. It is also associated with project management community. There are several references to a "PM Forum," set up in 2002, initially looking at areas that were not being handled well, such as project closings, and setting up groups to examine them. There is no indication to suggest that these initiatives continued or had any significant impact.

The primary interest in knowledge management appears focused on the use of contractors and concerns about minimizing the "external consultant spend and keep[ing] knowledge in-house." In 2004, they reported that "a small team of six people is looking at

setting up our own KM system." As with project management forums, there was no indication of the success or continuity of this initiative, and, although there was one reference to recognition that projects might have been handled more effectively, there was very little evidence that organizational learning is a sustained interest.

Text and Context

Business Change

This is clearly an important contextual issue, as there is reference to business change throughout the study period. "Restructuring" occurs in 2000, 2001, and 2002. By 2003, the discourse has changed so that now, instead of "restructuring," there is reference to "transformation." The influence of this "restructuring" and "transformation" can be seen in various ways. First, it affects the voices that present the reports on current concerns and activities in terms of organizational project management. As mentioned earlier, this shifted from the IT division to the wider organization, initially driven by people from internal audit although, on one occasion, "four people from four different areas" attended, indicating "how diverse [The Organization] is in terms of project management." When the EPO was formed, the people responsible for the EPO were the dominant voice, but in 2004, this dominance was weakened and can be seen in some of the conflicting messages being presented.

The presentation of business change as "transformation," as a consistent theme in Discourse 2 from 2003 onwards, reflects the wider discourse of business, management, and organizational development. In a paper reviewing the major areas of focus in the literature base of the organizational development field (covering empirical findings, theory, practice, applications, and interventions) (Piotrowski & Armstrong, 2004) "organizational or transformational change" was identified as the most popular area of study in the period from 1992 to 2003.

The Nature of Language

The affect of business change in the "transformation" phase can be seen by looking beyond the organizational project management themes to the nature of language used. The pace and tone of the text change noticeably in 2003. Prior to this, the language is relatively placid. The terms "progressing with," "aiming for," "revamping," and "looking at" are used on a number of occasions in the periods from 2000 through 2002 in reporting on the kinds of concerns and activities being undertaken. In 2003, the pace and nature of activity appears to increase. There is a sense that the people reporting are feeling a degree of pressure to perform which is expressed in terms such as "fast track"—which is repeated on several occasions throughout 2003 and 2004—and in association with other terms such as the need to "fast track" to "achieve aggressive targets." This sense of pressure to perform is reinforced by phrases such as "accelerated delivery," "delivering on promises," "execution capability crucial," and "charged with increasing execution capability."

The phrases "looking at" and "rolling out" appear regularly throughout the entire study period and appear to be characteristic of the ongoing discourse of organizational project management capability improvement, not only within The Organization but among all the organizations involved with the Network. In a keyword analysis of the text of reports from all organizations in the network from 2000 to 2005, the phrase "looking at" was highlighted as unusually frequent words in this body of text as compared to a reference corpus.

Surprisingly, given that the representatives of The Organization were, by their membership in the Network, interested in improving organizational project management capability, there were few references to improvement and no references to any coherent improvement program. There is no sense, either implicit or explicit, of a clear plan for improvement. The concerns, activities, and achievements that are reported appear relatively ad hoc and driven by the pressures of the moment; although, given the dominance of the concept in the organizational project management rhetoric, there are no direct use of the term "maturity" and/or any text that could be construed as referring to or implying the concept. Of the organizational project management capability-related terms (49 to 62 in Appendix A), the only terms that do not appear at all, either directly or by implication, are "maturity" and "ethics/rules of conduct." Although there is no reference to, or indication that there is, any coherent "improvement program," there is a general sense of striving for improvement, albeit with no clearly stated baseline or goals. The lack of baseline and improvement goals is interesting, as The Organization did use the Network tools to assess their organizational project management capability. But there is no evidence in the text to suggest that the feedback from this was used to inform and guide improvement. This is a point of difference between the discourse within The Organization and the discourse within other organizations involved in the Network, as analysis of the discourse in some other organizations over the same period reflects a far stronger and more coherent commitment to improvement of organizational project management capability. The reality of experience within The Organization, however, demonstrates that despite expressed commitment to improvement, organizations do not necessarily follow the step-by-step progress toward "maturity" of their project management capability as promoted in the literature and standards.

Conclusion

This paper has used the principles of discourse analysis as a framework for studying the extent to which practice reflects the espoused theories of organizational project management capability development. This has been done by comparing two discourses, one representing the espoused theories of project management practitioners (Discourse 1) and the other representing the reality of practice (Discourse 2).

The evolution of project management, as a field of practice brought into being through the conversations, writing, and collaborative activities of practitioners, consultants, and academics has been described as a journey from the conversations of senior practitioners and application of tools and techniques on stand-alone projects to the conceptualization of project management as an organizational capability. Themes and topics evident in the literature, standards, and guides have been identified as representative of the espoused theories of project management practitioners (Discourse 1). The text of periodic reports on current concerns and project management improvement activities and achievements of one organization over a four-year period have been analyzed as an instance of practice (Discourse 2).

The underlying proposition is that discourses are constructive and constantly shaping, and being shaped by, their context and other discourses. Results of analysis demonstrate that the discourse of practice (Discourse 2) does reflect the majority of key themes specific to organizational project management capability represented in project management literature, standards, and guides (Discourse 1, Appendix A). Analysis indicates that those taking an organizational view of project management capability show little interest in topics and themes that have traditionally been applied to individual or stand-alone projects (e.g., time, cost, and quality), and significantly more interest in those topics and themes that reflect a wider organizational perspective. However, although the concept of maturity is pervasive in Discourse 1, it does not appear either directly or indirectly in practice (Discourse 2). Those engaged in the reality of organizational project management capability development are more concerned with capability and results than they are with the concept of maturity. Reference to ethics and rules of conduct is similarly absent from the discourse of practice. In this particular text (The Organization), there is no evidence of any coherent plan for improvement. Instead, there are a number of initiatives undertaken in a relatively ad-hoc manner responding to increasing pressure from senior management to deliver desired benefits. The path for development appears opportunistic and highly subject to changes in organizational structure and priorities.

The influence of other discourses is evident in the impact of demand for higher standards of corporate governance and in the effect of restructuring and business change, also referred to as "transformation," reflecting a key preoccupation of the organizational development field.

This in-depth study of the discourse of organizational project management capability development in one company over a four-year period provides a very useful insight into the reality of practice, and the extent to which it reflects or may influence espoused theories as embodied in project management literature, standards, and guides. Although generalization is not possible on the basis of one case, additional studies along similar lines will be the subject of future research, leading to opportunities for generalization across multiple cases.

Notes

[1] The author was a member of the PMI Standards Committee when this standards project was initiated.

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Appendix A: Codes Used in Text Analysis

48 Topics/Themes from PM Literature, Standards and Guides (Crawford, 2004)		Selected Organizational PM Capability-Related Terms	Context
1. Benefits management	25. Project closeout/ finalization	49. Benchmarking	63. Business change/ restructuring
2. Business case	26. Project context/ environment	50. Improvement programs	64. Contractors
3. Change control	27. Project evaluation review	51. Ethics/rules of conduct	65. IT/software
4. Configuration management	28. Project initiation/start-up	52. Culture	66. Outsourcing
5. Conflict management	29. Project life cycle/ project phases	53. Governance	
6. Cost management	30. Project monitoring control	54. Management by projects	
7. Design management	31. Project organization	55. Maturity	
8. Document management	32. Project planning	56. Community	
9. Estimating	33. Quality management	57. Competence career development	
10. Financial management	34. Regulations	58. Policies, processes, methodology tools	
11. Goals, objectives and strategies	35. Reporting	59. PMO/support office	
12. Information/ communication management	36. Requirements management	60. Portfolio management	
13. Integration management	*37. Resource management*	61. Sponsorship*	
14. Leadership	38. Risk management	62. Top management support	
15. Legal issues	39. Safety, health and environment		
16. Marketing	40. Stakeholder/relationship management		
17. Negotiation	*41. Strategic alignment*		
18. Organizational learning (inc. Lessons)	42. Success		
19. Performance measurement (inc. EVM)	43. Team building/ development/teamwork		
20. Personnel/human resource management	44. Technology management		
21. Problem solving	45. Testing, commissioning handover/acceptance		
22. Procurement	46. Time management/ scheduling/phasing		
23. Program/programme management	47. Value management		
24. Project appraisal	48. Work content and scope management		

Note: Items shown in italics above are more directly related to organizational project management capability than to the management of individual projects.