

High Time to Tap the Enormous Power of Informal Project Management

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Leveraging project management for excellence, growth and transformation



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A suggested structured approach to tap few drops from the sea of immense wisdom driven by experience and power of instinctive & intuitive thinking from the informal part of all of us. This may give us a unique direction to introspect and incorporate the missing link in approaches and methodologies to execute the projects successfully.

1.1 Abstract

- ◆ India's richness of its glorious past is reflected through the best of monuments / temples built centuries ago..Like Taj Mahal, counted in the seven wonders of world..
- ◆ Just look at these facts :
- ◆ The construction of Taj Mahal started in 1631
- ◆ 22,000 laborers and 1,000 elephants.
- ◆ It was built entirely out of white marble, which was brought in from all over India and central Asia.
- ◆ With expenditure of approximately 32 million rupees (approx US \$68000), was finally completed in the year 1653.
- ◆ Now can we even imagine who managed such spectacular project with so much material, resources, money and with schedule spanning over 22 years without any deviation in objective to deliver the product , known by world as "taj mahal ???
- ◆when there was hardly any formal project management education available!!! Forget the project management and the technological advancement, we are enjoying and utilizing today on every project today.
- ◆ Still 70 % of Projects fails???
- ◆ Do we need to introspect seriously and learn from the historical past and experience India is having scattered at every corner geographically? The incredible power of visionary & creative human resources in Indian citizens present through ages & informal ways of converting their visions to realities need to be felt , understood, carefully analyzed and key learning from this exercise should be tried to integrate in project management education & techniques today to enhance the success rate of the projects we handle today.

The objective of this paper is to suggest a structured methodology to make a conscience effort to get the best of informal project management techniques & solutions and to integrate with the formal project management domain for bridging the missing link required to deliver the projects successfully as far as possible.



1.2 Keywords:

FPM – Formal Project Management

IPM – Informal Project Management

IQ – Intelligent Quotient

MQ – Management Quotient

EQ – Emotional Quotient

EI – Emotional Intelligence

AI – Artificial Intelligence

II – Informal Intelligence


1.3 Introduction :

Though every one of us has experienced the magic and power behind the surprising & charismatic works performed by the so called illiterate and uneducated people living in remotest parts of the country. But would have never given a serious thought of acknowledging that there is something to learn from their experience of executing extraordinary things without the knowledge & support of formal way of addressing such work.

Belief in philosophy of born project managers or dependence on raw and informal experience driven approach to take intuitive, practical & correct decisions to handle even very complicated tasks needs to be carefully revisited. Further most sustainable and practical way of tapping this power of informal processes needs to be formalized, institutionalized and should be made part of our educational systems to inculcate this approach of out of box visionary thinking to find solution to problems. Laboratory made project managers needs to be given the realistic flare of practical situations and should be adequately exposed to the formal interactions of extraordinary and invaluable experience of the informal performers to be better equipped in future.

1.3.1 What is the problem ?

The problem which is to be addressed via this paper has enormous challenges to focus on practical and viable techniques of tapping the vast power of various aspects of informal project mgmt. The biggest challenge is to quantify the intangible skills and convert them in to a format which could be made part of the curriculum of formal project management education to get the benefits. It is quite similar to mapping the intelligence of human being to computers, where neural network based artificial intelligence is playing a very vital role. Such huge efforts to identify such persons /



approaches / informal process scattered over wide geographical places with honest intentions of capturing such thoughts / experiences / decisions / actions and converting them to the useful, searchable database of contextual relevance is the guided path and strategy to deliver the useful results from this paper.

I would like to make it explicitly clear here that this paper in no way suggest that we should rely completely on informal or formal techniques of project management to address any problem but is suggested hereby only that if we can work towards quantifying the intangible skills, explore the treasury of extraordinary historical experience and start embracing the art of making intuitive correct judgments and various other similar aspects of informal intelligence (II) / project management in a structured and formal way, then it will definitely help us to reduce the failure of projects handled with most advanced techniques of formal project management available today. The solution lies in integration & merger of both approaches based on intelligent and judicious mix keeping in mind the contextual relevance & significance of each of them.

1.3.2 Why is it interesting and important?


To reflect the period through which informal project management is exercised in our country and to feel the marvelous and wonderful aspects of the same in present times and touching our today's lives, I would like to highlight the process and facts followed by the famous Mumbai Dabbawallah's as below:

- ✦ Started in the 1880s , 4500 semi-literate dabbawalas collect and deliver 175,000 tiffin boxes covering more than 25 kms of public transport, 10 kms on foot and involving multiple transfer points with their own coding system for the error-free delivery
- ✦ They have achieved virtual six-sigma quality with zero documentation?
- ✦ The Dabbawalla's operations is an excellent model of elegant logistics, operational efficiency & supply chain management with absolutely astonishing fact that this model is completely home grown model envisioned, developed and perfected by individuals who are not exposed to formal scientific methods procedures or principles of management.

It is really a remarkable, live and operational example of the capacities and capabilities of informal project management. Most importantly attitude of competitive collaboration seen and felt is equally unusual. Looking at the entire operation, process is competitive at the customers' end but united at the delivery end, ensuring their survival for more than 120 years. Is their informal business model worth replicating in today's digital age is the big question??

1.3.3 Why is it difficult?

There are various untold and unpublished examples of informal excellence presence all across all of us. In schools, colleges, organizations and in society as a whole, where we have witnessed this and felt also. In even formal organizations, there are



certain employees whose intuition coupled with experience has shown the solution to even very complex problems of corporate world and it is not a new phenomenon. But how to tap such potentials for more useful and practical aspect is the big question???

1.4 The Methodology / Process Followed

In most basic terms the informal PM is the unplanned execution of work without adhering to standard procedures, hierarchy or rules, emphasis here is getting the work done rather than hooked in procedures. In informal environments, project managers can approach the projects in way they deem appropriate and is driven by their experience, instinct and judgment taking capability.

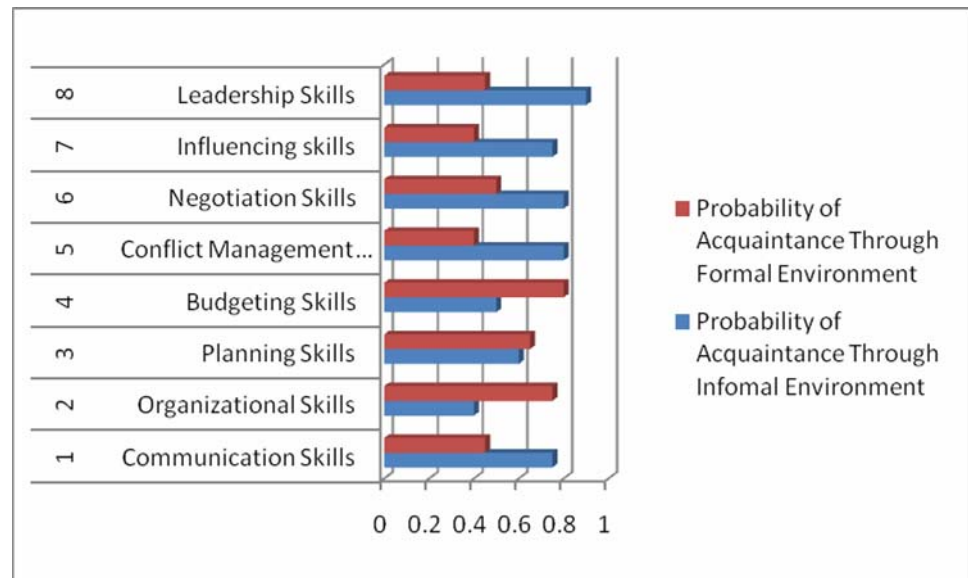
Informal approach is always subjected to criticism in corridors of formal and big organizational but the fact remains that we cannot rule out the informal existence of the same in each and every stage of formal project management. Informal solutions have been the integrated but ignored part of formal planned approaches and had been always live subconsciously and indirectly through the dreams, thoughts & actions of charismatic leaders, program and Project managers & team members driven by strong backing of individual's personal experience, intuitive skills and visionary dreams which can never be acquired by a formal course, degree or session on formal project management.

A survey is being done by circulation to individuals of widely varying background to get the inputs on the belief on the probability of acquaintance of important aspects of the essential skills required for a successful project manager through Informal or Formal environment?? The 8 skills have been included in this survey and each participant was asked to rate on the probability factor (from 0 to 1) for each of the skill. This survey was sent to the peoples varying from the formal project managers, program managers in formal organizations as well as to the other's involved in various projects in smaller organizations following more informal ways to handle the projects and even to persons not directly / indirectly associated with projects handling.

1.4.1 Sample survey format adopted :

Survey Form to compare the ways the essential skills for a successful Project Handling can be acquired ?			
Sr No	Essential Skills for	Probability of Acquaintance	
	Successful Projects	Through Infomal Environment	Through Formal Environment
1	Communication Skills		
2	Organizational Skills		
3	Planning Skills		
4	Budgeting Skills		
5	Conflict Management Skills		
6	Negotiation Skills		
7	Influencing skills		
8	Leadership Skills		
	Note : please rate the probability between 0 to 1 for each skill as you deem appropriate.		
	Name : Occupation : Mobile : Email :	Signature	

1.4.2 Results Of Survey :



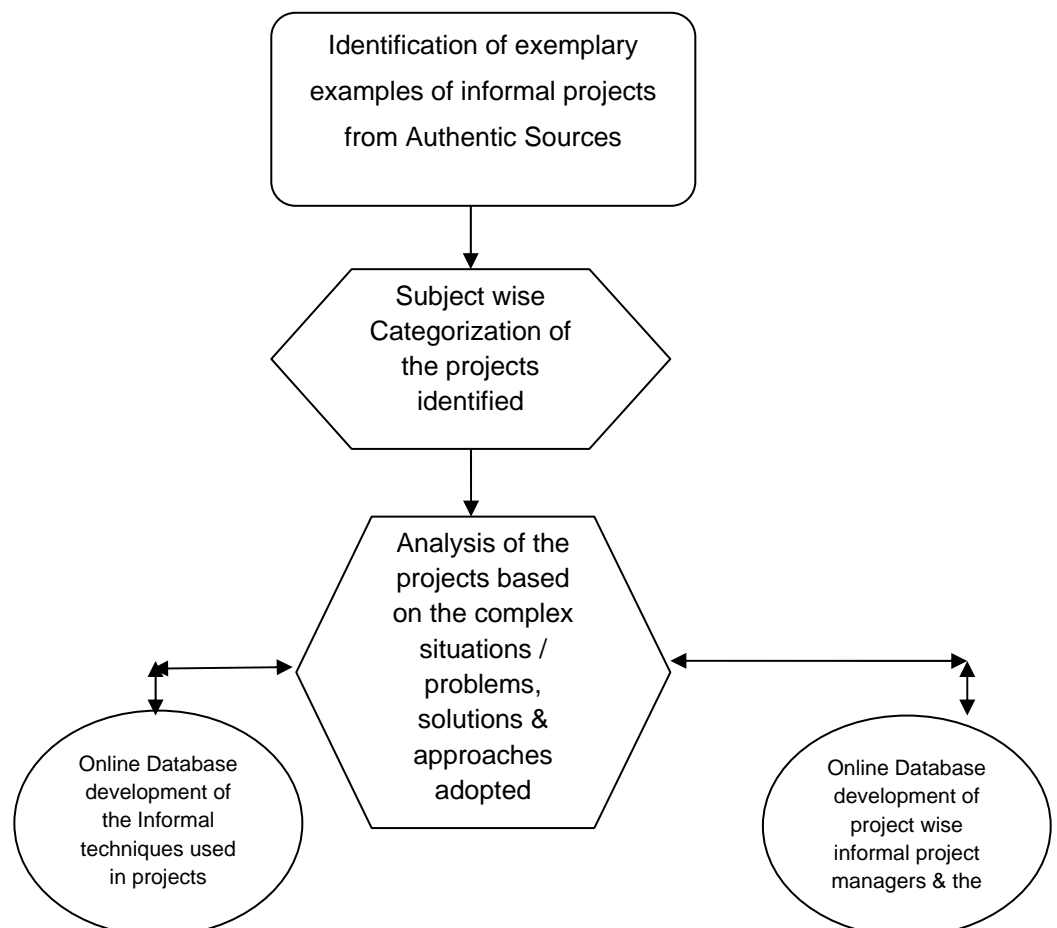
More deep analysis of outcome of this exercise will help us understand that though variation in degree / rating to each skill may be due to subjective perceptual difference in viewing each of them and correlating but it cannot be ruled out that there is a strong argument in favor of the role informal environment can play and playing in making the successful project managers. As highlighted earlier informal project management should be seen as complimentary to fill the gap in getting the solutions, where formal processes get to a saturated point and could not deliver further.

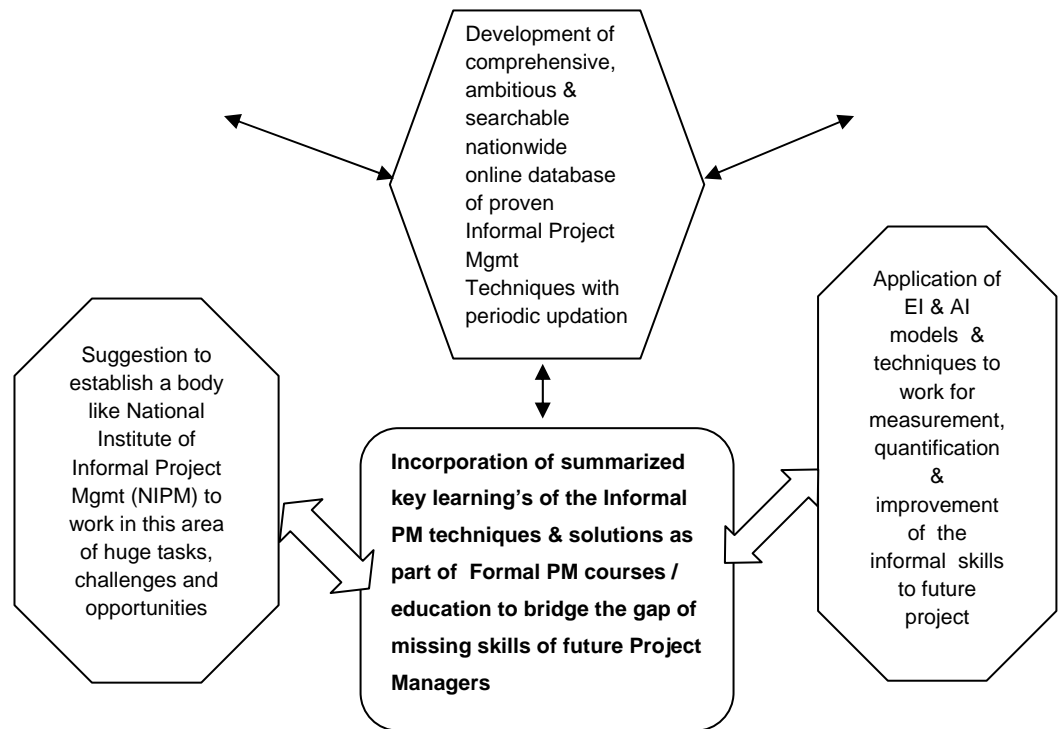
This first step towards this is the most important work which requires extensive work to search, capture and identify the best of successful projects executed with informal approach. The selection of projects / work should be based on the criteria of most stringent and justified aspects of absolutely amazing way of handling the man, material and resources by the persons / communities with extraordinary zeal and enthusiasm coupled with unmatched skills of instinct and intuition where the sustained and focused efforts has delivered astonishing products / projects. Important part of this phase is to have focused endeavors towards critically examining and recording the problem, solution and key learning's from each of such projects identified and then building a knowledge repository / database categorized contextually to the maximum feasible extent.

Once inventory of broad successful projects are developed, we need to work towards finding the techniques and methodology followed in such projects executed informally and also on the set of skills possessed by each of the key persons (informal project managers) associated with these informally executed project. The informal skill set matrix is required to be developed out of these thorough case studies derived from each of the project / persons and should be made the part of database.

Though I agree that at the first instance it seems absolutely unrealistic and imaginary to have such thought of making an effort to identify and tap such vast resources of intangible and informal nature and to make this sea of practical knowledge converted to useful index but I strongly feel that though it is quite long and cumulative process of building such thing but even if some few percentage of formal projects handled today are enlightened with this light of IPM approaches and solutions, the purpose of this effort will be a justified one. Moreover this may bring another aspect of not only motivating formal project managers by exposing them to realize the kind of difficult environment in which such projects were executed but also provide them a valid, authentic and absolutely strong reason to come out of their comfort zones, think out of box and adopt more innovative and informal ways of finding the solutions to the problems faced by them using this.

Flow Chart of Suggestive Methodology to Tap The power of IPM





I would like to give some of the best historical examples of wonderful and magnificent works done centuries ago by our own people obviously without the knowledge of the formal practices and education of project management below as the starting point to follow the methodology suggested in the flow chart above to begin the huge effort required for to formally tap the benefits of IPM.

Top 10 historical projects executed in india well before the advent of formal PM (FPM)

- ♣ **1) The Making of Qutub Minar :** World's tallest brick minaret with a height of 72.5 meters (237.8 ft). Built in 1193 under the orders of India's first Muslim ruler Qutb-ud-din Aibak,
- ♣ **2) The Making of Jantar Mantar :** Built in 18th century, Maharaja Jai Singh II of Jaipur. means calculation instrument. With purpose to compile astronomical tables, predict the times and movements of the sun, moon and planets.
- ♣ **3) The Making of Amber Fort Jaipur :** is known for its unique artistic style, ornate and breathtaking artistic mastery. Constructed of white and red sandstone.
- ♣ **4) Making of Ajanta Caves :** Aurangabad. Complex of 29 rock-hewn monastic residences (Viharas) and monument halls dates to the 2nd century BC


- ◆ **5) Making of Ellora Caves:** Aurangabad. Complex of cave architecture, considered the epitome of this genre, contains 34 caves. Built 5th - 7th century AD.
- ◆ **6) Making of Pink (City) Palace,** Built of pink sandstone , is the most imposing building at the City Palace of Jaipur.
- ◆ **7) Making of Golden Temple, Amritsar.** Real name is Harmandir Sahib. The site is actually a complex of buildings surrounded by a lake. originally built in 1604,
- ◆ **8) Making of Red Fort, Old Delhi.** This stunning palace built in 1639 by Shah Jahan, fort is surrounded by a 1.5 mile wall, which is as high as 60 feet, on the sides facing the city.
- ◆ **9) Making of Mehrangarh Fort, Jodhpur.** One of the largest forts in India, is located high on a hill and is surrounded by thick walls with several palatial buildings.
- ◆ **10) Making of Brihadeeswarar Temple :** Built in 1010 AD by Raja Raja Chola in Thanjavur, 130,000 tons of granite. The 60-metre tall Vimana and Nandi (sacred bull), carved out of a single rock, 16 feet long and 13 feet high are main structures.

Though the list is a sample of 10, it can be endless where we can build the repository of such projects to start with. To highlight and focus on the further steps of building the skill sets which can be identified after the study of the profiles of the brilliant persons who were the main driving force behind. We can work towards by first identifying the key persons , architects , engineers , entrepreneurs etc and then preparing the skill matrix based on the various skills possessed by them.

We can take the example of Mr **Dhiru Bhai Ambani**, an Indian rags-to-riches business tycoon who founded Reliance Industries in Mumbai . From an initial investment of a mere Rs. 15000 in 1958 to start a trading house, followed by the setting up of his own tiny manufacturing facility in Gujarat in 1966, Ambani, Son of a rural school teacher, has managed to build up a synthetic yarn, textiles and petrochemicals empire . Based on studies ,main skills of Mr Ambani are :

- ◆ Sharp business acumen and a spirit of adventure
- ◆ Exceptional risk-taking abilities
- ◆ Ability to see the larger picture and think big
- ◆ Innovative funding strategies
- ◆ Inspiration coupled with hard work and the “can-do” spirit
- ◆ Identification of informal / formal power centers and management of them

These skills can be made as the part of intangible and informal skills matrix and can be made available online. Further their measurement and continuous improvement part should be addressed via the various models of Emotional Intelligence (EI).



Overall methodology suggested here is to focus on such projects & persons and to develop a structured systematic process, which can be institutionalized as a system of imparting informal project management skills to our new and next generation project managers so that this sea of proven knowledge and experience can be tapped effectively & integrated with formal stream of producing future project managers.

1.4.3 The Conclusion & Future Work

The use of informal skills (acquired either by birth or learned through the practical experience of every moment spent) to find the solutions to daily life problems by each of us is not a phenomenon discovered just now, its present through ages. The subconscious and effective use of intelligence for their own survival by human being cannot be explained and taught in any formal classroom. There could not be a scope defined when we are talking to the arenas and domain of informal project management but definitely we can work towards building and deploying the smart informal project managers at right place and at right time.

Effective project managers are required to have both “hard” technical skills to help control the iron triangle of time, cost and functional scope as well as relationship management skills to work effectively with people and get the best out of them. In addition to both IQ and MQ, EQ is also felt to be most important of all to be a successful PM. In formal organizations, its strongly believed that in possession of the informal intelligence of tapping to the power equations and addressing the requirement of power centers also plays a very vital role for the success of a project manager or project. And that is never formally told or taught and can be learned informally only.

There is intense and immense amount of work which can be set as the goal in future if we want to bridge the gap between FPM and IPM. Though the use of informal techniques can reduce the cost and time in projects but one aspect where focus could be is to enhance the certainty. The latest techniques of EI, AI coupled with neural network can help us to a great extent to build a model for extraction and conversion of the informal skills, experience and knowledge to a formalized content useful for making of future project managers, with an ideal blend of informal and formal skills essentially required for enhancing the success of projects.

1.5 References

Sourav Chaudhari, Article Title “ Organizational Practice and Perception of Informal Project Management” A Survey based data report submitted to PMI

Web site - <http://en.wikipedia.org/> for information on historical aspects of IPM

1.6 Author(s) Profile



Working as deputy manager, Information Systems at HPCL. Basically a electrical engineer with Masters in Computer Engineering. A Certified ITIL and PMP professional having more than 14 years of working experience in the IT industry. Wide experience in handling and execution of IT projects.

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