A history of project management models: From pre-models to the standard models☆☆☆

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Abstract

The basis of project management theory includes, as is the case of many management theories an “articulated collection of best practices”, drawn for the most part from the study of major North American engineering projects. There is no history of project management comparable to the ones that have been produced for marketing, accounting or strategic analysis. Very few historians have studied projects as a specific activity and academics in project management are rarely specialists with archives or have familiarity with historical reasoning. Defining the historic trajectory of project management implies specifying the scope of what this history includes beforehand. To write a history of project management we must specify the object of this “historicization”. What are we dealing with when we talk about “history of project management”? A first objective of this paper is to define object and scope of this history. The author suggests a difference between “managerial practices” and “management models” and recommends writing a history of models rather than a history of singular practices. A second objective is to sketch the transition between pre-models of project to the standard North American model. © 2013 Elsevier Ltd. APM and IPMA. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction

Project management has been in vogue since the end of the 1980s, even though it is not, by any means, a simple trend. Interest in the various means of steering human activities has not declined over time in the media, as well as managerial and academic circles. We can observe the development of project management in the service sector, mass production industries or public companies. Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello (1999, p. 154) have gone as far as to suggest that the “projective city” is an integral part of modern capitalist ideology.

This article examines the projects conducted by people within organizations. Project management raises the dual issue of envisaging a future undertaking and the act of making it happen. Mastery of the unique and sometimes highly complex processes that constitute a project implies the implementation of specific management techniques (Turner, 2007).

Research on project management has developed a great deal since the mid-1990s. The notion has earned a place in management sciences as an organizational mode and more generally as a system of anticipating and rationalizing temporary collective initiatives, or even as the foundation of a new theorization of the firm (Söderlund, 2004). While there is a global conception of the phenomenon (Boutinet, 2005), there is no unified theory of project management. According to Mats Engwall (1998), the basis of project management theory includes, as is the case of many management theories, first of all, an “articulated collection of best practices”, drawn for the most part from the study of major North American engineering projects. Project management has been hard to integrate in traditional management disciplines, even if it has become more widespread since the turn of the 21st century. In the business world as well, project mode is rarely institutionalized, at least at the corporate level, compared to finance, accounting, marketing or strategy. The functions of project leaders are only temporary and individuals are, over the long term, identified and defined professionally by their business skills rather than their project experience.
Finally, project management is a generalized practice in contemporary capitalism and a legitimate field of research, even if it is still nascent (Blomquist et al., 2010). Project management is not a “crossroads discipline”, which would mean diluting its content and making it a “receptacle” or depository of what is produced elsewhere, in other academic disciplines. Project management exists in and for itself, with its own corpus of knowledge, concepts, organizations, methodologies and lines of thinking. The status of project management as a “theory” continues to compete for recognition against its “professional” dimension. This tension is commonplace in disciplines rooted in practices, especially when they are new.

What are the main stages in the evolution of project management models and the determinants of their differences? Ordinarily, any historical approach is exciting because, in the social sciences, history is part of the laboratory. While converging contributions have emerged in the past five years and have helped structure the field of project management history (Scranton, 2008), this part of the laboratory is rarely explored in the case of project management. There is no history of project management comparable to the ones that have been produced for marketing, accounting or strategic analysis. Very few historians have studied projects as a specific activity (Scranton, 2008) and academics in project management are rarely specialists with archives or have familiarity with historical reasoning. As for specialists in project management, generally focused on the study of practices in real time, they rarely consider history or often only concede to a quick overview in the introductions of their work (Engwall, 2003).

However, the intersection between the terms “project” and “history” is not an empty space. Whether the contributors are historians or researchers in management, we can find:

- case studies generally presenting projects that are emblematic in their scope and success or failure, whether they concern events, works or new products (ex. Sapolsky, 1972 on Polaris project; Latour, 1996 on Aramis project; Lenfle and Loch, 2010 on Manhattan Project or Garel and Mock, 2012 on Swatch project).
- Analyses of a sector or particular firm. For example, projects in aeronautics (Whittle, 2004 and Scranton, 2006 on jet industry) and railways (Caron, 2005) or development of project management in the automobile industry have been extensively studied (Midler, 1993).
- “Typologico-historic” markers. For example Christophe Midler (1996) identifies four project management models (the entrepreneurial model, the engineering model, the Taylorist model and the concurrent engineering model) that have more or less succeeded each other over time. Note however that the emergence of one model does not necessarily correspond to the disappearance of another. This study defines the typical ideals of project management through organizational and economic characteristics, and situates them within specific timeframes and challenges. On the other hand, Christian Navarre (1989, 1993) has graded the modern history of project management according to two degrees: “degree zero” that, at the start of the 20th century, rendered project management autonomous and “degree one” that, during the second half of the 20th century, rationalized and defined a standard model for it. Many project management handbooks present a “historical section”, from past to present, sometimes with some anachronisms (Kozak-Holland, 2011).

Defining the historic trajectory of project management implies specifying the scope of what this history includes beforehand. To write a history of project management we must specify the object of this “historicization”. What are we dealing with when we talk about “history of project management”? A first objective of this paper is to define object and scope of this history. We suggest a difference between “managerial practices” and “management models” and recommend writing a history of models rather than a history of singular practices. A second objective is to sketch the transition between pre-models of project to the standard North American model. This article primarily uses literature from project management journals and also the founder work of Jean-Pierre Boutinet and Christian Navarre.

The first part introduces this difference between “managerial practices” and “management models” and reviews the premises of project management models. In the second part, project management is rationalized and then standardized, until a common model is defined, i.e. the one used in North American engineering.

2. The history of project management between “managerial practices” and “management models”

A North American research stream (or team) has examined the history of managerial thinking in much the same way as the history of economic thought or political ideas (George, 1972; Wren, 1994). This history does not deal with project management directly, but its subject, the evolution of managerial theories, making the distinction between “managerial practices” and “management models”. The first sub-part defines the concept of “management model” while the second one describes pre-models of project management (in Europe and in France) when projects were conducted but not completely institutionalized.

2.1. Management model

Generally speaking, the study of managerial practices without any analysis or historical context, without any debate, without any discussion or hypotheses, has never constituted a line of managerial thinking. Managerial thinking only emerged when practitioners such as Taylor and Fayol, at the start of the 20th century, introduced, or coined from their own experiences, new organizational theories. That is to say, when they produced sufficiently general and recurring discourse to move beyond the context and the case that gave rise to them in the first place and disseminate them more widely. What differentiates project management practices from the assertion of a line of thinking that is autonomous, specific and specified, fully formed, identified and widespread? In other words, where is the cleavage between former project management practices and the emergence of more recent models? Four criteria can be put forward.
A management model is supported by a representation of the firm, by a “universal and totaling vision of the firm in society” (Hatchuel, 1998). This goes beyond the dimension of management techniques. Thus, project management is a representation of the cross-disciplinary character of the firm as opposed to functional hierarchies. In this way, it goes far beyond the technical dimension of managing deadlines and costs.

A management model extends beyond the specific features of a given sector. Through its generalization it spreads beyond its original sector. Thus, concurrent engineering has moved far beyond the context of the automobile industry, where it was not invented but extensively tested. Many business sectors use this type of organization for projects today.

Institutions exist that allow the formulation and generalization of management models. Networks of manufacturers, researchers, consultants, schools and universities or public bodies act as relays in generalizing and capitalizing on these models. They also contribute to standardization, training and harmonization of tools, terminology, functions, organizations and practices, etc. The existence of project actors also contributes to the institutionalization of project management. From this perspective, the history of professions contributes to the history of project management.

Finally, a management model is characterized by the firms and/or exemplary projects that incarnate the successful implementation of solutions. For example, Renault and its Twingo project represent, in France at least, a model of a concurrent engineering project. Until the work of Lenfle and Loch (2010), the Manhattan Project, which produced the first atomic bomb, was considered a prime example of a carefully planned and meticulous project management process.

If we start with practices, we cannot fail to observe that projects have always been a part of organized human activity, whether in buildings erected to glorify the gods or ensure defense, infrastructures (roads, bridges, ports, canals, tunnels...), wars of conquest and expeditions, etc. If we continue to focus on practices, there is always an earlier example we can observe; there is always “something” that has been documented before. The project has been the object of analysis for a very long time in the history of techniques and engineering, in the sociology of innovation or the history of firms... While projects were conducted by the Pharaohs, under Vauban or by the Vikings (Morten, 1988), there was no management model at that point. It was only in the second half of the 20th century that project management broke away from other forms of activity to be identified, highlighted and generalized in and of itself. It has now become a management model. An article on the project manager published in the Harvard Business Review by Paul Gaddis (1959) is considered the oldest explicit reference to project management. In it the project manager is described as someone who integrates the contributions of different departments that improve development efficiency.

A historical approach of management through models rather than by practices refuses to give to management an ontological or universal status as if it had existed since the time immemorial. The managerial function and fortiori the project function is not in the “essence of mankind”. It is not a “natural” function. Historical perspective in terms of model allows researchers to work on organization representations and to move beyond singular practices by analyzing the gradual diffusion of practices. A model approach also describes the process of institutionalization of practices and leads to work on organizations that embody the model.

2.2. Pre-models of project management

The history of project management is both one of practices that are not or rarely institutionalized, followed by one of increasingly institutionalized ones. The origins of project management, or degree “minus one” in keeping with the terminology of Navarre (1989), correspond to periods where projects were conducted, but project management was not recognized as a specific management model.

2.2.1. The architectural project or the conception of a future reality

For a long time artisanal creation failed to distinguish between the times dedicated to development and completion, granting great leeway to improvisation or a system of trial and error. While it is not easy to determine an exact date, project management made a major step forward when men were equipped with tools offering an intellectual representation of a future creation. It is in the field of architecture, up until the end of the Middle Ages, that “improvisation” became increasingly ineffective in the act of creation due to the diversification of materials used, a growing number of highly specialized professional corporations and new construction methods (Boutinet, 1999, p. 10). Improvisation gave way to rationalized preparation of the design stage. “The project concept was still not part of medieval thinking, which was marked, as were most traditional societies, by agrarian times (…) where the present consists in an updated version of a past that is written in stone” (Boutinet, 1999, p. 25).

In construction work, the project anticipated the future object. Some would say it was the transition from intention to design. From this perspective, the dome of Florence Cathedral, designed by Filippo Brunelleschi, is a feat of both design and construction. Brunelleschi (1377–1446), who is credited with inventing linear perspective, was among the first to clearly separate design and execution. In doing so he specified the project as the first act of all architectural creation, “an act that aims, through the use of perspective, to ensure a geometric representation of the space to be constructed” (Boutinet, 1999, p. 26). While the plans of Romanesque cathedrals were etched in the soil, the Gothic architect designed ex ante the object to be executed based on geometry, optics, materials resistance, etc. The architect’s models and drawings were used in relations with the building’s patrons. Technical blueprints, gauges and patterns or full-scale drawings were used to coordinate construction activities. While sketches and drawings were used well before the Renaissance, it is during this period that they were systematically and massively employed to create new and complex objects.
More broadly speaking, it was at the end of the 15th century that architecture produced a language of design that constituted a theory of its own projects. At the time, Alberti (1404–1472), after Vitruvius in the first century BC, defined architecture as a “mental thing” whose object is the art of social life. The criteria of this art are the “necessitas” (or the “techniques” in modern language, that is to say the dependence of construction on the laws of physics and mechanics), the “commoditas” (or uses) and the “voluptas” (or the aesthetics, that is to say the capacity of architecture to procure pleasure through a sense of beauty). Alberti’s approach can be considered one of the first analyses of an architectural design process allowing the creation of a variety of construction projects based on the same line of reasoning. To various degrees, Alberti’s criteria can be found throughout the history of architectural projects. They indeed offer a theory of future conceptions of the project, but not a general model for project management just yet.

Similarly, in 17th-century navigation, a techno-functional vision of the ship put an end to traditional metaphors comparing the hull to a fish or the sails to a bird. Ships became machines subject to the laws of physics. At that point it was possible to envisage, anticipate and overcome the contradictions of design as a link between weight and speed. Drawings or sketches help the designer consider several issues at a time and deal with them simultaneously (Vérin, 1996).

2.2.2. The institutionalization of project management in infrastructure and construction

Little by little, the practice of projects was institutionalized through a division of labor between different professions. In the case of France in the Middle Ages the construction of bridges, Romanesque cathedrals, chapels and monasteries was coordinated by local master builders, who were both architects and entrepreneurs. Starting in the 12th century, the construction of Gothic cathedrals implied new knowledge and know-how. Not only did the construction of cathedrals lead to formidable technical innovations in order to master arch thrusts and create ethereal spaces for stained glass windows, but also a division of labor between what we refer to in modern vocabulary as the contracting party (patron, user, customer, financial sponsor of the work) and the contractor (in charge of execution to meet an explicit need). The architect gradually replaced the master builder. The architect was both a true designer and contractor. He translated the theological concepts of archbishops and clerics into shapes, weights and mechanical resistance. To understand the intentions of his patrons, who were often learned prelates, and interact with them in the course of the project, the architect needed deep knowledge of theology and philosophy. He also ensured the organization and economics of the construction site by supervising the work, choosing the materials, coordinating the different craftsmen or designing construction processes like elevation devices, for example. The architect behind Gothic cathedrals was an exceptional individual, a providential “project actor”, who as such enjoyed significant benefits in kind and a higher remuneration than those working directly on the structure. These builders of cathedrals organized as project professionals at an early stage. Lodges organized around the construction site transmitted both the professional values of master artisans, craftsmen and apprentices, but also the techniques required to execute these edifices.

After the rationalization of Colbertism, it was during the French Revolution that the production of architecture would change considerably. The primary objective was to equip the nation. The architect’s expertise was challenged as the needs of programs changed. This marks the birth of a highly polytechnical approach with engineers who are trained in architecture and who develop an extremely authoritarian project method. In the 18th century, in the field of public buildings in France, engineers distanced themselves from architects and started to strongly influence production of space by relying on a network of new institutions and codifying their knowledge and practices. A state-run technical machine emerged in architectural projects. Jean-Rodolphe Perronet and his assistant Gaspard de Prony were two leading figures of this administrative, as well as mathematical and scientific, rationalization of project management. In fact, the corps of the Ponts et Chaussées, from which they both graduated, was created at the start of the 18th century “originally as a model of engineering (and) completely in line with the preoccupations of Colbert by unifying the status of engineers appointed by the king to supervise construction projects” (Picon, 1988). L’Ecole Nationale des Ponts et Chaussées was itself a school focused on the teaching of projects. In the field of naval construction, Vérin (1996) reminds us that on March 5th 1765 the Ecole de Paris became a school of engineer-builders, where scientific instruction would become systematic under the influence of academic circles in order to create an elite group of builders capable of applying science to the design of new ships. An identical movement towards rationalization in the design of machine tools could be observed in Germany in the second half of the 19th century (Le Masson and Weil, 2010). Its scope would be considerable as it allowed the development, while economizing design resources, of a wide variety of machines that would support economic growth in a different way by repeating innovative projects within the framework of a new regulated entity supported by new design languages and a new organization: the engineering department.

3. From rationalization to standardization of project management

Starting in the 1930s, project management became rationalized, but without creating a management model. It is not until later, at the end of the 1950s, that the management of engineering projects would lead to standardized tools, practices and roles, and the emergence of a true model.

3.1. The beginning of rationalization in project management

According to Navarre (1989), “degree zero” of project management consecrates its efficiency-oriented independence between the 1930s and 1950s. At the time, large state-sponsored projects raised new problems in the formulation of public goals, interaction between institutions, multi-criteria analysis, complex sequencing, managing relations with suppliers, etc. During this period, when projects were essentially conducted at the initiative of public authorities, the problems of deciding, formulating and
reaching goals at almost any cost were more important than efficiency. Colonial projects allowed the accumulation of new knowledge. In the UK, in 1948, an Overseas Resources Development Act created the Colonial Development Corporation (CDC). The early years were difficult with many project failures, but the CDC has gradually improved its project management techniques and expanded its operating range (Brain and Cable, 2008). Supported by a belief in the mastery of socio-economic development through projects, project management was enriched by new dimensions such as the consideration of socio-cultural data or the interaction between macro-economic planning and local development. Until the 1960s, different forms of engineering projects were developed: military projects, oil-rigs, dams, naval constructions, highways, university campuses, industrial sites, etc. Project management methods and techniques were mastered by engineers: funding, cost estimates, prototype design, operating methods, construction site management, supply chain management, contract negotiations, etc.

And yet this is in fact “degree zero” of project management. On the one hand, know-how is monopolized by several isolated firms that have not standardized or disseminated their processes or tools. “Everyone lives on his own splendid island, convinced of the extreme singularity of his expertise” (Navarre, 1993, p. 189). On the other hand, the specific nature of project management has not been asserted: firms do not have a specific dedicated system for managing projects yet. They conduct projects like any other operation. It was in the 1960s that project management developed and shifted away from the singularity of individual experiences and occasional successes to enter an era of standardized rationalization. This represents “degree one” in project management.

3.2. The advent of rationalization: the standard model

Starting in the 1960s, project management was shaped by powerful professional associations and management tools. The former would lead to the widespread dissemination of the latter. A standard model would emerge for engineering projects. According to PMI, “a standard is a document, established by consensus and approved by a recognized body, which provides, for common and repeated use, rules, guidelines or characteristics for activities or their results, aimed at the achievement of the optimum degree of order in a given context” (http://www.pmi.org/PMBOK-Guide-and-Standards/Standards-Overview.aspx).

3.2.1. Origins of the standard model

There is no particular event, nor legendary business figure or actor that emerges as a catalyst behind this modernization of project management. Navarre (1989) explains the constitution of project management as an autonomous field of knowledge based on four sources of inspiration:

- engineering sciences, which had been interested for a long time in methods of conducting successful civil or military projects,
- the conducting of large projects, which led public authorities to consider the issues of assessing and preparing decisions,
- socio-economic development schemes in colonies, which led to an accumulation of technical, economic and sociological know-how,
- the managing of innovation, which gradually became a major competitive challenge for firms.

The Space Race and the Cold War led to a multiplication of large military and aeronautical programs in the 1950s. The Cold War gradually led to standardization in project management methods, particularly due to the need to meet tight deadlines, coordinate huge numbers of suppliers and control costs. McDonnell Douglas launched a project group at the start of the 1950s that would develop the F4 Phantom II for the US Navy. Before that, in 1943, the Manhattan Project demonstrated that transversal developments (and not at all in a standard form, which would later become a reference and a project management model as Lenfle and Loch, 2010, have clearly demonstrated) organized outside organizations and traditional procedures, free from budget constraints and strong time pressure, could rapidly produce... radical innovations.

3.2.2. The institutionalization and formalization of project management

Institutions would play a capital role in the dissemination of the instrumental project management model. The Project Management Institute (PMI) was founded in the United States in 1969 by five volunteers. Their initial goal was to establish an organization where members could share their experiences in project management and to discuss issues. The PMI is an association that gathers and organizes project professionals. It was formed to serve the interests of the project management industry. The premise of PMI is that the tools and techniques of project management are common even among the widespread application of projects from the software to the construction industry. In other words, the PMI considers differences between sectors as less important than common preocupations in terms of project management.

Right from the start the PMI brought together technicians, engineers and scientists from large engineering firms and public organizations like NASA. Today the culture of this professional association remains highly technical. The PMI project management model is based on a sophisticated arsenal of methods and tools: the WBS (Work Breakdown Structure or the division of the project into segments within a technical organization chart), the CPM, (see below), cost control tools, etc. The technical culture of the PMI developed in the 1960s through the analysis of several successful projects. The methods and “best practices” of the Apollo space programs were dissected and disseminated (Johnson, 2002; Webb, 1969). The first research work on matrix organizations appeared at around the same time, during the study of American space programs (Mee, 1964). The Polaris rocket program in 1958 offered an opportunity to develop the PERT, a new project planning tool that would rapidly spread and also draw a great deal of criticism (Sapolsky, 1972). PERT was devised in 1958 for this missile program by the Program Evaluation Branch of the Special Projects office of the U.S. Navy, helped by the Lockheed Missile Systems division and the consultant firm of
Booz-Allen & Hamilton. In 1964 more than 1000 books and articles were written about the PERT, causing this tool to be literally confused with project management itself (Morris, 1994, p. 31). The “Critical Path Method” (CPM) was the discovery in 1957 of M.R. Walker of Du Pont de Nemours and J.E. Kelly of Remington Rand (Vanhoucke, 2012, p. 24). The first test was made in 1958, when CPM was applied to the construction of a new chemical plant. In March 1959, the method was applied to a maintenance shut-down at the Du Pont works in Louisville, Kentucky. While similar to the PERT, CPM method eliminates some of its drawbacks.

The American Federal Government would require PMI standards in responses to certain calls for tender. The Pentagon contributed a great deal for training European military engineers in the use of these tools. Some of these engineers eventually left the defense industry for other sectors where they became independent consultants. As consultants they helped spread project planning methods by searching for markets far from their original sectors and developing customized solutions (Blomquist and Söderholm, 2002). The development of a specific management system for engineering projects also illustrates the mechanism for disseminating a management tool through institutions and practices. The aim was to simultaneously control deviations from the budget and schedule in relation to a reference point. Earned value is a reference to the “cost specifications” of the PMI that emerged at the start of the 1980s at the initiative of three major American agencies: the DOD (Department of Defense), the DOE (Department of Energy) and the NASA. These three institutions forced their suppliers to use the same project monitoring tools instead of a multitude of progress measurements. This in turn affected thousands of subcontractors around the world. The method became the norm for engineering projects (nuclear power stations, ship building, public works, etc.).

Little by little, with each annual conference, the PMI standardized professional practices in project management. The following three initiatives were taken at the beginning of the 1980s (Navarre, 1993) and contributed to definitively institutionalizing the standard model:

- the introduction of a body of knowledge in project management with the PMBOK (Project Management Body of Knowledge) whose first edition dates back to 1987 and has been available for download free of charge (for everyone) for many years (now free for members). PMI updated its PMBOK in 1996, 2000, 2004, and most recently in 2009 as the fourth edition.
- The development of a certification project. The certified project manager complies with a code of ethics, masters a standardized body of knowledge thanks to training and is subjected to an examination confirming his professional practices. PMI first began offering the Project Management Professional (PMP) certification exam in 1984.
- The adoption of an ethics charter and an oath with the aim of creating the profession of project manager, based on the model of chartered professions. We are not far from our original builders of Gothic cathedrals.

These initiatives constitute, beyond differences in business sectors, a common identity for all project actors. Once professionalized and certified, they constitute “a new social group” according to Tomas Blomquist and Anders Söderholm (2002), who have studied the development of the Anglo-Saxon and European project managers in great depth.

Finally, the PMI standard model is formalized, professionalized, disseminated, standardized and quintessentially North American. PMI association is the world’s leading not-for-profit membership association for the project management profession, with more than 600,000 members and credential holders in more than 185 countries.

The standard model would be severely challenged after the second oil crisis in 1979. Several causes intersected at that time: the impoverishment of developing countries, an increase in international risks, and the arrival of new competitors on the engineering market. There is a growing body of work in the project management research community criticizing the PMI model as a “rational” view of project management (Cicmil and Hodgson, 2006; Lenfle, 2008; Winter et al., 2006).

4. Conclusion

The history of project management is both one of practices that are not or rarely institutionalized, followed by one of increasingly institutionalized ones. Up until the start of the 20th century, the history of project management was indistinct from the history of techniques or professions. The project activity had no specific status. Project management only became a management model in the 1950s and 1960s. At the time, it became independent and standardized, in particular because differences between business sectors were perceived as less important than common preoccupations in managing engineering projects. The standardization of practices and tools was widely encouraged by major contractors who viewed them as a way of rationalizing their efforts.

Beyond the standard model, what could be the other(s) one(s)? Possibly a more agile and reactive “concurrent engineering” model could be defined. Industries that design new products and services implemented concurrent engineering at the end of the 1980s. They changed their organizations to develop projects more quickly. The automobile industry was the first to experiment with it on a large scale (Clark and Fujimoto, 1991). Concurrent engineering, through its widespread development, produced transversal links across traditionally functional organizations. It constituted a new approach to project development in anticipating certain tasks and decisions in order to delay as long as possible those that engage significant and strategic resources. Concurrent engineering and agile project management are management models supported by an “interactive” representation of the firm, extended beyond its original (IT, information systems, automotive) sector and promoted by institutions.

Several areas in the history of project management might be explored further according to the definition of a management model.

- The history of techniques and tools in project management.

In that way, project management is clearly a contributor to modern project management.
– The representations of the firm supporting the model (e.g. planning and control for the “standard model”; network, transversality and compromise for a “concurrent engineering model”).

– The history of institutions and actors in project management. For example, the identity of project actors has gradually been constructed inside Renault since 1972, when the “project leader” function was created (Midler, 1993). More broadly speaking, the master builder, architect, engineer, or “heavy-weight project manager” represent different figures of the project actor over time. Gradually, in each profession, and then across business sectors, a specific identity has been constructed for actors in charge of projects. Firms, professional associations and public authorities all take part directly in this process. Their role and their contribution to the diffusion of models are a part of project management history.

– Construction and deconstruction of “exemplary projects”.

The work of Lenfle (2012) and Lenfle and Loch (2010) shows that pre-PMI US military projects are usually and wrongly presented as the roots of the standard model. A deconstruction approach leads researchers “to focus on the forgotten paths, the practices, models, organization that have been lost during the institutionalization of the (...) model” (Lenfle, 2012).

Because this is only the beginning, the history of project management remains to be written.

References


