

Advances in Project Management Series¹

Creating a culture of partnership between Project Management and Change Management

By Gabrielle O'Donovan

The dismal results achieved by organizational change initiatives over the past decades drive home the need for a step change in how we deliver projects. We can no longer be satisfied to hop along with a 'one-legged approach', where only Project Management methodologies are used or, alternatively, limp along with Project Management in the driving seat and Change Management playing second fiddle. Rather, a firm-footed 'two-legged approach' to project delivery, that employs both Project Management and Change Management methodologies and expertise, will enable projects to stride forward in confidence and derive business benefits. Achieving this requires the thoughtful integration of Project Management and Change Management methodologies throughout the end-to-end project lifecycle, and *the cultivation of a culture of partnership* between Project Managers and Change Managers – a twenty-first century solution to a twenty-first century problem.

The current disconnect between Project Management and Change Management feeds the well-documented projects failure rate (40–70 per cent), and the laying of many a dud egg. While much work has been done in recent times to try to address this issue, cross-discipline integration efforts thus far have only touched the tip of the iceberg (policies, practices, and processes), ignoring that below-the-surface subterranean cultural component that can divide or unite project teams. An effective joint value proposition between Project Management and Change Management must incorporate both perspectives. By way of an example, on any given project team shared assumptions drive the expression of shared attitudes and behaviours. These in turn impact what gets done and what doesn't, and cultural assumptions at play are reflected in project outcomes and results. For instance, if the project team holds a shared assumption that successful measurement of project delivery is simply 'on time, on scope and on budget', they will not appreciate the need to secure end-user adoption of new ways of working, and are likely to see the work of Change Managers early on in the project cycle as little more than interference and a distraction. They may rationalize this mind-set by saying, 'If we don't have a system, we won't need users to be on board.' Where this assumption is in action below the surface, strategies and plans that involve Project Managers' cooperation with Change Managers early in the project cycle (e.g. to agree how the end user will be impacted) may prove very difficult to implement, and undermine business benefits realization.

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Making Culture Explicit and Measureable

Because mapping any given culture could be a never-ending task, it is essential to define the parameters of such work. Context is one such parameter and the context here is 'the integration of Project Management and Change Management methodologies for projects'. The other parameter I am employing is a three-part framework designed by Edgar Schein, Professor Emeritus, MIT, on those universal 'problems' or challenges that organizations face:

- I. Deepest assumptions about universal macro issues
- II. The second part of the framework considers those challenges that the organization faces as it adapts to its external environment. My new additions supplementing Schein's original list include getting consensus on the 'shared approach to problem solving', and 'shared approach to risks and issues resolution' – challenges that are in the forefront for project leaders and teams.
- III. The third part of the framework considers those universal problems that the organization faces in terms of internal integration. Newly identified challenges added to Schein's original list include getting consensus on 'maximizing problem solving capability' and 'openness to feedback'.

These problems are as relevant to change projects as they are to business-as-usual. The project is, after all, an organization, albeit a temporary one. While leaders may give considered thought to some or even all of the problems above when considering the larger organizational context, they rarely give these problems due attention in the temporary projects environment – and certainly not in terms of how they can define a network of cultural assumptions that will help resolve these issues. Therefore, these challenges are an excellent reference point for doing just that, as they add a structured level of detail to that higher-level parameter of 'Change Management/Project Management integration'.

Below, the first category 'Deepest Assumptions about Macro Issues Affecting the Project) is expanded upon by way of illustration. To learn about the second and third categories, and how Project Managers and Change Managers can cooperate on a daily basis to bring this culture of partnership to life and ensure that change is not only implemented, but embedded, read *Making Organizational Change Stick* (O'Donovan, 2018).

Deepest Assumptions about Marco Issues Affecting the Project

Universal macro issues to be resolved for project teams relate not just to their project environment, but also to the organizational and broader context that informs the workplace culture. These are fundamental issues that any group needs to agree on in order for the group to function. Macro-related issues that the project team needs to reach consensus on include:

1. How life and change unfold in general, and in the project's environment;
2. The nature of the project;

3. How the project relates to its environment beyond the immediate project environment;
4. How Change Management and Project Management will contribute to delivery;
5. How the Change Manager and the Project Manager will cooperate;
6. The roles of the Change Manager and Project Manager as separate to the core team who will report into these two key roles;
7. Respecting differences in ways of thinking about project concepts, based on occupational subcultures and finding common ground;
8. The nature and value of masculine versus feminine reasoning for managing organizational change;
9. The nature and value of gender roles and what it means for project delivery.

In Table 1, cultural assumptions relating to each of this nine problems or challenges are presented on with an X indicating the optimal assumption for each. From there, each taken optimal assumption is presented in italics and discussed, alongside alternative, and less constructive, assumptions.

<i>The Nature of Life</i>		
Tidy		<i>X</i> Messy
<i>The Nature of the Project</i>		
Concrete set of linear tasks	<i>X</i> Both	Series of activities arising from the needs of people and business
<i>The Nature of the Relationship between the Project and the Organisation</i>		
Separate from organisational realities		<i>X</i> Inter-linked
<i>The Nature of the Change Management/Project Management Relationship</i>		
Independent	<i>X</i> Inter-dependent	Dependent
<i>The Nature of the Change Manager/ Project Manager Relationship</i>		
Independent	<i>X</i> Inter-dependent	Dependent
<i>The Role of the Project Manager/Change Manager as Separate to the Core Team</i>		
Getting plan and sticking to it	<i>X</i> Both	Team leaders and integrating force
<i>The Nature and Value of Masculine versus Feminine Ways of Reasoning for Managing Organizational Change</i>		
Masculine Reasoning Superior	<i>X</i> Equal Value	Feminine Reasoning Superior
<i>The Nature and Value of Gender Roles</i>		
Stereotypical		<i>X</i> Non-stereotypical
Male input more valued	<i>X</i> Equally valued	Female input more valued
<i>The Nature of Change Management and Project Management Epistemic Cultures</i>		
Essentially Different	<i>X</i> A Strong Degree of Sameness	Essentially the Same

Table 1: PCP cultural assumptions continuum: macro issues' (O'Donovan, 2018)

1.1 The nature of life

Life is messy and projects are messy too.

The essential nature of life is that of renewal, brought about by evolutionary, transitional and transformational change. Some of that change is predictable, but a lot of it is not, making life a rather messy business with many a twist and turn. Projects are messy for this, and other, reasons too; they are typically a melting pot of employees, consultants and contractors and, as temporary environments, projects are perhaps more vulnerable than business-as-usual to political shifts, weak governance and poor general management practices. Take the following real life examples:

- Project/programme management overly dependent on a particular Project Management consultancy that used this power to hinder the best efforts of perceived competitors who were project team members;
- The new Project Manager who pushed out existing project team members, instated those of his own choosing and received back-handers from the recruitment agency that he was colluding with;
- Programme directors taking Friday afternoons off to play golf, with project team members sneaking out to the pub during their absence en masse;
- The project sponsor who signed off the project Statement of Work without consulting his direct reports, and had his plans for organizational structure change derailed as a result;
- The operations director who responded, 'We don't care; employees will do what they're told' when advised that a tiny Change Management team reporting into BAU could not support a global workforce for a technology project;
- The project director who went abroad on holiday during a critical and external stakeholder facing project activity because he feared it would fail (the Change Manager led the activity, although it was new to her too, and it was a resounding success);
- The employee who had never managed a project, project senior stakeholders or a Steering Committee before and was given the role of Project Manager for a global deployment as a 'stretch assignment';
- High project turnover among female team members, due to a culture of bullying, which went unnoticed in a constantly changing environment.

Any seasoned veteran in the projects space is likely to raise a wry smile and may even have some more examples to add. Yet, project and programme management literature, for the most part, seems to operate on the assumption that projects are neat and tidy, and come across as sanitized and academic. Such literature does not reflect the real world. Projects are messy environments indeed and, although addressing general management practices such as those listed above is beyond the scope of this article, it is worth bearing in mind that all members of the team –from both Project Management and Change Management disciplines –will have varying levels of general management skills that will impact teamwork. The same goes for project support partners working in business-as-usual. Behaviours in the projects space need to be subject to the same

controls and good governance one would expect in the business-as-usual space, and it is for leaders to set the tone.

1.2 The nature of the project

The project is a series of linear and non-linear tasks and activities arising from the needs of the business.

This cultural assumption recognizes both the consecutive and the emergent nature of project tasks and activities, while emphasizing the relationship between the product of the project and end users. In a study on masculine and feminine logic systems in the projects environment, Thomas and Buckle-Henning (2007) found that the masculine way of thinking sees the project as a 'concrete linear set of tasks with a clear start and finish' and 'separate the project from its context'. The feminine way of thinking sees projects as 'a series of activities deeply embedded in a goal arising from the needs of the company's people and business' and emphasizes 'connectedness' and 'interdependence'. The recommended optimal assumption captures both these views to create common ground.

1.3 The nature of the relationship between the project and the organization

Projects don't exist in a vacuum; they emerge, exist and die in their host organizations.

The relationship between the project and the organization has been the subject of much research. Grabher (2002) illustrates it by describing its different facets, which can be summarized as follows:

1. Projects are vehicles for introducing change and achieving organizational goals.
2. Projects are often hard to decompose into constituent tasks and such a (commonly agreed) decomposition is only possible when stakeholders interrelate with each other continually.
3. The contractor is the lynchpin on whom trust is focused (for our purposes, the contract will be the Project Manager and the Change Manager cooperating to bring change to the organization). The role of the manager is particularly important in projects on which team members do not have the time to get to know each other well.
4. The contractor is also the wielder of organizational authority as far as the project is concerned. He or she is, in this sense, a representative of the organization – a person whose presence underlines the fact that the project exists to achieve specified organizational goals.
5. The final deadline of a project culminates in the termination of the project and serves as a connector with the rest of the organization. As the project team disbands, the outputs of the project disperse into the wider organization.
6. Projects draw on organizational resources.
7. Organizational culture plays a role in determining how projects are governed, managed and run.
8. The project can serve as the lynchpin for strategic partnerships.

9. The organization hosts a range of processes that are needed to organize and run a project.
10. Projects present the opportunity to enhance organizational learning; However, as projects are typically high-pressure environments, there is little time for documenting knowledge.

Additional facets of the relationship between the project and the organization include the political landscape and organizational climate. Project progress, coordination and control are often hindered by organizational politics, and all the more so when project leadership is lacklustre and stakeholders in the business are not united behind a common purpose and objectives. Poor employee engagement in the larger organization can create a sense of inertia that can only increase the challenge faced by the project. All of the points above support the operating assumption that the project and the organization are interlinked. However, it can be tempting for Project Managers to choose to operate from the alternative assumption that the project is isolated from its environment and not subject to organizational controls. With this mind-set, relationships and politics are seen as external to the project and problems relating to coordination and control are simpler to manage. The project team works, for the most part, in isolation to the host organization. My strongest first-hand experience of this assumption in action was when I worked as Change Manager for a successful M&A project where a firm was acquired by another. Our project team was located on a secure floor of the head office building and access to the floor was strictly limited. As we were dealing with highly sensitive information and liaising with legal advisers on a daily basis, we worked largely in isolation from the rest of the organization where there were, not untypically, strongly divided views on the best way forward. Politics could not but impact the project and the team members whose rewards and punishments were influenced not only by those who were for the change but also by those who were against it. In the real world, it is unrealistic to suppose that the project can operate in a vacuum and not be subject to organizational controls.

1.4 The nature of the Change Management and Project Management relationship

Project Management and Change Management are separate, but interdependent, disciplines.

Project Management is concerned with end-to-end delivery of the change, with Change Management concerned about bringing stakeholders on the journey and ensuring that change meets the needs of the organization and is embedded. Each has its own distinctive service proposition and toolkit. When the project team operates on the assumption that one of the disciplines is dependent on the other, or to be assimilated by it, it is typically Project Management tools that dominate with the Change Management toolkit being used to a lesser degree. Alternatively, when the project team operates on the assumption that Project Management and Change Management disciplines are independent, they can overlook opportunities for synergies and the need to incorporate Change Management processes into project plans. An interdependent approach will reap the best results.

1.5 The nature of the Change Manager/Project Manager relationship

The Project Manager and Change Manager develop the plan, lead the team to deliver the plan, and work with stakeholders to integrate diverse perspectives.

Traditionally, the Project Manager has been the central axis of project delivery. Carrying the weight of the responsibility, it is easy to see activities such as team leadership and interfacing with the organization being neglected as the demand to deal with technical matters presses. Where the Project Manager and Change Manager work together to develop a joint plan, co-lead with team on delivery, and utilize their respective strengths to manage the stakeholder equation, synergies are created and the burden is shared. Note that while the Change Manager will have facilitation and team-building skills, it is not the job of the Change Manager to make up for any weaknesses the Project Manager may have in terms of those tasks traditionally associated with female roles e.g. people management and performance management, as suggested in some quarters.

1.6 The nature of the Project Manager and Change Manager relationship

The Project Manager and Change Manager are interdependent partners who together can implement – and embed – change.

When the project team operates on the assumption that one of the managers/teams is dependent on the other, it is typically the Project Manager who wins out on the power-sharing agreement, and the Change Management team takes on a secondary and even administrative support role. Alternatively, when the project team operates on the assumption that the Project Manager and Change Manager best work independently, they miss important opportunities for synergies, and the results work in parallel to project team organizational structure, rather than in unison

1.7 The nature and value of masculine versus feminine ways of reasoning for managing organizational change

Neither masculine nor feminine ways of reasoning are inherently superior to the other (Thomas and Buckle-Henning, 2007).

In their study of masculine and feminine logic systems at work in Project Management, Thomas and Buckle-Henning describe the masculine way of thinking 'field independent' (detached from the individuals and situations they seek to understand), 'objective', 'impersonal', 'independent' and 'analytical', presenting in behaviours such as 'competitive', 'decisive', 'assertive', 'task-orientated' and 'directive'. Decisions are made with preference to conforming to predetermined project realities and tasks preferably executed according to predetermined views, regardless of the context. Feminine reasoning they described as 'field dependent', conceiving tasks and plans through emerging realities, relationships and information, and presenting in behaviours such as 'power sharing', 'collaborative sense making and working styles', 'information sharing' and 'empathy'. Thomas and Buckle-Henning argue that, as healthy adult life involves moving towards wholeness, both male and female Project Managers need to understand

the differences inherent in masculine and feminine reasoning and ways of managing projects. They assert that 'neither style is the domain or liability of males or females' and that 'both sets of capacities are present in any healthy individual'. However, society still tends to view masculine behaviour as inappropriate for women and feminine behaviour as inappropriate for men. Wholeness and strength can be achieved for the individual, the organization (including the project organization), and society when both males and females claim the strengths of both approaches. In their research, Thomas and Buckle-Henning found that in the PMBOK® 'hard masculine logic systems exert considerable influence on the "best practice" outlined in the PMBOK®. Softer feminine logic systems appear less influential and presumably less valued or trusted in the profession'. In essence, the culture of Project Management is inherently masculine and dominated by power relationships and a task orientation. This has serious implications for Change Management, and successful change adoption, as feminine reasoning and behaviours that focus on interpersonal relationships and process orientation are integral to the work of Change Managers who build stakeholder buy-in and embed change in the business.

1.8 The nature and value of gender roles

Male and female roles are not bound by stereotypes that are harmful to both, but to women in particular.

Gender stereotypes stem from traditional male and female roles, depicting women as more communal (nurturing, relationships-focused and interdependent) and men as more agentic (ambitious, task-orientated and self-reliant). These stereotypes create expectations about how women should behave and how men should and should not behave, and they have shifted little, despite the growth of women in the workforce. Studies have shown that both males and females experience backlash when displaying non-stereotypical behaviour. But females face additional challenges and punitive behaviours. Rudman and Phelan (2008) conducted research on this topic and found that:

because women are perceived to be less competent, ambitious, and competitive (i.e., less agentic) than men, they may be overlooked for leadership positions unless they present themselves as atypical women. However, the prescriptive nature of gender stereotypes can result in negative reactions to female agency and authority (i.e., backlash). This dilemma has serious consequences for gender parity, as it undermines women at every stage of their careers. It also has consequences for organizations, as it likely contributes to female managers' higher rates of job disaffection and turnover, relative to male counterparts.

The male and female contributions to the project are equally appreciated and respected. It will be no surprise to readers that often a macho culture reigns on projects. The project's environment is typically male-dominated, although this can vary in degree depending on the nature of the project (e.g. HR projects can have more female Project Managers than other types of projects), and how intergender relations present in the organizational and national culture. In *The Culture Code*, author Clotaire Rapphiale

provides perspective on the role of national culture on intergender relationships. Commenting on male bonding, and English culture in particular, Clotaire has this to say:

The English men have a remarkably strong bond with one another, perhaps stronger than the relationship between men in any other culture. Because they truly believe that only other men can understand their feelings, all of their meaningful friendships are with other men . . . this understandably leads to a real disconnection from English women, who feel left out of the party.

The dominance of male versus female Project Managers (70 per cent to 30 per cent, respectively) suggests that more projects are run by men with more females playing a support role. Yet studies on gender in the projects environment strongly suggest that feminine reasoning is essential to the management of change. Author Charles Handy (1994) even goes as far as to say:

They [organizations] want people who can juggle with several tasks and assignments at one time, who are more interested in making things happen than in what title or office they more, more concerned with power and influence than status. They want people who value instinct and rational, who can be tough but also tender, focused but friendly, people who can cope with these necessary contradictions. They want, therefore, as many women as they can get.

1.9 The nature of Change Management and Project Management epistemic cultures

Project Management and Change Management epistemic cultures fundamentally differ, attracting students and practitioners with different, but complimentary, interests and talents.

Different thought worlds can lead to conflict over goals and methods, impeding the collective action required to implement and embed successful change. As observed by Lehmann (2010), a huge gap exists between conceptualizations in Change Management and Project Management. Lehmann highlights the tendency for Project Management practitioners to focus on planning, control, processes and methodologies, while Change Management practitioners are more interested in 'change's objects and underlying mechanisms' and the behavioural aspects. Bresnen (2006) sees the two fields as representing two different approaches to the mechanisms of knowing, with Project Management bringing projects to the foreground (obscuring understanding of how projects dovetail with the wider organizational context), unlike Change Management which brings the organizational context to the fore. Differences in epistemic cultures become more rigid and entrenched if the change project is subject to external threat or failure and high stress levels prevail, as Project Managers and Change Managers will default to known behaviour that they are comfortable with.

In summary, universal macro issues that the project team needs to achieve consensus on include issues such as the relationship between the project and its broader environment, the nature of the Change Management and Project Management

relationship, and the nature of the relationship between the Change Manager and the Project Manager.

Those leaders who create a culture of partnership between Project Management and Change Management will benefit from the unique value that these interdependent disciplines bring to project delivery. It is they who will drive up project success rates, laying golden eggs and securing business benefits.

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About the Author



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Gabrielle O'Donovan has clocked up more than 30,000 hours over 20+ years working on change programmes that have covered the full spectrum. Clients have included Bank of America Merrill Lynch, Unilever, the London Metropolitan Police, Lloyds Banking Group, Friends Life Insurance, the Ministry of Justice UK, Invensys Plc, Dublin Airport Authority, Cathay Pacific Airways and HSBC Hong Kong. Projects have been global, regional and country-specific in scale.

Gabrielle O'Donovan has some significant achievements under her belt: her culture transformation programme for HSBC Hong Kong plus five subsidiary companies embedded a customer-centric culture and won an ASTD Excellence in Practice Award (USA, 2005); at Dublin Airport Authority, Ireland, her work as Stakeholder Management Lead for the building of Terminal 2 was instrumental to securing capital expenditure; Gabrielle's first book 'The Corporate Culture Handbook'1 was rated "In the top 1% of best business books for 2005" by USA reviewer Business Book Review; in 2010, Edgar Schein, Professor Emeritus of Sloan School of Management, MIT and founding father of organisational culture, referenced Gabrielle and her HSBC culture change programme in his 4th Edition of 'Organisational Culture and Leadership (Jossey-Bass, 2010). Schein also shared Gabrielle's 'Characteristics of a Healthy Culture' typology in his book, referring to her 23 new culture dimensions as "noteable".

Gabrielle O'Donovan is the author of [*Making Organizational Change Stick: How to create a culture of partnership between project and change management*](#), published by Abingdon: Routledge in 2018.