Driving Innovation Through Projects

Interview with Tim Jaques [1, 2]

Global Director for Special Interest Group
International Project Management Association

Interviewed by Yu Yanjuan
Journalist, Project Management Review: PMR (China)
International Correspondent, PM World Journal

Introduction to the interviewee

Tim Jaques, an avid writer, presenter, and facilitator, has been exploring, thinking, speaking, and writing on the topics of project management, organizational change, culture, and human performance for more than two decades. As the IPMA Global Director for Special Interest Groups (SIGs), Tim supports the IPMA vision of promoting competence throughout society to enable a world in which all projects succeed. Tim's work in IPMA focuses on connecting global experts to solve some of the world's most important and complex challenges through the development of special interest groups around topics as diverse as Innovation, Smart Cities, Smart Rural, Artificial Intelligence and Mega Projects.

[1] This interview was first published in PMR, Project Management Review magazine earlier this year. It is republished here with the permission of PMR. The PM World Journal maintains a cooperative relationship with PMR, periodically republishing works from each other's publications. To see the original interview with Chinese introduction, visit PMR at http://www.pmreview.com.cn/english/

[2] How to cite this interview: PMR (2020). Interview with Tim Jaques; *Project Management Review*; republished in the *PM World Journal*, Vol. IX, Issue IV, April.

In business, Tim's work today focuses on business transformation and workplace performance through his company Teaming Worldwide. Tim has worked with a variety of private and public sector clients including General Electric, Toshiba, Tufts University, the US Army and US Postal Service. Teaming Worldwide delivers professional development and performance consulting, re-imagined using the latest science in adult learning, motivation and performance.

Tim's core capabilities include project and program management, performance improvement, execution and operations, organizational change management, IT transformation, and business strategy. Tim co-authored the International Project Management Association (IPMA) Individual Competence Baseline (ICB) 4.0. He has published two books on US Federal government PM practices and written numerous articles on project management, organizational change and transformation.

Besides, Tim is a past vice-president of IPMA-USA and has held numerous board positions.

Interview

Part Ⅰ Project Managers Should Be Innovators

Q1. Many project managers do not see innovation as part of their job. Why do you believe project managers should consider themselves innovators?

Tim Jaques (Jaques): Innovation is simply the act of creating new ideas and solutions to known or unknown problems. And project managers do this all the time.

The challenge is that project managers have different orientations that define "done", and different organizations implement different levels of innovation depending on the scope and scale of the disruption. Consider the matrix below.

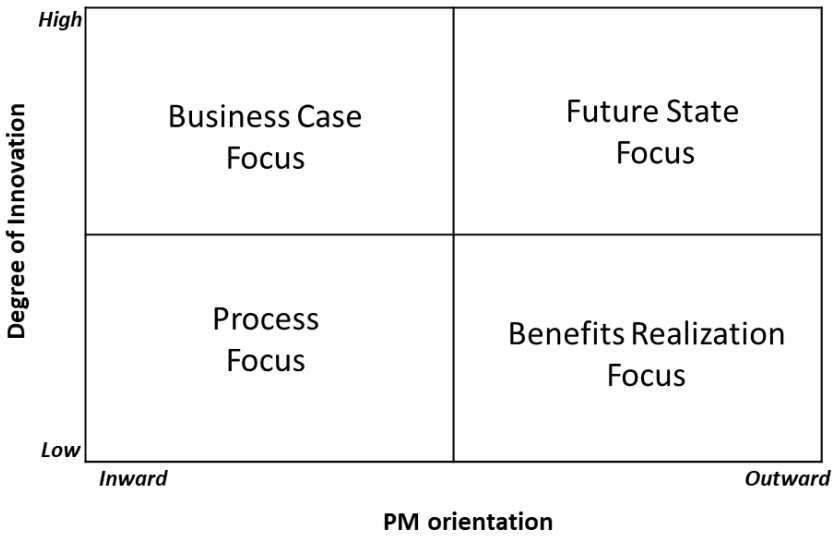

Figure 1: The impact of PM orientation on degree of innovation

The graphic shows that, with a given project manager orientation – inward or outward – the focus of a project will tend to be more oriented toward satisfying scope of the project versus satisfying the market need for the innovation. Of course, project managers must satisfy project requirements. However, the speed of change and faster cycle times for new products can blow up traditional project processes. Sequential, or even agile development techniques, may result in missed opportunities to pivot the project or product in order to capture the real business value from an iterative innovation series.

We need to do a better job of inviting project managers to rethink their classic definitions of "project". The work of a project manager has always been changing. From the earliest production lines to today's most audacious mega projects, we have seen a progression from highly-engineering focused, to more design oriented.

Not all project managers are innovators at heart; however, I believe that project managers should be skilled in the modern practices of change and innovation. It helps to see innovation in the context of history. If we go back to the earliest days of formalized project management – the 1930s and 40s – the world was grappling with innovation in nearly every corner of our lives, from electricity and plumbing, to automobile production, flight, public works projects, weapons and defense, and food supply. These industries used the starting pieces of project management – schedules, resource charts, material inputs – all of the essential logic of project management – in an unconscious development process. Over time, a few items had direct applicability to modern project management such as Frederick Taylor's work on scientific management and Henry Gantt's now famous chart. Therefore, project management comes from a deep well of innovation and progress.

Q2. You said project managers are a natural fit for leading innovation initiatives. Why?

Jaques: In some ways, project management and innovation are very different. For example, project management often starts with a solution in mind (after project selection), tends to be

inward-facing using PM methodologies, often focuses on meeting scope and requirements. Projects are concerned with execution and control processes.

Innovation, on the other hand, often begins with mandates and targets about the marketplace. Innovation is often outward-facing, focused on business model development. And, perhaps most in contrast, an innovation environment has the capacity to quickly pivot to meet business growth targets.

Yet, in another sense, project management and innovation are closely aligned. For example, the concept of Design Thinking in innovation is not too far away from current project delivery models, particularly agile-based models. A typical Design Thinking approach involves:

(1) Empathize. This can be done through voice of the customer, journey mapping, personas, and the like.
(2) Define. Breaking down the customer journeys into discrete pathways. This is clearly in the realm of project management skills.
(3) Ideate. In this phase, the core ideas are created and iterated on.
(4) Prototype. Here, the team will establish the conditions to adequately operate the innovation.
(5) Test. Testing happens in a variety of ways, and should result in both quantitative and qualitative data.

So, based on this thinking, many project managers are well positioned to drive innovation through projects.

Innovation is often about modifying human behavior, such as a decision to buy or use a product, or a new way of doing something. Disruptive innovation breeds a cycle of early adopters, early majority, late majority etc.

Part Ⅱ Competencies of Innovative PMs

Q3. In your opinion, what are the core competencies of innovators?

Jaques: I recommend that project managers consider the following four competencies as a starting point:

(1) Creativity
- Generating Ideas
- Critical Thinking
- Synthesis/Reorganization
- Creative Problem Solving

(2) Enterprising
- Identifying Problem
- Independent Thinking
- Technological Savvy

- Openness to Ideas
- Research Orientation
- Collaborating

(3) Forecasting
- Perceiving Systems
- Evaluating Long-term Consequences
- Visioning
- Managing the future

(4) Managing Change
- Sensitivity to Situations
- Challenging the Status Quo
- Intelligent Risk-taking
- Reinforcing Change

Q4. What are the top qualities or skills of an innovative project manager?

Jaques: They need to build an innovative mindset. The two most important elements in building an innovative mindset are:

(1) Empathy. Empathy allows us to listen, to be authentic, to deeply understand how the customer feels, and
(2) Curiosity. As project managers and innovation drivers, we must continuously ask a lot of questions such as "Why" and " Why Not" .

The most successful project managers I've seen who have strong innovation skills bring skills in three key areas (people, perspective, process) to projects.

People. Innovation PMs should recognize that projects begin and end with people. In other words, nearly everything we do either begins with a need or want or ends with a fulfillment of a need or want. The needs and wants come in from all sides – customers first, but also executives, staff, marketing department, the general public, etc.

Perspective. This deals with strategy, context, and the abilities of a project manager to understand their own capabilities and limitations. Perspective is how a project manager recognizes that a project needs to be repositioned from 'system upgrade' to 'competitive advantage' .

Process. The project manager must have the right tools. As project managers grow and their experience grows deeper, they begin to see how different toolkits can be deployed. It is all about context. First, we learn what a screw driver is, then we learn that a screw driver cannot be used to drive nails, and then we understand that using a framing hammer to do fine carpentry will ruin the product. So whether you subscribe to agile or waterfall makes no difference; it is your outward read of the context that makes more difference.

These three areas track very closely with the IPMA ICB 4.0, which is an international standard that describes the core competences a project manager should have.

Q5. In order to drive innovation through projects, what changes should project managers make?

Jaques: Project managers who seek to drive innovation through projects recognize that their role needs to shift. They should change from a manager to a leader & translator, from implementor to strategist-change Agent, from Schedule, Scope, Cost, Quality focused to Future State focused, from solutioning to working prototypes, and from linear cause and effect to design thinking.

Part Ⅲ What Is the Future State

Q6. You emphasized that we should see more projects as a set of Future States rather than thinking about projects only as deliverables. Would you please elaborate?

Jaques: There is absolutely nothing wrong with defining deliverables, tasks, timeframes, budgets etc. These are the necessary components of many projects. That said, I see a distinct difference between project managers who see these artifacts as the end game of their job, and those who see those artifacts as doorways into deeper discussions about the business.

In my work with customers, I'm often asked about the difference between a project scope and a Future State. In my thinking, a "Future State" is a wholistic vision that includes the necessary elements to operate and grow in the future. Such a vision should connect the team to market drivers, customer uses, global and industry trends, etc.

In order to adapt to rapid changes in the marketplace, we need to go about solving problems in better ways. Perhaps this sounds like standard project management, but building a Future State goes beyond the boundaries of a traditional project role. Below are terms we commonly use to define the products of a project.

So let's compare the words we use in traditional project management versus with an innovation mindset. Consider the terms Deliverables, Target Environments, Outcomes and Benefits, which are all well-known concepts in project management. Yet, this line of thinking often fails to take into account the context within which the project will live. We tend to build toward discrete outcomes without enough consideration of how customers and suppliers will use it.

Deliverables are the most fundamental imperatives of a project – the direct result and purpose for a particular scope of work. This is often how we define project scope. Yet, we know there is so much more.

Target Environment. This term often reflects a comparative view of how the business will change – today we do X and tomorrow we will do Y. This view is often process centric, seeking to define

the target environment only in terms of the work we do. Customers are often left out of a Target Environment, and the wider business environment is often ignored.

Business Outcomes are the direct reflection of the deliverables, realized over a longer timeframe. For example, the new technology enables greater collaboration across business units.

Benefits reflect the long-term, often indirect, gains realized from the implementation of a project. For example, higher rates of product innovation as a result of new technology.

To reiterate, a Future State is a vision that includes these incremental elements of a project and connects them to business mandates, customer uses, global and market trends, etc.

A Future State must be compelling by changing behavior, practical by solving real problems scalable by serving more customers, and feasible generating economic value.

Part Ⅳ Myths about Innovation

Q7. What are the common misunderstandings about innovation?

Jaques: There are several myths of innovation that often need to be dispelled for project managers.

Myth 1: Innovation starts with ideation.

Truth 1: Innovation should begin by understanding the business mandates for growth, market share, wallet share, etc. Mature innovation practices often begin with a discovery process that analyzes business mandates, capabilities, market forces – and therefore the types of innovation required by the business. Only then can we begin to look at ideas around innovation.

Myth 2: Innovation is risky business.

Truth 2: The size and scale of the innovations should be pegged to a risk framework. Risk management is inherent in organizations with mature innovation practices. Often, innovations can graduate from a lower risk profile to a higher risk profile over a series of planned implementations.

Myth 3: Innovation must be bold and market shaping.

Truth 3: Not true! There are four types of innovation: Leaping (High innovation/risk, new to world, redefines industries), Leading (Moderate risk, new to space, redefines businesses), Improving (Lower risk, refreshing mature products), and Enabling (Low risk, efficiencies, capacity, margin).

The value of an innovation is always in the mind of the consumer. Smaller innovations that respond to market needs, such as adding new features to an application, can be just as (or more) powerful as larger innovations.

Part Ⅴ Barriers to Innovation

Q8. What are the major barriers that prevent project managers from carrying out innovations?

Jaques: The two biggest barriers that I have encountered are:

(1) Personal fear. Project managers, particularly those that have never worn the "innovation" hat before, may have fear around how to begin and how to engage people in meaningful change. Project managers should explore their own fear, and inhabit that space of not knowing. Innovation is risky and scary and if you are not a little bit uncomfortable or scared, then you are not pushing far enough.

(2) Culture. Some companies are made for taking risks and creating new things, and other companies are not. And the simplest – and most complex - explanation is culture. Culture is the people we hire, the holiday policy, the values we celebrate and the physical layout of the office. Like the night sky, culture is most visible when we tune out the noise and just observe. We can take steps for sure, but as a barrier, we need to be willing to recognize that an innovation culture is not a thing to strive for. We must simply create the conditions for growth.

I recommend reading *The Innovator's Dilemma* by Clayton Christensen as well as *Zero to One* by Peter Theil and *The Start Up Owner's Manual* by Steve Blank. These books are wonderful and have helped me build innovation as a business within a business for many clients.

Q9. How should we build an innovative culture in an organization?

Jaques: I think culture is the net manifestation of beliefs, behaviors, rituals, humor, people, and the like. One of the best ways to assess and change culture is to first measure it. The best tool that I have encountered for measuring culture is a tool called Culture Talk. I was recently certified in the Culture Talk and am very excited about what this tool does. Culture Talk is a survey instrument designed to measure individual and organizational archetypes or patterns of behavior, which is based on the work of Carl Jung, a Swiss psychotherapist who dedicated his life to looking at patterns of behavior introduced the idea of Archetypes. Organizationally, my experience is that organizations display archetypes as well. There are Ruler organizations (Oracle) and Explorer organizations (Patagonia). Recognizing these archetypes as strengths is key to changing.

Migrating a culture is less like rebuilding an engine and more like growing a butterfly garden. In the engine metaphor, we see a direct cause and effect relationship that is far too simplistic of a way to define what actually happens in the chemistry that is your corporate culture. The butterfly garden is a better metaphor because we must introduce many things that create the conditions for butterflies, but not the butterflies themselves. Only after we have the soil to the right pH, the right plants, the correct food for the worms and the insects will butterflies appear. Culture to me is similar – we take actions, and must understand that there is no direct correlation between our actions and the overall culture.

In my experience, changing outward behavior is the most obvious method for changing the chemistry of a corporate culture. For example, one of the best things I've seen is to begin prototyping and piloting within an organization. This revolutionary act often is upsetting to

executives because it airs dirty laundry and creates wasted time. But none of this is true. What prototyping does for the culture is create the space for new behaviors and new beliefs about what works and what does not work. It resets expectations and spurs immediate and urgent action. We redefine success and failure! And, the obvious benefit is that we can usually build successful model faster in a prototyping culture.

To read the original interview and to learn more about PMR magazine, visit
http://www.pmreview.com.cn/english/

About the Interviewer

Yu Yanjuan

Beijing, China

Yu Yanjuan (English name: Spring), Bachelor's Degree, graduated from the English Department of Beijing International Studies University (BISU) in China. She is now an English-language journalist and editor working for *Project Management Review* (PMR) Magazine and website. She has interviewed over sixty top experts in the field of project management. Before joining PMR, she once worked as a journalist and editor for other media platforms in China. She has also worked part-time as an English teacher in training centers in Beijing. Beginning in January 2020, Spring will also serve as an international correspondent for the *PM World Journal*.

For work contact, she can be
reached via email yuyanjuan2005@163.com or LinkedIn
https://www.linkedin.com/in/yanjuanyu-76b280151/.