

Whatever Happened to Organizational PM Maturity ¹

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Organizational project management maturity seems like an important topic. Can an organization successfully plan, implement and deliver a critical project? Can it do so for more than one project? Can it do so consistently over time? If you are an owner, how mature are the contractors that you may hire for a project? Will any of them screw it up? Will they save you money or cost you more? How does each contractor compare with others in terms of capabilities, competence or past performance? How can you know? These questions would seem to be at the heart of maturity models and assessments. And especially important if a project is mission-critical?

Ten years ago, project management maturity models were a hot topic. PMI had its Organizational Project Management Maturity Model (OPM3), PM Solutions in the USA had a robust PM maturity model based on J. Kent Crawford's book² and an aggressive PM maturity assessment business, the UK had the P3M3© and PRINCE2 Maturity Model (P2MM), and a quite large consulting industry was growing worldwide around this whole subject. According to projectmanagementacademy.net, there have been more than 20 PM maturity models developed and promoted.³

There seem to be many consulting companies still promoting PM maturity models and assessment, especially in technology industries. While many articles, research papers and books about PM maturity were published between 2000 and 2015, the topic seems to have died. PMI dropped its OPM3 standard and support in 2017. Since 2015, the interest in PM maturity models seems to me to have declined. Why might this be? Why did PMI back away from OPM3? I suspect it is because it's a hard sell, especially in IT and technology organizations.

How many executives of technology companies want to hear that they are immature, or may need to spend much time and money to increase their PM capabilities? How many executives want to admit that they are not as smart, experienced or knowledgeable as they thought? And if they did, how many would want that information to be made public or

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² Crawford, J.K. "What is Project Management Maturity?" IT Performance Improvement; undated at <http://www.ittoday.info/ITPerformanceImprovement/Articles/2015-03Crawford.html>

³ See <https://projectmanagementacademy.net/articles/project-management-maturity/>; as this webpage is not dated and because it discusses PMI's OPM3 maturity model, I can only guess that it is several years old.

shared with customers, employees or other stakeholders? The dichotomy here is that it takes either a naive or very mature (and confident) manager, executive or organization to tackle the whole maturity topic. Maybe there are other factors leading to the decline of PM maturity modelling.

We published a good introduction to PM maturity models authored by Archibald and Prado in 2014 ⁴ and an entire series of articles on the topic by Russ and Darci that year. The following paragraphs offer some additional insights.

According to Backlund and Sundquist, “*despite several PM3s developed during a time period of over 20 years, knowledge about how PM3s are applied in organizations is sparse within the PM literature...*” ⁵. Back in 2003, Anderson and Jessen discussed “project maturity in organizations” with ladder levels for project, programme and portfolio maturity. ⁶ In 2012, Wendler published the results of an interesting research into maturity model research itself. ⁷

According to Pasian, et al in 2012, “*The purpose of this paper is to report on the findings of a doctoral thesis examining the limitations of project management maturity and associated models... Results indicate that multiple non-process factors can contribute to a mature project management capability. These can include context-specific values, specialized bodies of knowledge (instructional design), customer involvement, third-party influence, and tacit “human factors” such as trust and creativity... and designers of future models could explore a multi-dimensional approach that includes context-specific factors to assessing and defining project management maturity.*”⁸

⁴ Archibald, R.D. and Prado, D. (2014). Introduction to Maturity in Project Management. *PM World Journal*, Vol. III, Issue I, January. <https://pmworldlibrary.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/pmwj18-jan2014-Archibald-Prado-Introduction-MaturitySeriesArticle1.pdf>

⁵ Backlund, F., Sundquist, E. (2014) “Project Management Maturity Models – A Critical Review”, IPMA World Congress, Dubrovnik, Croatia. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/257609098_Project_Management_Maturity_Models_-_A_Critical_Review

⁶ Anderson, E.S., Jessen, S.A. (2003) Project Maturity in Organizations; *International Journal of Project Management*, Vol. 21, Issue 6, August. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0263786302000881?via%3Dihub>

⁷ Wendler, R. (2012). The maturity of maturity model research: a systematic mapping study. *Information and Software Technology*, 54(12), 1317-1339. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.infsof.2012.07.007>.

⁸ Pasian, B., Sankaran, S., Boydell, S. (2012). Project management maturity: a critical analysis of existing and emergent factors, *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business*, ISSN: 1753-8378, 20 January. <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/17538371211192946/full/html>

In a significant 2014 paper, Mark Mullaly stated “*Maturity models have been widely adopted as a popular framework for improvement of project management practices. Despite their prevalence, there is still minimal evidence that improvements in maturity correspond to improvements in performance or value... Project management maturity models presume that project management is universal, control oriented and consistent, and that maturity is a linear process. Empirical evidence demonstrates that the practice of project management varies, that different practices result in different value... This paper will have particular relevance for organizations who may place excess faith in the rhetoric surrounding maturity models without questioning their underlying relevance or value... This paper takes an important look at whether maturity models actually deliver on their promise and argues that by both design and structure, they are unlikely to do so in their current form.*”⁹

According to Viana and Mota, “*Although organizational project management maturity models have been well explored, they have been criticized as being ineffective as firms continue to face difficulties in improving their project management practices. Based on a literature review, an alternative methodology was developed, and the arguments for the proposal were analyzed. The analysis demonstrated the importance of integrating a decision-making model to develop initiatives toward project management institutionalization appropriate to the organizational context and strategies.*”¹⁰

The best PM maturity research and best evidence of a PM maturity model being used by organizations that I am aware of is that developed in Brazil by Prof Darci Prado, and the associated research into organizational PM maturity run in Brazil since 2005.¹¹ The model is robust but simple, the assessment straightforward and free, and the results impressive. Most importantly, the maturity model and process allow managers and organizations to conduct a confidential self-assessment. Organizational and industry data is gathered, but names of individuals and organizations can remain confidential.

Darci partnered with Russ Archibald to categorize the Brazilian maturity research results by industry, organizational levels and context to allow for more useful benchmarking. The results have been used for benchmarking by participating organizations and also between industries. The Prado PM Maturity Model and research have also been embraced in Italy by ISIPM with ongoing results.

⁹ Mullaly, M. (2014). If maturity is the answer, then exactly what was the question? *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business*, 7(2), 169-185. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/IJMPB-09-2013-0047>.

¹⁰ Viana, J.C., Mota, C.M. d. M. (2015). Enhancing Organizational Project Management Maturity: a framework based on the value focused thinking model, *Production*, vol.26, no.2, São Paulo, Apr./June 2016, Epub Nov 10, 2015. https://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0103-65132015005069913#B046

¹¹ <http://www.maturityresearch.com/novosite/index.html>

Other research has been conducted related to PM maturity across different industries including that described by Cooke-Davies and Arzymenov in their 2014 paper that explored PM maturity in six industries (petrochemicals, defence, pharmaceutical R&D, construction, telecommunications, and financial services).¹²

One of the most prevalent questions in the project management field, and especially related to standards and products developed by most PM professional bodies, is whether the one-size-fits-all approach is valid. There is little argument that many characteristics of projects are similar regardless of size, type, industry or location. For example, all projects have a beginning and end, scope, cost, resources, requirements and often similar risks and success factors. They all have similar planning and management requirements.

In my opinion, those similarities only go so far. There are also many differences among projects in different industries, conditions and locations. Bob Prieto has also provided strong arguments that basic PM breaks down on mega projects and programs due to size, complexity and other factors. Basic PM standards, guides, education and certifications are useful, even necessary, for learning about and working in project management. As the PM maturity researchers have found, however, more is needed to successfully plan and manage projects in different industries, contexts and locations.

Project management maturity assessments are probably useful for some executives, especially in small and medium-sized organizations. Project management knowledge should be important for all managers and organizations, but organizational maturity may be less relevant in some owner organizations and in some industries. And it seems to me that understanding context is essential for effectively using PM maturity-related information. It also seems to me that few senior executives would want the results of a maturity assessment made public. Outside of Brazil, I know of no government agency that has undergone a PM maturity assessment.

The confidential self-assessment and benchmarking approach used in the Prado model in Brazil seems to be the most practical and sustainable. (*According to Dr. Prado recently: "The site is permanently available, even at times when we do not conduct the research. We have there about 50 reports on the results of the research, since 2005. Access to the website (unique access) varies between 1,000 and 2,000 per month. The number of respondents varies between 300 and 500 professional organizations and between 400 and 800 academics. The virtual library shows an amount of downloads per year between 500 and 3,000."*)

¹² Cooke-Davies, T.J., Arzymenov, A. (2003). The maturity of project management in different industries: An investigation into variations between project management models, *International Journal of Project Management*, Vol. 21, Issue 6, August. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0263786302000844?via%3Dihub>

This editorial article is the first in a series with which I plan to explore the maturity of the project management professional field itself. In addition to OPM3, other topics to be explored will include project typologies and categorization, projectification, contexts, size, business orientation, project/PM failures, life cycles, professional bodies and future scenarios.

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