Towards the Integration of Event Management Best Practice by the Project Management Process

First published in EVENTS BEYOND 2000:SETTING THE AGENDA July 2000, ISBN: 186365562X

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Abstract

Explores the underlying processes in event management and their convergence toward the project management system. In particular, the dynamic system of event management is outlined with examples in current events and festivals. The latest trends in project management and the influence of information technology has recently given rise to a system suitable to event management. The external environment in which the event occurs, including stakeholder objectives, has brought about the obligation of an accountable system. This paper is the first step towards an event project management system that integrates all elements of the planning and control, but must also respond to change and take opportunities where necessary. Events as large as the Sydney Olympics and as small as the Illawarra Folk Festival use the processes, language and to a degree, the software of Project Management.

The topics covered include:

1. The current trends in Project Management suitable to event management. This includes the influence of the IT industry on project management theory and the use of the web as an event control tool.
2. The convergence of diverse event management procedures. The examples range from small award ceremonies to large hallmark celebrations.
3. The differences between the current project management body of knowledge and the practice of event management. In particular the dynamic nature of special event management, the priority of deadlines and the lack of an event management body of knowledge.

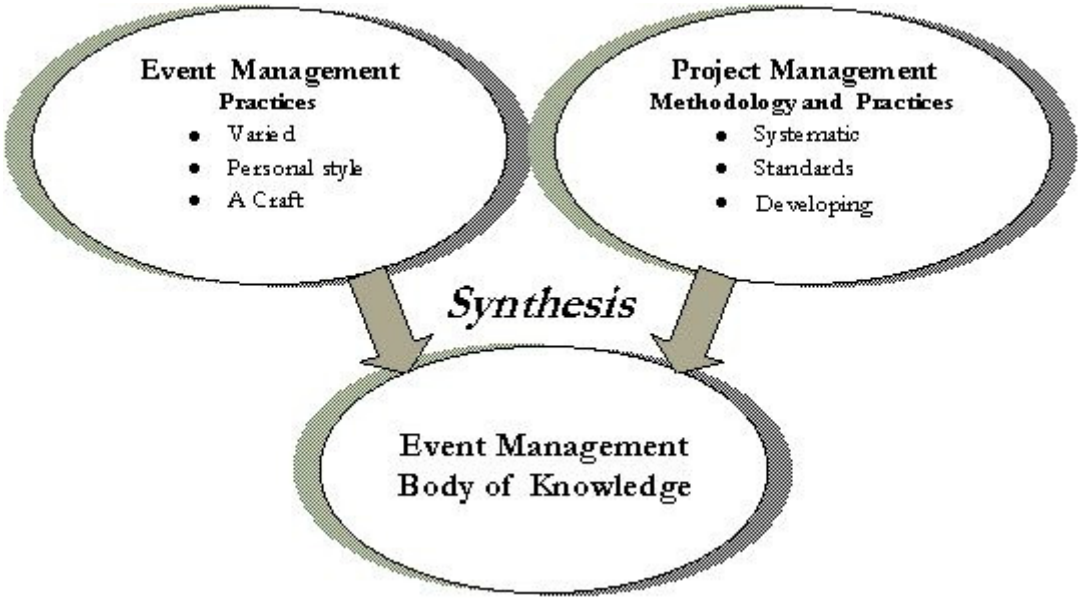
4. The concept of a workable dynamic Event Project Management System as a synthesis of event best practice and the project management process.

Introduction

When I started in the events industry - although it was not recognised as such - an event organiser was called a promoter or an agent. The skill of successfully creating and managing a concert , product launch or seminar was gained on the job or from fellow workers. It was more a folk craft than a profession. This was reflected in the style of the events at that time. They were very personalised events. Issues such as risk management, Occupational Health and Safety and environmental impact assessment were virtually unknown. Just as in other industries, the rising need for professionalism meant that the rule of thumb method was no longer good enough. An example is the Woodford Festival in Southern Queensland. Their detailed Operational and Site Management Plan (1997) was compiled as much in response to the requirements of their bank loans as to the need for a plan for their increasingly large festival. For the last ten years I have used project management tools to both help organise the events and explain the event to the various stakeholders.

The purpose of this paper is to track the movement of event management towards the project management model. The need for thorough accountability to stakeholders, risks, complexity, rules and regulations affecting events, cross border status, increasing size, number and economic importance of events are factors that create the need for a systematic and accountable approach to the actual management of events. This paper is not concerned with the sponsorship, economic impact or even the 'wow' factor of events. It is concerned with the planning and control of events. To put this into context I begin by briefly describing the history of project management and the current trends. The areas of project management are then compared with similar areas in event management. These similarities and differences are explored. The paper then suggests a synthesis of event management knowledge and skills based on the theory of project management, see Figure 1. The paper concludes with an outline of the need for an Event Management Body of Knowledge.

Figure 1 Synthesis of Project Management and Event Management



Project Management History and Current Trends

The skills and processes of traditional project management are best found in the Project Management Institute's publication 'A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge' (PMBOK® Guide). The introduction states:

The primary purpose of this document is to identify and describe that subset of PMBOK® Guide which is generally accepted. Generally accepted means that the knowledge and practices described are applicable to most projects most of the time.

In the next section of the PMBOK® Guide , projects are defined and a number of examples given. What is of interest in this authoritative publication is that events fit perfectly into the description of a project but are never used as an example. This is common across the field of project management literature, web sites and newsgroups. Of the project management texts listed in the bibliography only one uses events as an example of a project. Web sites such as http://www.pmforum.org/ list *Construction, Defense, Equipment, Information Technology, Pharmaceutical, Software, Government and Other* as the areas that use project management.

The reasons for this are perhaps the perceived economic impact of events and probably include the work history of the authors as distinct from the work history of the event managers. Although there is no formal study on the backgrounds of event managers, a quick survey will find that many have come from theatre, film or other parts of the culture/arts industry. As one would expect this is hardly conducive to a sharing of knowledge with project managers in construction and defence industries

The history of project management is the history of the development of a method, the absorption of useful techniques from other disciplines, refinement of these techniques and shifts in focus. The method, combined with systems analysis and operations research, form an integrated system and a science (Kerzner 1998, Badiru 1995). The formalised beginnings in the 1950's for the **US Airforce Joint Project Officers and Weapons System Project** Offices emphasised an integrated base forming into a systems method (Morris 1999). Interestingly Morris shows how the techniques of project management were developed not in

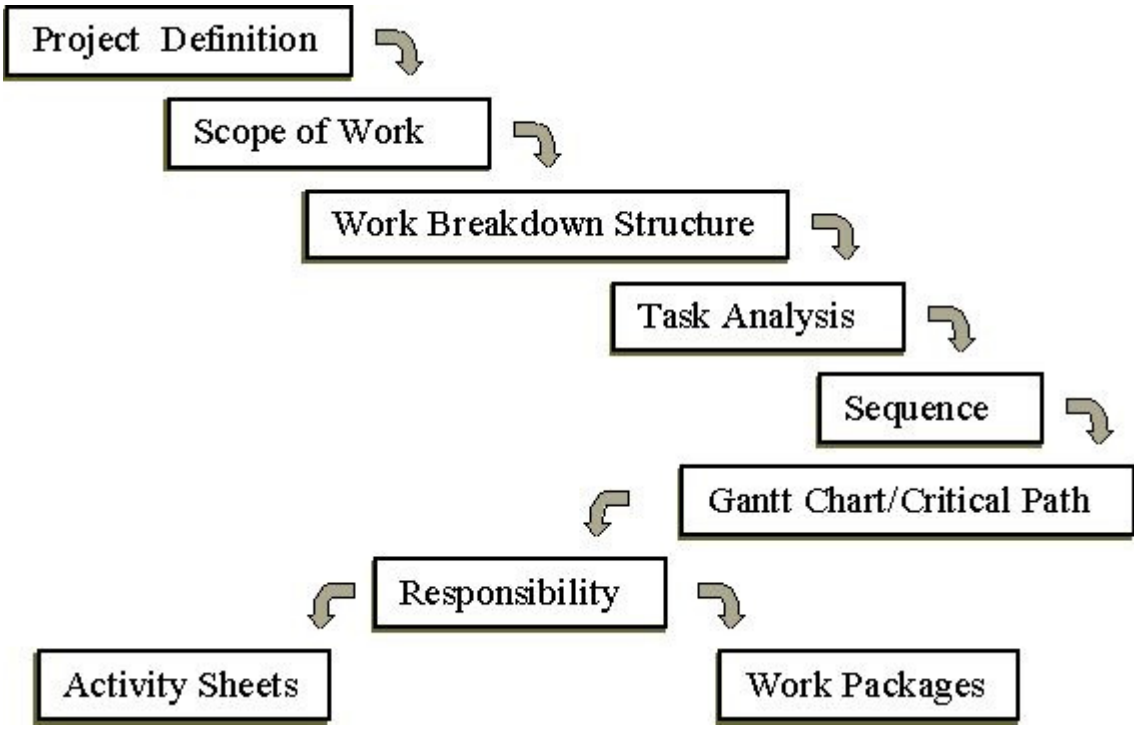
the construction industry, but in the space and arms race. NASA was a primary developer of project management. In a sense one can see that event management, such as putting a man on the moon, was at the core of the development of project management. The development of information technology has important results in both the application of systems management (namely is was easier to use the project management tools), and in project management itself, as the priorities of software development were different from those of construction and weapons development. A more recent development is the use of project management as a basis of organisational change in a company. The work of the University of Technology, Sydney is an example of project management being used to bring about a change in an entrenched corporate culture. The later employs the **Soft Systems Methodology** (SSM) approach that emphasises change by consensus and human resources. (Crawford 2000)

Project management has absorbed complex techniques from a variety of disciplines such as the operations research tools of linear analysis, as set out in Badiru (1995), decision optimisation methods and probability, as set out in Schuyler (1996). It has incorporated the straightforward production tools such as the Gantt Chart and resource scheduling. The basic process of decomposing a project, that is creating a work breakdown structure and refining this down to the level of actual tasks and work packages as illustrated in Figure 2, **Project Planning Cascade,** underpins the discipline. To illustrate the continuing links with the US Department of Defence, one can visit their website and download an entire manual on how to construct a work breakdown structure and this elegant reason for using one:

> '*A work breakdown structure (WBS) provides a consistent and visible framework for defense materiel items and contracts within a program. This handbook offers uniformity in definition and consistency of approach for developing the top three levels of the work breakdown structure. The benefit of uniformity in the generation of work breakdown structures and their application to management practices will be realized in improved communication throughout the acquisition process.*'

USA Department of Defense Handbook, 1998.

Figure 2. Project Planning Cascade



These techniques are the basis of traditional project management. However this traditional process has been under increasing review due to its numerous shortcomings. These modern movements are of interest to the event manager because the event industry may well provide a solution to many of the problems.

The trinity of project management - cost, quality(or content or scope) and time - are supposed to be the three major objective functions on a project. However, time and again, as pointed out by Jaafari (2000), Kerzner (1998), Morris (1999) and Kharbanda (1983), there are overruns. As Leach (2000) writes :

Projects fail at an alarming rate. Quantitative evaluations show that as many as 30% of projects are cancelled before completion, wasting all the time money and effort spent on them. Surviving projects usually fail to deliver the full initial project scope or deliver late or overrun the budget. (Leach 2000)

There are a number of solutions proposed to these problems ranging from a complete overhaul of the critical path method and discarding milestones to taking project management out of the confines of middle management and considering the larger strategic issues. In the later case the interests of the stakeholders become paramount and objective functions are identified that drive the whole process.

Convergence of Event Management

The event industry has to be aware of these changes as there is an increasing use of project management within the industry. One of the most obvious example is the use of the software package Primavera to plan and control the Sydney Olympics. The history of the development of the Olympics at Homebush illustrates the extent of its use. It seemed a natural progression to go from the model of management used in the construction to the event overlay process to the event itself. Richard Fechner (1999) , Principal Project Manager of GHD writes

of the challenge of this event overlay and the way this reflects back on the construction project management. In a recent lecture to the New South Wales Festival and Events Association, Neil Timmins, a member of the Project Management Group at the Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games gave a valuable insight into the importance of project management to the organisation of the Olympics. Their first task was to create a common language of terms so that communication could be precise. Terms such as *bump in* and *bump out* had different meaning to the computer technicians than they did to the stage hands, for example. Once this was established the reports generated by Primavera could be used to maximum effect. The importance of this is demonstrated by the fact that, of all the various departments within the Olympics, the Project Management Group reports directly to the SOCOG Board.

In other major events in Australia, project management companies are taking a leading role. The Adelaide and Melbourne Grand Prix are further examples. The former was managed by Kinhill, a management engineering consultancy. Australian Pacific Projects (APP) the building project company formed a subsidiary APP Events to bid for events as well as manage events, including the Royal Easter Show.

The major promotions of Australia overseas comprised of a large number of diverse events, including cultural, conferences, seminars, trade exhibitions and sport competitions. The $6 million promotion in India - called New Horizons - was organised along project management lines.

However the use of project management is not confined to large scale events such as the New Horizons or the Olympics. It is being used in exhibitions and festivals. Many of the exhibition event companies are using some of the techniques of project management . Tour Hosts, for example, use the concept of a critical path in their work. The Illawarra Festival on the South Coast of NSW used MS Project to create its Gantt Charts and control its multistage events.

From the above it is evident that as events and the event environment (legal, financial and otherwise) become more complex, event management is turning towards project management to provide a systematic methodology. Currently this is done in a patchwork and disparate way. Some large events are wholeheartedly using the project management system and small events using bits and pieces. This Darwinian approach has the advantage that a new system may emerge that can be used by all events. The next section of this paper highlights the differences between current project management theory and event management practice.

The Differences

Table 1 is a comparison of areas of project management as they relate to different industries. It is based on a similar comparison by Dinsmore(1999).

Table 1.

Aspect of a project	Engineering and Civil works	Information Technology project	Event management
Organisation	Concurrent	Network of experts	Vary - often

Structure	structure - fairly autonomous network within a traditional company or bureaucracy		entrepreneurial
Time	A major priority	Often has overruns as the product is not as well defined	Absolutely must meet the deadline.
Risk Management	Systematic methodology developed -tested many times	A developing methodology	Varied and event dependent
Cost	A major priority	A major priority however cost overruns are common	A priority
Content/end product	Fixed and decided upon	Variable due to change in software and new problems	To a degree variable
Site plan	Overriding constraint	Inapplicable	Overriding project constraint
Human resources	Skilled staff essential	Highly specialist staff essential	Staff ranges from volunteers to specialists
Planning	Planning, then implementation	Planning and implementation often at the same time with feedback.	Planning and implementation overlap
Implementation	May take years and is completed	Is ongoing	Actual event may be over in hours.
Dynamic and responding to change	Not a high priority	A high priority	A high priority

Some of these areas of project management contain subtle, yet important, differences, ones of priority rather than qualities. Others are significant differences which effect every aspect of the planning and implementation of the project.

The overriding constraint of the deadline is without a doubt the defining difference between project management as practiced in engineering and IT, and events. The show must go on even if the suppliers didn't deliver. The difficulty of time constraints in the development of computer software and systems, as illustrated at length by Collins (1998) and Cooper (1999), is intolerable in the event industry. This sense of urgency filters throughout event management. Cost and content can be sacrificed if need be to achieve the deadline. The recent cost overrun of the Perth Festival was not a cause to sack the event manager but regarded as a learning experience. It is a similar outlook to the media industry

where the deadline or time to air is all important. This puts a different emphasis on the traditional task and critical path analysis. Events work back from the date of the event - not forward from the first task. Interestingly early project management software didn't have the capability to work back from the project date.

Another overriding constraint is the venue or event site. Although obviously significant in the construction industry, the event site determines so much of the project that the site visit is recommended by all event management books. However unlike the construction industry, the event site is vacated completely once the event concludes. This means that all works have a transitory nature to them. Once again this is reflected back throughout the planning of the event. Whatever is done has only a lifespan extending to the end of the event. There may be a legacy of the event ,such as a cultural product or fixed facilities, but these are of secondary importance to the event.

The major resource that is different in events to other project based industries is the use of volunteers. This is common throughout the industry from small corporate events that use their staff to help out to the Olympics. The use of volunteers creates an event organisation with different methods of motivation to the construction and IT industry. In particular leadership plays an important role. Also, the use of volunteers makes many of the standard estimations of tasks and resources difficult to perform.

The major area that concerns event management is the ability to make decisions in a changing environment. The remarkable growth of project management is an indication of a change in business practices throughout all organisations. It is implemented to bring about change in organisations so they can catch up with or lead change in society. Special events are also used as a tool to bring about corporate change. Seminars, conferences, training sessions, incentives and other corporate events can all be used to assist this change. Concomitantly as events are creating change, there are fundamental changes in the event environment. The use of the web, information technology advances, the deregulation of Australian industry, market segmentation and even the influence of a fashionable event, have produced an ongoing instability. The risks have changed to include many outside forces. It is this ability to function successfully in a volatile environment which gives the event industry a heuristic methodology which can contribute to the project management theory.

Managing in a changing environment requires:

1. Capability to make **optimal decisions quickly** - this requires both skill, based on experience, and knowledge of the alternative results.

2. Capability to **communicate those decisions and have them carried out** - this requires qualities of leadership, delegation of responsibility and pervasive culture of the urgency and importance of each task.

Many of these qualities are the ones described in the Critical Chain (Goldratt 1997) methodology as essential to successful project management and lacking in traditional project management. In particular the 'student syndrome' of leaving a task until it absolutely has to be done. The buffer times will be filled even if a task is completed early. The result is that projects run over time. Also the vital need for the project manager to be focused on the project objectives and the limiting factors or constraints.

Jaafari's (2000) recent work on Risks and Projects reflects the need to integrate fully the risk management with the management of the project. In changing times it becomes important to identify the life cycle objective functions, soft variables and to undertake real time evaluation of a project.

It is commonly known that projects often suffer serious set backs due to political, social, environmental and community challenges and through statutory processes. Despite their vital influence on the eventual state of a project these factors are often managed informally.

Large sections of recent project management texts are concerned with the project variables and tradeoff analysis (Kerzner 1998 , Schuyler 1996). Rather than being an occasional necessity, tradeoff is often the ongoing situation of event management.

This suggests that not only has project management a system that can be used by event management, but that event practice can teach project management new insights.

Synthesis

Three recent publications in Australia are indicative of the changing event environment:

- The 1997 Major and Special Events Planning , A Guide for Promoters and Councils, produced by the NSW Department of Local Government in response to the need for a standardisation of the rules relating to events;
- The 1999 Manual of Emergency Management Australia Safe and Healthy Mass Gatherings (Dickson 1999), produced after a number of intensive cross discipline workshops;
- Traffic Management for Special Events (1999) published by the Roads and Traffic Authority.

None of these publications replaces any previous ones. They indicate a response to the increasingly complex environment in which events operate. It is similar to the situation during the standardisation and regulation of the building industry. Kharbanda (1983) illustrates the increasing rules and regulation from the 60's to the 80's governing aspects of construction project management. It would be instructive if we had similar figures for the event industry. Areas not directly related to events are creating the need for some standardisation . The draft occupational Health and Safety Regulation 2000 contain a number of new sections that will, if adopted, have a significant effect on event planning and control. The similarity between the development of the two systems is obvious. The current disparate state of event management is equivalent to the early stages of project management.

Returning to table 1 and choosing one area of projects - risk management - highlights the immature phase of the event industry. In engineering, risk management is well developed, tried and tested, with a systematic approach. There are innumerable texts and articles on the subject. For the IT industry, risk is a growing area of study with a number of recent books pointing out the current crisis in IT projects (such as Collins T. 1998 and Cooper A. 1999) and there are numerous websites and newsgroups devoted to risk and IT projects (such as wwwdrivers.com) However for the high-risk industry of events there is little published with the notable exception of Berlonghi (1990).

The synthesis of event practice and project management process can produce an event management body of knowledge. It can comprise the best practice in the event industry and the processes of project management.

Event can contribute:

1. the ability to get tasks done on time,
2. management that is familiar with external and internal change,
3. extensive experience and examples.

Project management can contribute:

1. an established system to classify and link the areas of event management,
2. a system of management planning and control,
3. a nomenclature that can be used in all areas of events and general business,
4. a system of documentation to enhance communication and record the event.

That is not to say that project management will survive intact. Its history, as pointed out in the first section of this paper, is highly influenced by the new industries as each new business applies its methodology. It is definitely a two way influence. The integration of event best practice by the project management process could begin by establishing an event management body of knowledge. This can be planned along the lines of the creation of Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK®Guide) where practitioners and academics gathered together to create the PMBOK®Guide . From this collective experience the subject areas can be decided and these may be similar to PMBOK®Guide or the work done at the Centre for Research in Management of Projects (CRMP.)

Conclusion

This paper has outlined the need for a systematised methodology for the planning and control of events. The external environment requires it. The event internal environment is already starting to use it.

The points made were:

1. Event management is converging towards a systematic approach to planning and control.
2. The complexity and increasingly regulated environment requires some standardisation.
3. Events, as they become more central to the company's or organisation's marketing are required to use a common business methodology .
4. Project management provides a solution to all these problem, but will change with the inclusion of event management.
5. Given the above, it is time to create an Event Management Body of Knowledge (EMBOK)

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