

Pick up the Baton

A position paper suggesting that using a facilitative approach to project management may assist in the effective delivery of major projects

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Abstract

PMBok Guide (1996) recognises nine core competencies of project management: time management, cost management, quality management, risk management, procurement management, communications management, human resource management and integration management. Management by definition means to: administer, be in charge of, control, cope with difficulties (Collins English 1999). The Project Manager may be able to administer, be in charge of and in fact cope with difficulties. However, it is suggested that the Project Manager can in fact not control the outcome.

People familiar with public works and infrastructure are aware that in 2003, we can no longer focus on time, cost and quality. The triple bottom line is here: Financial, Social and Environmental. The challenge with public works is balancing the often divergent requirements of multiple key stakeholder groups. It would be great to have a tool to do this.

The baton may be a useful implement. It could be used to A: pass as in 'pass the baton' or B: strike those out of line or C: to conduct the orchestra. It is suggested that option C: conduct the orchestra may be most useful in obtaining optimum project outcomes for all key stakeholders.

Project Facilitation is a proposed methodology of Project Management which the author is currently reviewing and would be pleased to share the work in progress with the conference delegates.



Background

I have been involved in public works and institutional work for the past 15 years. Consistently I have been disappointed with 'the project manager', 'the process' and 'the outcome': 'The Project Manager' because I perceived their role at best 'post boxes' or at worst they got in the road; 'The process' because it seemed at best uninspiring and at worst stifling creativity; and 'the outcome' because generally it was satisfactory but infrequently inspirational.

By 2000 I hypothesised that the answer to the effective delivery of major public works was in selection of the appropriate procurement technique. However, I now realize that all procurement methods have their strengths and weaknesses and can equally contribute to a great or poor project outcome irrespective of their own merits.

In 1998 I undertook professional development via a 'train the trainer' course and in 2003-2003 I attended Value Management Principles and Practice and also Advanced Facilitation course. During these experiences

I was exposed to Facilitation Approach and Techniques. This paper puts forward the position that a Facilitation Approach to Project Management could assist in the effectively delivery of major public works.

Key Concepts

- Facilitation Approach
- Control
- Learning Organization
- Innovation
- Creativity
- Teamwork

Introduction

The following paper reviews the Project Management process addressing the nine core competencies. The idea of Project Facilitation and the creation of a project space are discussed. The Facilitative approach is then outlined with reference to Schwarz and Heron. Schwarz' and Heron's ideas of control are then discussed. The ways in which the facilitative approach can be used in a project context are addressed. Finally some future musings are shared. In summary it is suggested that a facilitative approach to project management may assist in the effective delivery of major projects.

Reviewing the Project Management Process

This section acknowledges that the project management process addresses the nine core competencies of project management. It suggests that the additional consideration of purpose and values as another dimension could assist in the effective delivery of major projects. Furthermore it is suggested that a facilitative approach would prompt the project manager to consider purpose and values at the early stages of the project.

The PMBOK guide (1996) outlines 9 core competencies of project management: Integration, Scope, Time, Cost, Quality, Human Resource, Communications, Risk and Procurement. Ten years ago, the project management paradigm was Time, Cost, Quality. At the AIPM conference in 1993, Boyland presented a paper entitled The Project Pyramid suggesting that the third dimension to the PM triangle was the 'people' dimension. In 2003 it is suggested that we need to acknowledge another dimension to the nine core competencies, this being acknowledgement of the purpose and values.

The ability and the prompt to consider purpose and values are provided through a facilitative approach as outline below. Lloyd and Maguire (2002) suggest that acknowledging purpose and values releases both creativity and responsibility and enhances opportunity to create customer delight. It could be argued that purpose and values could be addressed in the scope. However, experience suggests this is rarely considered or explored in detail. The facilitative approach to project management may assist in prompting the team to consider purpose and values and in doing so assist in the effective delivery of major public works.

Project Facilitation

This section discusses how the concept of 'project space' as referenced to a virtual environment could be applicable to the realm of reality using a facilitative approach. It further suggests that the use of a structured process in this realm assists team members in solving complex problems.

Project Facilitation is defined by Medina, West and Fenner (2003) as organizing and simplifying the collaboration of people around a common goal-helping them work together, plan, and make decisions in the process of completing their project tasks. They further state that one way to organize and simplify these interactions is through a common environment or 'project space'. The 'project space' they describe is in terms of a technological environment or a virtual project space. It is suggested that this 'project space' could also be created in human environment by providing a facilitative approach to project management.

Hirokawa and Gouran (cited in Schwarz 2002) note that a group that uses a structured approach to solve complex problems is likely to develop a high-quality solution. It is suggested that a facilitative approach to project management provides a structured process to assist in solving complex problems sets such as major projects.

The position put forward by this paper is that the project manager can use a facilitative approach providing a project environment and a structured process to assist in effective project delivery.

Facilitative Approach

This section describes the six dimensions of facilitation as described by Heron. It suggests that these align with Schwarz' guiding rules of effective group learning. It is suggested that together these describe the foundations of a 'Facilitative Approach'.

Heron describes six dimensions of facilitation being: Planning, Meaning, Confronting, Feeling, Structuring and Valuing. These are further described as follows:

1. The Planning Dimension – Heron describes this dimension as goal oriented, and prompts the question 'How shall the group acquire its objectives and its program?'
2. The Meaning dimension – Heron describes this dimension as the cognitive aspect. This dimension prompts the team to understand 'what's going on' and 'make sense of the experience'. This dimension also asks the team to consider how to do things and react to things. It prompts the question 'How shall meaning be given to and found in the experiences and actions of group members?'
3. The Confronting Dimension – Heron describes dimension as the challenge for the facilitator to raise the consciousness about group's resistances and avoidances. It prompts the question 'How shall the group's consciousness be raised about these matters?'
4. The Feeling Dimension – Heron describes this dimension as the affective aspect of facilitation dealing with the management of the feeling of the group. He suggests this prompts the question 'How shall the life of feeling of the group be handled?'
5. The Structuring Dimension - Heron describes this dimension as learning. He suggests it prompts the questions 'How can the groups learning experiences be structured?'
6. The Valuing Dimension – Heron describes this as the integrity aspect of facilitation which creates a supportive climate which 'honours and celebrates' individuals within the group. He further describes this dimension as creating a climate in which individual team members can be genuine disclosing their 'reality' as it is, enabling them to keep in touch with their true needs and interests. Heron suggests this dimension prompts the question 'How can such a climate of personal value, integrity and respect be created?'

Schwarz suggests there are nine ground rules for effective groups, these being:

1. Test assumptions and inferences
2. Share all relevant information
3. Use specific examples and agree on what important words mean
4. Explain your reasoning and intent
5. Focus on interests, not positions
6. Combine advocacy and inquiry
7. Jointly design next steps and ways to test disagreements
8. Discuss undiscussable issues
9. Use a decision-making rule that generates the level of commitment needed.

Schwarz suggests a facilitator can use these ground rules to assist the group (or team) to become more effective by improving group processes. Schwarz suggests you can achieve this in one of two ways. Firstly a facilitator (project manager) can model the ground rules demonstrating to the group how to do the same.

Secondly the facilitator can use the ground rules to identify times when group members are acting less effective than they could, and intervene.

It is suggested that it is possible to align Schwarz' ground rules for effective groups with Heron's facilitation dimensions. It is further suggested that by operating within Heron's Dimensions and using Schwarz' guiding principals a 'Facilitative Approach' can be explored.

Schwarz further suggests that in order to achieve effective group process the ground rules should be considered as a micro process and should be supplemented by a macro process. The macro process Schwarz offers is a Problem Solving Model outlined in Figure 1.

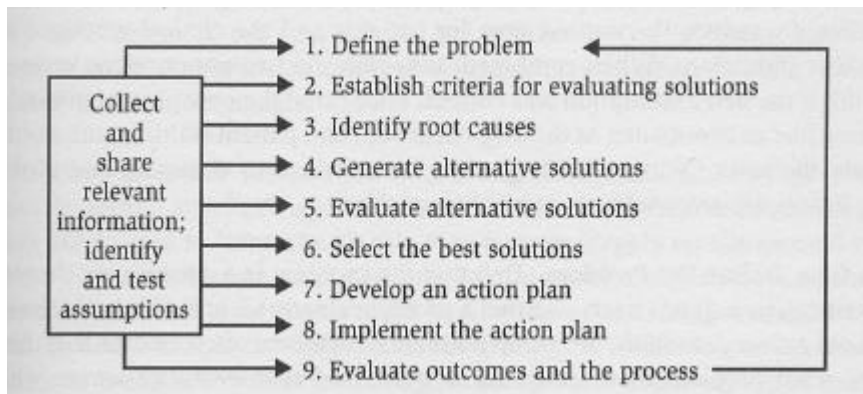


Figure 1: Schwarz Problem Solving Model (Schwarz 2002:221)

It is suggested that a number of these steps are often omitted or glossed over in the context of a major project. The project team often is racing to generate alternative solutions without defining or exploring the problem, establishing criteria for evaluating solutions (and prioritising them) and identifying root causes (not are we doing the project right – but are we doing the right project). Similarly in the race communication is easily oversimplified and the project team misses opportunities to collect and share relevant information and identify and test assumptions. Adopting a facilitative approach may optimise the opportunities to explore these issues and assist in the effective delivery of major projects.

Control

This section discusses various approaches to facilitation. It recommends the particular mode or model of facilitation will enhance the ability of the project manager to assist in the effective delivery of a major project.

The pmbok guide (1996) defines the 'project manager' as the individual responsible for managing the project. Heron suggests that the key question is 'Who will decide about the issue raised: a) the facilitator, b) the facilitator and the participants and c) the participants?'. He suggests that three modes of facilitation respond the answer to the question above. These modes being: The Hierarchical Mode, The Co-operative Mode and The Autonomous mode. The notion of three models of control is reflected by Schwarz in his Theory in Use models. Schwarz proposed the three models are Unilateral Control, Give Up Control and Mutual Learning Model.

In the Hierarchical Mode, Heron suggests that the facilitator takes full responsibility. He suggests that the facilitator is in charge of all major decision of all dimensions of the learning process. Operating in the Hierarchical mode the facilitator will

- Direct the learning process and
- Exercise power
- Do things for the group
- Lead from the front

- Think and act on behalf of the group
- Decide on objectives and programme
- Interpret and give meaning
- Challenge resistances
- Manage Group feelings
- Provide Structures of learning
- Honour claims of authentic behaviour of the group.

It is suggested that Schwarz' Unilateral control model reflects Heron's Hierarchical mode. Schwarz' summarizes this model as follows acknowledging previous work by Argyris and Schon (1974).

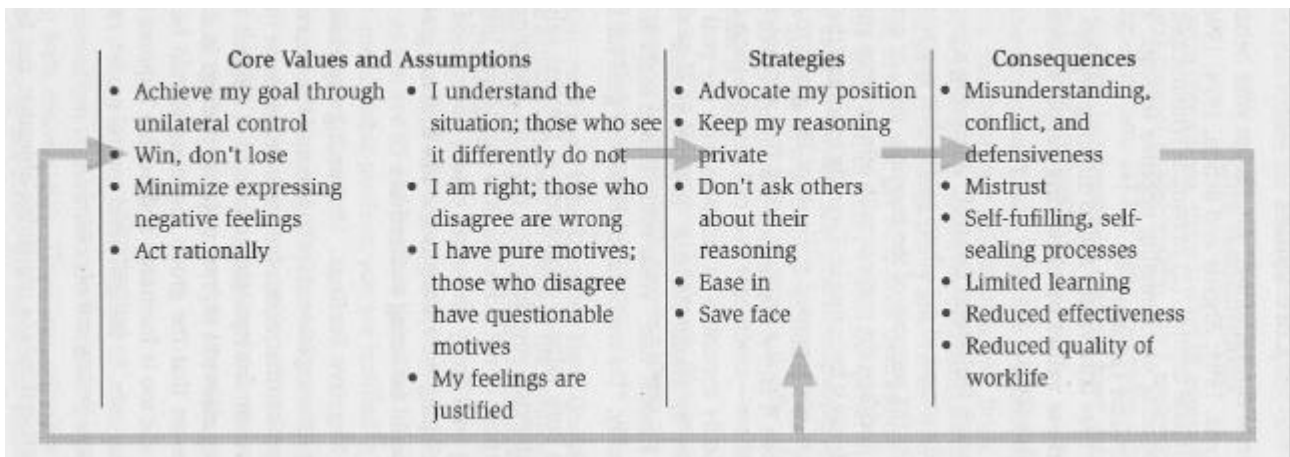


Figure 2: Schwarz Unilateral Control Model (Schwarz 2002:71)

It is suggested that the above mode relates to typical model of project management where the project manager is deemed to be responsible for the management of the project. Some project managers may act out this style by metaphorically 'hitting the team members over the head with a baton'. The position being put forward is that often the project manager does not have the authority to make many if not all of the key decisions. Generally project managers of major public works will need to refer key decisions to the project sponsors and relate the answer to the team. Therefore it is suggested that a project manager cannot take full responsibility and be in charge of all the major decisions. This reflects the image of 'post box'.

Similarly it supports the notion that in this mode the project manager will 'do things' for the group. Project Managers coming from discipline beginnings often find the path of least resistance to 'do things' themselves when a particular discipline (of their origin) does not perform. For example with a core discipline of architecture, the author finds it tempting to provide a sketch solution when the 'architect' for the project is not delivering the goods. Clearly this is not the role of the project manager, and as such the project manager should resist these temptations.

In the Co-operative Mode, Heron suggests the facilitator is co-operative and participates as collaborative member of the group in devising the learning process. He proposes that in this mode the facilitator will:

- Share power
- Manage difficult dimensions within the group
- Enable and guide the group to become more self directing
- Prompt and help group members to decide on the program
- Give meaning to experiences
- Prompt and help members to undertake own confrontation
- Share views, which though influential, is not final but among many
- Negotiate outcomes.

It is suggested that the Schwarz model that relates to Heron's Co-operative mode is his Give Up Control model, or pass the baton. Schwarz does not provide a diagram to express this model. The following diagram is extrapolated from his representation of the Unilateral Control Model and Mutual Learning Model.

Core Values and Assumptions	Strategies	Consequences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone participates in defining the purpose • Everyone wins and no-one loses • Express your feelings • Suppress using your intellectual reasoning • In order for people to learn, become involved and committed they must come to the right answer themselves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitator has determined 'right answer' and leads group to that answer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased misunderstanding • Conflict • Defensiveness • Reduced learning • Reduced effectiveness and • Reduced quality of working life

Figure 3: Schwarz 'Give-Up-Control' Model represented by author

In the Autonomous mode, Heron suggests the facilitator does not abdicate responsibility but exercises the 'subtle art of creating conditions within which people can exercise full self-determination in their learning'. Operating in this mode the facilitator will:

- Respect total autonomy of the group
- Enable the group to do things for themselves
- Create freedom for the group to find their own way
- Enable the group to exercise judgement without intervention
- Enable the group to establish the program
- Give meaning
- Confront group avoidances
- Enable self directed practice
- Provide space

The Schwarz model that reflects the Heron's Autonomous mode is the Mutual Learning Model. Schwarz represents this model graphically as outlined below.

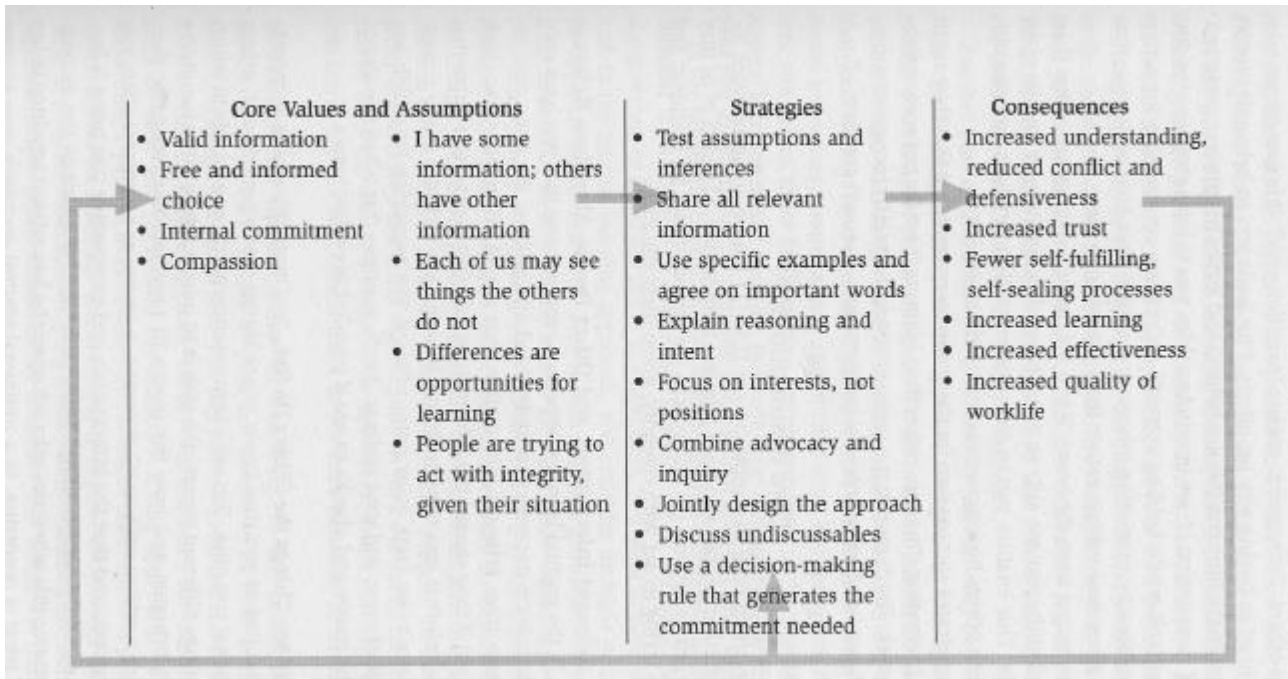


Figure 4: Schwarz Mutual Learning Model (Schwarz 2002:87)

It is suggested that the effective facilitator will use all three modes/models when appropriate. However to enable the effective delivery of major projects, it is suggested that the project manager working primarily within Heron's Autonomous mode of facilitation and Schwarz' Mutual Learning Model, will be more successful. This is because the facilitator maximizes the opportunity for the project team members to creatively use their disciplines, collaborate, establish purpose and promote ownership of the program and process.

Heron nominates the criteria of excellence for a facilitator as follows:

1. Distress free authority
2. Supportive confrontation technique
3. Ability to provide clear conceptual orientation
4. Caring empathetic, warm and genuine manner
5. Repertoire of techniques and exercises for personal and interpersonal development
6. Respect of persons
7. Flexibility of style.

He suggests that practice of the above criteria by the facilitator will enable the group dynamic to flourish with growth and learning.

Heron refers to groups. It is understood that in the project management context one would refer to project teams. Further more Heron refers to group learning. It is suggested that the undertaking of a project is an exercise in group and/or organizational learning. Implicit in a project is the need to solve a problem or achieve a problem. Schon refers to design problems as 'ugly' problems that require an iterative approach to problem solving.

Successful project teams are made up of people who are adequately trained, encouraged, and nurtured to enable them to steer clear of fog of confusion (Leemann, 2002). Therefore it is suggested that if project managers can mould an environment that encourages creativity, than the ability of the team to effectively exercise their creativity must be maximised with the foreseeable result being the effective delivery of projects.

Counter positions

This section responds to literature which may suggest that it is not appropriate to put forward a facilitative approach to project management.

Hunter et al describe a facilitator's role in project design. However, they suggest that a facilitator's role is different to a number of roles including a conductor to an orchestra. They make this assertion on the basis that by their definition of facilitator, the facilitator is responsible and accountable only to the group whereas they suggest most of the responsibility and accountability for the conductor rests with an outside source.

It is suggested that because a project manager is the connection between the group (project team) and outside source (project sponsor) the facilitator's role can indeed be likened to that of a conductor picking up the baton to conduct the orchestra.

Hunter et al describe the role of the facilitator as to guide the process not get involved in the content. On the surface this would be contrary to our understanding of the role of the project manager. However, if it is understood that not getting involved in the content relates to not undertaking discipline work on behalf of the project team, it can be seen that the facilitative approach is able to be related to the project management role. This is further supported by Hunter's description of the role of facilitator as to intervene to protect the group (team) process and keep the group (team) on track to fulfil its task.

Using a facilitative approach

This section describes how the facilitative approach can be used to enhance project outcomes during the life of the project.

Hunter et al discuss facilitation in the context of 'project design'. Their concept of facilitation intervention in project design is understood as describing an intermittent role for the facilitator in an audit role rather than a facilitative approach to project management. However it is suggested that the questions posed and alarm bells identified could be adapted and used by the project manager aligning themselves with a facilitative approach.

Hunter et al suggest that the four stages of a project are: Formulation, Concentration, Momentum and Completion. These can be aligned to the lifecycle of a major project in Briefing, Design, Documentation and Construction, and finally Post-Construction. Hunter et al further describe the role of the facilitator in the four phases.

In the formulation phase, Hunter et al suggest the facilitator should assist in identifying 'What's Important', Priority, Feasibility, Commitment and resources. By the end of this phase, the initial concept should be developed to identify specific and measurable objectives. The facilitator's role in the Formulation phase is to:

- Document SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Result's oriented and Timely) project objectives
- Develop an Action Plan
- Ensure Feasibility.

Hunter et al describe the Concentration (read Design) phase as the fine tuning and implementation of the action plan. They suggest it is high energy time when co-ordinated action is required. The facilitator's role during this phase is to get people back into communication and share problems. The facilitator may also need to recreate the vision. Commitments should be clarified. However most importantly, the facilitator should trust the group can solve any problems and encourage celebration of small successes (Hunter et al).

In the Momentum phase (read documentation and construction) Hunter et al suggest that less energy is needed to drive the project as results are beginning to be evident. They suggest it would be beneficial to

reflect on progress and acknowledge efforts and successes. The facilitator's role is to maintain focus and concentration and encourage extra energy to solve problems.

The final stage as described by Hunter et al is Completion. This is describes as the time where final results are collated, loose ends are tied up and evaluations are carried out. They encourage unresolved issues and disappointments be shared amongst the team. Similarly acknowledgements should be given. They further suggest the 'completion ritual' be carried out to enable people to be 'free' to begin the next project. A key suggestion is that learning from the project is distilled so that future projects can benefit. The facilitator's role is to encourage people to say everything they need to say and ensure people have the opportunity to acknowledge themselves and one another.

Hunter et al also offer some useful prompts for the facilitator for each phase in terms of 'Key Questions' to be asked during a phase and 'Alarm Bells' to be recognised during a phase, refer Table 1.

Key Questions	Alarm Bells
Formulation (Briefing)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the project move towards its vision • Is project best use of time, effort and resources • Is it attainable • Is the project a sufficient challenge • Can every single person 'own' the project and be committed to it • What are peoples concerns about the project • Is it exciting – does it 'light up' or inspire the group members • Are group members aligned on the project? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project is unclear or unmeasurable • Project is not central to fulfilling the vision • Some group members are not excited or have gone quite.
Concentration (Design)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are action plans clear and comprehensive • Has a Project Manager been appointed • Is it clear what actions people are accountable for • Are timeframes clear • Is there feedback or 'early warning' systems in place to identify potential problems • Is there a clear display of the project eg Wall Chart (where people can see at a glance what is going on) • Are there problems getting access to resources • Is anyone stuck? Confused? Needing help? • Does anyone need coaching to carry out their tasks • Has anyone bitten off more than they can chew? • Are there clear lines of communication • Is everyone in communication or are some people such and withholding their problems? • Are there clear problems-solving and conflict resolution methods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People are out of communication – not returning phone calls, not checking in • People look hassled and avoid eye contact • Time frames are slipping • Wall display is out of date • People are withholding problems.
Momentum (Documentation and Construction)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is management in place – who is steering and watching for danger • Is wall display up to date • Is momentum being maintained • Who is out of communication and why • Do action plans need updating • Is it time to have a clearing session • What is missing that could make a difference to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People losing focus and concentration • People satisfied with 'less than full' or 'near enough is good enough' completion • PM not vigilant in steering and the project is getting off course.

Key Questions	Alarm Bells
achieving the project?	
Completion (Handover)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have project outcomes been achieved? • Is the display complete? • Is anything missing which can still be put in • Have all the action plans been completed or reworked • Has all learning from the project been captured • Has a completion meeting been held to express any unfinished business one another • Have full acknowledgements occurred • Is everyone complete and freed up to move to the next project • Has there been full celebration? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People looked hassled and not freed up to complete • Learning is superficial • Fullness of Acknowledgement is missing • No clear ending ritual.

Table 1: Hunter’s Key Questions and Alarm Bells by Project Phases represented by Author

Future Gazing

Successful organisations of the future will be facilitating conversations for organisational learning and individual responsibility (Lloyd and Maguire, 2002). Lloyd and Maguire suggest that the old paradigm of looking right, having answers, being in control and demonstrating brilliance through being busy – will not cut it in the near future. Rather they suggest that there are no easy answers any more, no one is really in control, no one wants or needs busy leaders and a ‘no-blame’ environment can work. This concept ties in with Heron’s Autonomous Mode and Schwarz’ Mutual Learning model. Similarly it is suggested that future project teams (project organizations) will achieve success through a facilitative approach.

A number of authors suggest that a fundamental change in management techniques is required due to world events (Lloyd and Maguire, 2002). People are changing the way they think, the way they find meaning in their work, the way they interpret the world around them and ultimately create their sense of personal purpose. Lloyd and Maguire suggest that it is the deeper mutual understanding that allows for new possibilities and previously unimagined emergent horizons.

Schwarz suggests that many organizations consider that the possession of the skill set and mindset of the facilitative leader approach as a core competency for leaders. Descriptors of this approach are authenticity, building relationships and creating a learning environment. To capture these opportunities, there is a need to create a safe project environment generated by a facilitative approach. It is suggested that a facilitative approach to project management will enable the effective delivery of major projects and let us at least imagine emergent horizons.

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Bonus Material

This is quote/unquote from my friend's Dad's Webster's New World Dictionary of American Language which he purchased in 1978.

Manage

[It. maneggiare < mano, hand < L. Manus: see manual]

1. orig. to train (a horse) in his paces, cause to do the exercises of the manege 2. to control the movement or behaviour of; handle; manipulate 3. to have charge of; direct; conduct; administer (to manage a household) 4. {rare} to handle or use carefully; 5. to get (a person) to do what one wishes, esp. by skill, tact, flattery etc; make docile or submissive 6. to bring about by contriving, contrive, succeed in accomplishing: often used ironically (he managed to make a mess of it)

facilitate is shown as:

"vt. -tated, -tating [<Fr. faciliter, after It. facilitare < L. facilis)

to make easy or easier

facilitation is shown as:

1. the act of facilitating

2. Psychol. increased ease of performance of any action, resulting from the lessening of nerve resistance by the continued successive application of the necessary stimulus