

## **Paper for the IPMA World Congress `04, Budapest**

# **Development of a Project-specific Culture: A Project Management Function**

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### **The perception of projects as temporary organisations and as social systems**

Projects can be perceived as temporary organisations for the performance of relative unique business processes of large scope. Through the temporary character of projects the establishment of projects in the project start process, as well as the dissolution of projects in the project close-down process, attains a special meaning.

The perception of projects as temporary organisations also makes it possible to view projects as social systems. Social systems establish clear boundaries to differentiate them from their social environments, but are also related to those environments. If projects are perceived as social systems the specific characteristics of social systems, such as their social complexity, their dynamics and self-reference, become management themes in projects as well.

This understanding of projects has as a consequence in a systemic project management approach, which corresponds to the complexity and dynamics of projects. The development of a project-specific culture is an important approach in the management of the project complexity.

### **Organizational culture**

Permanent organizations, such as companies, profit centers and departments, have a culture. The company culture can be understood as „...a consistent whole made out of values, norms and symbols, which develops in a company as an answer to the requirements placed on the company as well as the needs of the people working there through the whole of the company's history. This is passed on consciously or unconsciously to new members of the company, particularly through the symbolic behaviours of roles models (dominant carriers of culture) and it affects the thinking and behaviour of those working in the company in an unmistakable manner.“<sup>1</sup>

The concept of the organizational culture can not only applied to permanent organizations but also to temporary organizations, i.e. to projects and programmes.

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<sup>1</sup> Hoffmann, F., Erfassung, Bewertung und Gestaltung von Unternehmenskulturen – Von der Kulturtheorie zu einem anwendungsorientierten Ansatz, in : zfo 3/1989, S. 169f

## **Objectives of the development of a project-specific culture**

The objective of the development of a project culture is the creation of competitive advantages for the project. Competitive advantages are created through the establishment of clear boundaries between the project and other projects, through securing the recognition of the project and the promotion of the identification of the members of the project organisation with the project. The project culture contributes to the development of the team spirit within the project, it provides orientation to the team members. Elements of the project culture, such as the project name, the project logo, project slogans, etc. also form the basis for a professional project marketing.

For the promotion of the relative autonomy of a project the development of a project-specific culture is an important instrument. A project-specific culture contributes to the development of a project identity.

The culture of a project can be observed through the behaviour of the members of the project organisation as well as from the methods and the communication forms used in the project.

## **Elements of the project culture**

Elements of a project culture are

- the project name, the project logo, project colours,
- project-specific values, which might be documented in a project mission statement,
- project slogans, the project language and project related anecdotes,
- project-related artefacts such as project documents (project plans, organization charts, etc.),
- the project infrastructure: project office, meeting room, IT-tools and video-conferencing,
- project-related events.

### ***Project name, project logo and project colour***

A project name should make a project and all project related information recognisable and assignable. The project name should make the identification of the project type possible and promote associations with the project objectives. So are, for example, conception projects to be differentiated from realisation projects. From the project names „Conception eApplication“ and „Realisation eApplication“ a chain of product development projects is recognisable.

Project names should be short, but no abbreviations should be used which outsiders would not understand. A contract number „A 2003-12“ is, for example, not a good name for a contracting project.

The project name „Route 66“ for a vacation trip with the aeroplane from Vienna to New York further with a rental car to Miami is a bad choice. One associates it with Route 66, an east-west route and not a north-south trip through the USA.

The use of a project logo seems to presuppose costly design work. It is, however, seldom necessary to create a picture as a project logo. Often it will suffice to use the project name as word pictures, for example, written in italics and in colour.

The choice of a project colour supports the recognisability of a project. Such as in the chain of projects „Conception ABS“, „ABS“ and „ABS Optimisation“ the continuity of the chain of projects is also assured through the retention of ABS (Antibiotic strategies) as element of each

project name and through an uniform use of blue and turquoise as project colours. But in order to communicate the independence of the projects the two colours are currently being used in inverse in the project „ABS Optimisation“. Examples of different coloured documentation from both projects are shown in figure 1.



Figure 1: Guidelines for further development of the antibiotic culture in Austrian hospitals (example 1 as a result of the project „ABS“, example 2 as a result of the project „ABS Optimisation“)

### **Project values and the project mission statement**

Project values provide benchmarks for what is viewed as good, valuable and desirable in a project. They determine the behaviour of the members of the project organisation consciously and unconsciously and provide orientation for their actions. Project values are therefore an important leadership instrument in projects.

In defining project values one can use the following questions as an aid:

- What is specific about the project result?
- What is important and/or not important to the project team?
- What differentiates the project from other projects?

In the definition of the project values one can differentiate between results-related and process-related statements. These central values of the project „Realisation eApplication“ are shown in figure 2 as an example.

<b>Realisation eApplication</b>	<b>PROJECT VALUES</b>
<b>Results-related values</b>	
Innovation in project management training	
Professional marketing of the eApplication	
Co-operative project between RGC and IT supplier	
<b>Process-related values</b>	
Making project management learning from eProjects possible	
Version: 1.0	Date: 01.02.2003
Author: GS	

Figure 2: Values of the project „Realisation eApplication“

Central values can be communicated by documenting them in a “Project Mission Statement“. An example of a project mission statement is shown in figure 3 with the mission statement of the project „IPMA`90“ for the organisation of the world congress of the IPMA-International Project Management Association. In this project mission statement the project values were not formulated into full sentences, but they were defined as pairs of concepts. The interpretations of the values took place in personal discussions and in presentations, the implementation of the values took place in the daily project work. The implementation of the value pair „Mind and Body“ took place, for example, through the a challenging, „top-heavy“

congress program, but also through a light lunch and through relaxing Tai chi exercises by which attention was given to the physical well-being of the congress participants.

<b>Mission statement of the project "IPMA '90"</b>	
•	Significant in content and socially stimulating
•	Tradition-minded and future-oriented
•	Mind and body
•	Science and practice
•	International and innovative
•	(Learning) experience and chance

Figure 3: Mission statement of the project „IPMA `90“

### **Project slogans and project related anecdotes**

Project slogans should communicate what is important in the project and/or what is especially important in a project phase. Project slogans can only be formulated for an entire project or for individual project phases. The slogans which were used in the individual phases of the project „IPMA `90“ are shown in figure 4. These slogans were used by the project manager internally to give orientation to the project teams. For marketing the world congress additional product related slogans were formulated.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Phase</b>	<b>Slogans for the project "IPMA `90"</b>
12/88	Marketing	Total marketing!
10/89	Design	No more creativity! Love for the details and for high production quality!
05/90	Final preparation	Have fun, everything is decided!
06/90	Performance	IPMA `90 - A High Touch project!

Figure 4: Slogans for the project „IPMA `90“

The image of a project can also be imparted through project related anecdotes. An anecdote about a co-operative customer discussion from the project manager can go a long way toward forming a project-related customer relationship.

### **Project related artefacts, project language and project rooms**

Project related artefacts are, most importantly, the project management documents, such as the project brochure, the project organisation chart and the project plans.

Through the professionalism of the content as well as through the graphic and colour arrangement of these documents the project culture is formed and communicated. A great importance is put on „symbolic project management“.

The project language, meaning project specific terms and designations will also inform the project management documents.

A project room represents an „organisational home“ for a project. This project room does not always have to be available to the project, it is also sufficient for providing an identity when the same room is always available for project meetings. The decoration of the project room with selected artefacts from the project, such as print-outs of the work breakdown structure and the project organisation chart as well as some project photos, should be done by the project manager.

### **Project related events**

Project related events, such as outdoor weekends, project vernissages or visits to wineries, are further elements for the development of the project culture. The use of such events is

dependent on the size and strategic importance of the project, since these all incur additional costs. But even in small projects it is recommended, for example, for the project team to mark the end of the project start workshop with a social event.

### Symbolic project management

Particularly in temporary organisations it is of great importance to describe the organisation for representatives of relevant environments and also for new members of the project organisation. With the help of symbols information can be passed on in a more complex form. In this way values and norms can be passed on and orientation given.

Symbols can be used to motivate members of the project organization: ceremonies (handing over the project assignment) and parties (to close down the project) positively influence the feelings of project contributors toward the project.

Symbols „jog the memory“ of feelings and experiences. For example, when a project team member looks at the project logo, he or she perhaps will recall a lively discussion which preceded the definition of the logo.

Symbols act to control energy in that they provide a possibility to vent negative feelings.

In projects in which project team members of several companies work together there is the necessity for a professional symbolic management. Through the different histories of the project team members there can be problems in understanding symbols. It can happen that symbols are interpreted differently. Therefore there is a challenge for the project manager to provide sense by interpretations of the symbols.

The methods of symbolic project management are listed below with the interpretation of these symbols, which surpasses the content of the artefact or the act.

<b>Verbal Symbols</b>	<b>Possible Interpretation</b>
Project slogan	Central objectives and values of the project
Project-related anecdotes	Central values and norms of the project
Project language, jargon	Belonging to the project
<b>Interactional Symbols</b>	
Availability of scarce resources	High strategic importance for the project
Seating plan in project meetings	Power in the project
Social Events	Personal interest of the members of the project organisation for each other
Milestone party	Start a new project phase
Use of first names (in non-English-speaking culture the use of the familiar "you" as opposed to the formal "you")	Belonging to the project, setting boundaries to other organisations
Burning old project plans	Agreement of new project objectives
<b>Objectified Symbols</b>	
Graphic depiction of the project organisation diagram	Power in the project, meaning of individual roles, of relationships between roles
Project logo, project name	Challenges and objectives of the project
Availability of a project room	High meaning for the project teamwork, home of the project
Size and decoration of a work room	Status in the project organisation

*Figure 5: Methods of the symbolic project management*

These and other symbols and symbolic actions can be used in projects.

### **The process of developing a project culture**

The development of a project culture is a process that requires time and energy. Because projects are usually defined for dealing with short to middle term business processes, the deficit in time must be compensated with a high use of resources and through corresponding communications forms. This is possible, for example, with the performance of the project start workshop. A preliminary version can be built upon the project assignment process (project name, first project management documents). Specific challenges regarding the development and the „social controlling“ of the project culture occur in virtual projects. Time and space must be devoted to the development of the project culture during the project start process.

Controlling the project culture takes place during project controlling. But elements which give identity to the project culture, such as the project name, the project values, etc, should not be changed in the process. Eventual adaptations in the project culture are the result of reflection processes in the project.

Major changes of the project culture might be required due to a project discontinuity, such as a project crisis, a project chance, or a structurally determined project change. Instruments for the development of project-specific cultures from different project-oriented companies will be presented.

### **Identity of a project**

As with other organisations, projects have a specific identity, each of which is characterised by its specific project objectives, project organisation, project values and project environment relationships.

The identity of an organisation is determined by:

- the strategies and objectives of the organisation
- the services of the organisation
- the organisational structure and business processes, and the organisational culture
- the personnel (quantitative and qualitative) of the organisation
- the infrastructure (buildings, plants, IT, telecommunications) of the organisation
- the finances (budget, financing) of the organisation and
- the context of the organisation.