

Cover to Cover

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Impact on Project Management of Allied Disciplines: Trends and Future of Project Management Practices and Research

by Young Hoon Kwak and Frank T. Anbari

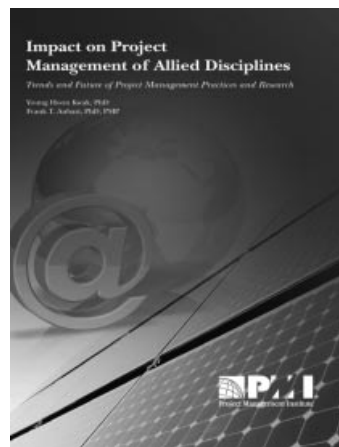
Some would argue that project management has an identity crisis. Is it a profession? Is it a discipline unto itself? How does it relate to general and functional management? By looking at how theory and practice in other disciplines may affect project management, and vice versa, the authors have served up useful findings to help us further our understanding of the broader context of project management.

This PMI-sponsored research looked at project management through the lenses of what the authors call “allied disciplines” to see what, if any, impact there might be. They defined and categorized the allied disciplines into eight groups:

- operations research, decision sciences, operation management, and supply-chain management
- organizational behavior and human resources management
- information technology and information systems
- technology, innovation, new product development, and research and development
- engineering construction, contracts, legal aspects, and expert witness
- strategy, integration, portfolio management, value of project management, and marketing
- performance management, earned value management, project finance, and accounting
- quality management, Six Sigma, and process improvement

The authors did an extensive literature search for “past, current, and future trends of project management” by examining 18 top management and business journals (e.g., *Management Science*, *Sloan Management Review*, and *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management*) from the 1950s through June 2007. They reported 980 total occurrences in 537 papers using the eight allied disciplines to tag findings. Reporting the key elements of those articles, however, was not apparently in the scope of this research.

Complementing the literature search, the authors did a self-selected Web survey of the project management community regarding perceived impact of research that has been available in the allied disciplines. Unfortunately, the survey produced only



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82 responses over the 5 months the survey was available. Last, they did in-depth interviews with just a handful of researchers and experts to sketch the future of the interaction between project management and the allied disciplines.

While the authors report numerous findings and observations, a couple stand out.

There is a strong upward trend in project management research in the publications examined. A notable uptick in research is evident particularly in strategy/project portfolio management and operations research. This should be good news for those who feel project management does not get its just desserts in the executive wing. However, the research findings substantiate that the project management community appears to think that research will not have much of an impact.

That research has low visibility among practitioners is hardly surprising when most in the trenches seem to have no time or appetite for “academics” in the workplace. What is ironic in this “blind spot” is that practitioners seem always on the hunt for best practices, with an insatiable curiosity to know what peers are doing. Moreover, the report notes that the project management community relies on sources other than this study’s top journals. As the report suggests, it is time for project managers to turn over some new stones.

As for the future of project management, the authors suggest the future vitality of project management rests with the project management community being able to understand and interact successfully with the allied disciplines.

Project management, they maintain, will become the norm for organizations in achieving strategic goals. They even go so far as to say “project management will be the accepted way of getting work done in a flexible, outsourced, and projectized environment.” This should be heartening for practitioners and the rest of the project management community.

This report is a rich resource for anyone wanting a snapshot of today’s broader project management environment. Additional research into the substance of promising trends in the allied disciplines, along with how practitioners can use this information, would be valuable. Moreover, this train of research will help validate or create improvements in current standards and practices. ■

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