

How is project management different to change management?

There's a lot of talk about change management these days. Nearly every day I meet project managers, PMO-officers or others who refer to "change management" and I don't think it's only because of my recently published text book (in Swedish) on the topic. I think it's because more people are beginning to realize the importance of change management.

An indication of this is the recent announcement of PMI Sweden that they have initiated a collaboration with ACMP, a world-wide Association for Change Management Professionals. Many project managers may think that they already work with change management, and some may wonder what's new. How is change management different from project management and how does the professionalization of change management affect the profession of project management?

As I see it change management is different from project management in three ways.

First of all, change management and project management focus on different things. Project management is about ensuring that the project goal is reached (eg that a new IT-system is developed, or that an office space is re-furnished into an activity-based space, whereas change management aims at ensuring that the objectives with the project are reached, which most often means that people have to change their behavior. To for example achieve the benefits of the new IT-system, or with an activity-based office people have to work differently compared to before.

This means, in turn, that the daily work of change management and project management differ. Both work practices involve the formulating of goals that may be evaluated later, and the sub-sequent planning of activities, but since change management is about making sure that the effects of a particular change initiative are achieved, the tool box of change management involve tools related to communication, leadership and how to deal with anxiety and resistance to change. This type of knowledge may also a project manager have, but traditionally she mainly uses it to deal with the challenges that may

arise within the project team, rather than among users, citizens, recipients, or whoever are to use that which the project aims at developing.

Yet another difference between the two practices is that a change initiative does not necessarily need to be performed in the form of a project. The change initiative may run in parallel with a project that aims at developing a particular solution, or that the project includes a sub-project of activities that aims at preparing the future users/recipients for what is to come, for example by educating or informing them, but since change management is about making sure that particular and defined effects are achieved, the change management work has to be performed in close collaboration with the permanent organization. This means that it is not always suitable to organize a change management initiative in the temporary form of a project. Sometimes it may be wiser to include the change management initiative in the organization's yearly plan, and provide the line managers with necessary resources.

It is clear that change management is undergoing a process of professionalization, which means that those that work with this type of practice are coming together, formalizing their knowledge, and specifying what is needed in order for someone to call herself a "change manager" or similar. The area of project management saw the same development a few decades ago – PMI is only one of the organizations that played an important role in this. Hopefully, the professionalization of change management will mean that the crucial, but often neglected area of knowledge and competence – how to make people motivated to change their behavior – is spread further, and this is useful also for the performing of successful projects.

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