

Abstract

Engaging 'Meaning' in the Analysis of the Project Start-Up Workshop

*Mano Nugapitiya (1), Patrick Healy (2), Spike Boydell (2)

(1) Endstate Pty Ltd, Sydney, Australia; (2) University of Technology, Sydney, Built Environment, Sydney, Australia

'Meaning' provides a valuable concept in the explanation of project management (PM) practice. It offers an understanding of the basis of human behaviour and action. In this paper, we present a model of meaning that we employ in the examination of PM practice.

Our model consists of a simplified definition of meaning, a description of introspection leading to understanding and a process of interaction between people. This process enables the construction, destruction, and development of meaning. We demonstrate this approach by analysing an autoethnographic case study of a project start-up workshop to test our model.

Such a model requires a shift to an interpretivist paradigm, and to achieve this we draw on ideas and concepts from the Chicago School of Sociology and the Continental Philosophers in examining the PM practice.

Our interpretivist model makes a significant contribution to the understanding and application of meaning in the context of Project Management practice. It provides an enabling methodology that allows the Project Manager the authority to be introspective in their analysis of their respective role and place in project success.

Corresponding Author:

Mano Nugapitiya

Email : manon@endstate.com.au

Phone : ++61 418 869275

Fax : ++

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Key Words: project management, project start-up, meaning, interpretation, understanding, interaction, symbolic interaction, introspection

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Introduction

The project start-up (PSU) workshop is an important initiating approach in Project Management (PM) practice. There is an intuitive and widespread belief that PSU's are useful and effective; we share this view. Fangel (1984) and others, such as Verma (1996; 1997), discuss the social importance of the PSU in the way it enables co-operation and cohesion within the project team, promotes goal setting, and offers measures for building communication skills and managing conflict and agreeing actions. In the context of PSU, terms such as ‘mutual understanding’ (Halman and Burger, 2002; Hamburger, 1992), ‘shared perception’ (Fangel, 1987 as cited in (IPMA, 1990)) and ‘mutual co-operation’ (van Hooft, 1981 as cited in (IPMA, 1990)) are introduced in the PM literature. However, there is no explanation of why they might be effective, other than as a useful way to gain agreement.

We are of the view that much of project management (PM) practice cannot be explained within a mechanistic ‘iron triangle’ model of cost, quality and time. There is widespread recognition that the existing PM bodies of knowledge (BOK) have difficulty in explaining the PM practice (Cicmil, 2006). Some claim that because the existing BOK are designed as vehicles for professional accreditation, one should not look to them for adequate explanations of practice (Morris, 2006), this claim is accepted. However, this still leaves PM practitioners no alternative approach but to be locked into a positivist paradigm where much of the lived experience of the project manager and the subjective existence of other project participants is ignored.

In this paper, we propose to take the reader beyond the positivist (or objectivist) paradigm into the interpretivist paradigm, whilst accepting both approaches are useful in dealing with the world. Most of the achievements of the physical sciences take a positivist perspective that views the world as something external to the individual and that we can treat as separate.

Most of the theory of project management falls broadly into the positivist paradigm. In contrast, interpretivist positions take the theoretical belief that reality (in this case, PM practice) is socially constructed and fluid.

Taking an interpretivist approach, our purpose is to draw attention to the importance of 'meaning' in explaining project management practice. We demonstrate this by using meaning to analyse some of the outcomes of a project start-up workshop. By understanding meaning, the insights available significantly complement functionalist explanations such as 'time/cost/quality' or 'gaining agreement' in the context of project start-up workshops. We suggest that meaning provides a vehicle for project managers to transform the perceptions of value of their projects. Importantly, this approach opens up possibilities for their projects to achieve success in a new and dynamic way.

Meaning is a complex philosophical problem, which has occupied the best brains for centuries. We start by presenting a simplified concept of meaning. To achieve this, we separate out 'meaning' from 'understanding' and present an explanation of the process of understanding as a reflective process. We then move outside the single individual to interaction between groups of people, so that we can explain the role of interaction in the construction and negotiation of meaning by using a case study of a project start-up workshop.

We present our case study through the eyes of the project manager by engaging an auto-ethnographic methodology. This approach, using the subjective experience of the project start-up workshop, is deliberate because it is one way of gaining access to a subset of meanings.

Whilst interpretivist views have different origins in different disciplines, there are few precedents in their application to Project Management. This enables us to borrow a vocabulary of meaning arising from what is known as the Chicago School Sociology, drawing on authors such as Dewey, Mead, Cooley and Blumer, as well as the explanations of the

Continental Philosophers (phenomenologists) provided by authors such as Husserl and Schutz. As we will demonstrate, by using these ideas project participants can become more aware of the concept of meanings as they arise on projects and, more importantly, heighten their awareness of the impacts of meanings on participants' and stakeholders' behaviour.

This paper takes the reader into an area where things cannot be proven in the usual scientific way (i.e. by falsification), an expectation that is commonly emphasised in PM. Instead the reader will have to make their own interpretation of meaning to decide whether or not what is presented here is valid. Being valid does not imply that it is the 'truth', but rather that what is presented here provides useful insights beyond that which is currently available within the accepted view of project management.

Using our interpretivist model to explain the events of the project start-up workshop, we submit that the explanation we provide is valid. The contribution of the paper is that it offers a meaning that is not available to project management within the dominant positivist paradigm and makes the case that the interpretivist paradigm has much to offer to future research in PM practice.

Articulating Meaning

We start with the idea that meanings are all around us. Let us call these ideas, things, events, and behaviours phenomena. Some aspects or features of these phenomena can be of significance or have the capacity to become significant to people. A meaning exists if the aspect can or might have significance for people that are affected. This 'significance' arises when people have an emotional response or recognise value, where that value can be positive or negative. While examples of significance are potentially infinite, we will focus on self interest, something worthy of support, or reduction of uncertainty.

Self Interest: Meaning connects to peoples' perceptions of rewards and punishments. It is in some way related to what people perceive as their self interests (Heath, 1994).

Support: Meaning here is seen as something people believe is worthy of support. In the corporate communications area "vision statements" are attempts to provide meaning to corporate activity, so as to gain and maintain support for the corporation.

Uncertainty: Meanings are sometimes associated with the need for more information.

Meaning is attributed with the quality of reducing uncertainty (Heath, 1994, p. 63). By being able to put data into meaningful context, one is able to deal more confidently with the world. Scheff (2005, p. 158) offers another view, that uncertainty is caused by multiple 'meanings'. Schutz explains this as a time related problem - the meaning of the person's experience of the situation will evolve as he lives through experience and reflects on it (Schutz, 1967, p. 12).

Meanings are aspects or features of phenomena, and are aspects or features to which people respond by either emotion or recognition of value. The aspects are there all the time, but the meanings may or may not be identified or recognised. When we identify or recognise meaning, we say that the meaning is understood. We assume that meanings are important in motivating people to act or not to act. People do things, want to do things, or choose not to do things because each of those actions (of doing or not doing things) has meaning for them.

We will now classify meanings, based on how they arise, because that allows us to identify some important subsets. We can divide meanings into four groups. These groups exhibit a range of 'fixity' or 'stability' of meanings. The first is the more stable and fixed while the others gradually move towards the malleable, or socially constructed, end. We are particularly interested on the socially constructed end.

- 1 Firstly, there are some things in our everyday world where a universally held meaning has arisen; for example, a chair, a playground, or a star in the night sky. As objects, these have a set of fixed meanings that are entrenched in today's world. The fixed

meaning of these objects has potential for negotiation before becoming universal, entrenched and 'taken for granted'. This is one type of 'meaning' as Blumer (1969) points out: 'meaning' originating from the objective makeup of a thing, then held and entrenched in society.

For many people this is the main understanding of meaning. Meanings are seen as fixed, put in place because of technical necessity. Much of the world needs to fall into (or appears to fall into) this category in order to reduce the mental effort of living. Berger and Luckmann (1967) discuss the terms 'objective reality' and 'subjective reality' to describe the complexities of everyday reality of society. In examining the existence of objective reality in society, Berger and Luckmann take the view that all human activity is subject to habituation; therefore, all action that is repeated frequently becomes cast into a pattern and frees the individual from the burden of 'all those decisions'. Typification of habitualised actions is available to 'others' so that 'interaction' becomes predictable.

- 2 Secondly, there is meaning of a thing that arises for an individual perceiver from a cumulative 'psychical accretion' of perceptions; the thing has meaning for the individual perceiver through sensations, feelings, ideas, memories, and attitudes.

This 'thing' can be physical, for example the care and sense of elation and pride with which a soldier will handle his bravery decoration; such decorations would mean nothing whatsoever to someone who has no interest in the proud soldier's memorabilia.

Likewise, the 'thing' could also be a social encounter, such as a wedding, a christening, a funeral or an office function (Blumer, 1969).

- 3 Thirdly, while close to the second category, meanings arise out of the effect of how people interact with things (Blumer, 1969). Acting towards things includes thinking about the things. With the same object, one may have many meanings associated with

the object and these may change because of what people do or happens in relation to the things.

Take the example of a playground. A Council Ranger will see a playground as a Council's liability, a problem of having to arrange to mow the grass regularly, ensure vandalism is kept in check and the equipment is safe and solid for use. A child will see the same playground as a good reason to get out of the house and play soccer and the child's parent will see the playground as a means for bonding with his child and getting some healthy exercise. It is still a playground. However, if the child, whilst running to collect the ball, fell into an uncovered stormwater pit and suffered serious injury, a playground would mean something quite different for the Ranger, the child and the parent from then on. This example shows how because of an event in relation to a thing (the playground) meanings change. This is different from the second group where one individual alone deals with the object over time while in the third group society has come into the situation and been involved in some change.

- 4 Fourthly, Meanings arise from how people interact with each other. 'Meanings' are a social product arising out of social processes and interaction. They are not fixed; they are ongoing and are broken down, modified and renegotiated from time to time with new experiences and insights. In essence, objects and events have no intrinsic meaning separate from the meanings assigned to them in the course of interaction (Prasad, 1993, p. 1403). It is through a process of human interpretation that meanings are constructed: by *what* is said, by the *way* it is said, and *when* and *how* it is said (Blumer, 1969).

Within this subset, we have 'shared reality'. Meaning is also concerned with a shared view of reality. It allows people to make agreed sense of same events. It helps people to interpret events at work and in other places, and in particular, it helps people to understand the behaviour of others. It involves people in coming to agreement on standards of behaviour and outcomes required. In this sense 'meaning' clearly impacts

on relationships between people and meaning guides behaviour (Heath, 1994, pp. 19 and 59).

These four categories show that meanings can come from, or arise from, a wide range of phenomena, or from the ways in which people interact. Almost everything around us has a meaning. Meanings cover the range from a 'fixed' reality through to a 'socially constructed' reality.

In the context of project start-up workshops, the third and fourth groups become particularly important in project management when dealing with matters such as scope, negotiation, and communication. Here, things do not have a fixed form and their significance and importance can change with how people construct them in their minds.

We argue that meaning is important in human life. As intelligent beings, humans make the presumption that meaning exists and, therefore, the lack of it means anomaly (Dewey, 1910, p. 117). To grasp meaning, to understand and to identify are important functions of human life; their absence can result in lack of intellectual content, confusion, and perhaps intellectual perversion. 'Meaning' plays a central role in explaining and accounting for human behaviour (Blumer, 1969). It should be noted that this view (which is accepted in this paper) is not in accord with Durkheim's (1982) objectivist position, where he argues that both thinking and behaviour are concepts external to the individual.

Interpreting Meaning

To this point, we have articulated meaning as being all around us, and suggested that we need to recognise and interpret meanings before they can be understood. We need to clarify the use of the word 'recognise' in this context. We cannot understand meanings until we interpret them; so it is incorrect to suggest that meanings have been recognised before they have been interpreted. Recognition simply means that some choice is made before interpretation starts.

For example, one might identify a flag (recognise the flag) before trying to interpret its meaning or its meanings.

By 'interpretation', we mean a process that leads to an understanding of meaning.

Understanding of meaning arises when we grasp a meaning, appreciate the significance, or understand its value. Before the grasping, or appreciation, or the understanding occurs one goes through a process that leads to the state of understanding. Of course, the process can have a quite random sequence in line with its complexity. This process is essentially an interaction within ourselves (e.g. we talk to ourselves) by which we come to terms with the meaning or grasp the meaning.

This internal interaction occurs as a reflection – there is a time lapse between something we experience and arrive at a meaning being grasped; understanding meaning occurs after (not during) the experience. The notion of time lapse between action and understanding is found in the writings of Schutz (1967), Dewey (1910), Mead (1922; 1934) and Husserl (cited in Moran, 2005). For the purposes of our case study analysis, the important point to note is that meanings are understood after the experience and that this understanding arises from an introspection process. We now expand from introspection to interaction, to explain how the process of human interaction conveys and modifies meanings.

Social Interaction

Our definition of meaning does not require a unique or fixed set of meanings associated with a fixed set of aspects or features of phenomena. To reiterate, meanings are always around us and as long as we can think and breathe, humans will continue to construct, reconstruct and negotiate 'meaning' continually through either introspective process or through social interaction (the social interaction will of course involve internal reflection). Importantly, as our playground incident demonstrated, the meaning of an event or action for one person may not necessarily be the same for another (or others).

Central to the interpretivist approach is the acknowledgement that social interaction is practically unavoidable. It is through ‘interaction’ that humans will come to recognise each other’s existence and construct and negotiate meanings (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). By recognising the construction and negotiation of meanings, project managers will achieve greater insight into the factors driving scope, and influencing cost, quality and time targets.

In summary meanings are constructed and conveyed through social interaction, and an interpretive process is involved.

Case Study - Background

Our case study comes from a reconstruction project that followed a significant and fatal (18 deaths) landslide in Australia. The town where the landslide occurred is a ski resort and is known as The Village. The landslide occurred at the start of the ski season (Southern Hemisphere – Jun to about Sept), some ten years ago. The Village is located within an environmentally protected area and the economy is largely dependent on tourism and is seasonal. The disaster had personal, psychological, environmental, and economic effects on the Village.

The landowner was a government agency and a private operator, a publicly listed company, operated the resort under a head lease arrangement. Syndicates, clubs, and individuals owned the various ski lodges under a sublease arrangement. The landowner also had responsibilities for road maintenance and fire trails and development consent within the Village. The operator in addition to promoting tourism and events also performed the services of local municipality.

The reconstruction project implementation phase commenced the following February. A professional project management (PM) firm was engaged in that February, just prior to the award of the construction contract. At the outset, two stages were identified: Stage 1

between February and June; and Stage 2 between November and June the following year, with a break between the two stages due to the harsh snow conditions.

The project was completed eventually in March, two years later, taking several months longer than projected to complete and at a cost significantly higher than the original estimate, largely due to quantity increases and scope changes. Though it could be classified ostensibly as a failure against the traditional PM model, the project was hailed a success in serving as a significant step in returning normalcy to the Ski Resort. The project also received an engineering excellence award. The award was more significant as it was supported by the external stakeholders, and in particular the local community.

Case Study – Project Start-Up Workshop

The methodology that the Project Management firm engaged for this project was underpinned by a philosophy of project co-operation and innovation. It identified organising and holding a project start-up (PSU) workshop with the key stakeholders as one of the first activities for the PM team.

The client had a say in who should be on the invitees list for this workshop. Key personnel from organisations that had a contract with the client, together with several departmental representatives, were invited to the PSU workshop.

The Project Manager presents the record of this case study as an autoethnographic account told in the first person, giving voice to the project manager and reported as seen through his eyes (presented in italics). It is presented without comment, with the analysis following the account. For the purposes of this example, the account understandably runs to several pages to provide a rich context of the events through the eyes of the Project Manager. This autoethnographic approach offers a rich contemporary contribution to research design for

project management and the reader is referred to the relevant literature (Ellis and Bochner, 2000; Spry, 2006; Wall, 2006).

The workshop was to be held in the Boardroom at the Client's Office. The PM team had to drive in to the town where the Client's Office was located, a thirty-minute drive downhill from the Village. Some of the PM team's management together with all the engineering consultants travelled from Sydney whilst the Construction Contractor's staff travelled from their home base. All were expected to meet at 9 am.

As most of the participants had not met previously, and had only communicated by fax and telephone, the morning tea session prior to the Workshop was crucial. All the participants had the opportunity to introduce themselves to each other and engage in casual conversation. I saw this as an 'ice breaker'—gathering first impressions of the other and getting to know the other.

The Workshop commenced formally, with self introductions by each of the participants and a brief outline of what each participant sought from the project.

The Workshop was facilitated by the PM team's Project Director/Contract Manager appointee and not by an independent facilitator.

Following the initial introductions, the Client Representative proceeded to outline their overall concerns for this project as:

- *The work at the Village is very sensitive and we see it directly affecting both the economic and natural environments of the local community; and.*
- *We are very concerned to execute the works in a professional manner and have the first stage of works completed prior to the commencement of this year's winter season.*

The Workshop then went on to form several syndicates. Each organisation then operated as an individual syndicate, with the senior person of that organisation becoming the nominated spokesperson for that syndicate. The individuals within the syndicates then went on to discuss each of their views on the project mission.

The spokesperson from each syndicate then set out to outline their respective corporate project missions. These are summarised as follows:

The Geo-technical Engineer and the Engineering Designer offered a combined view that they looked forward to strengthening their existing relationship with the Client by delivering technically proficient work.

The Construction Contractor is seeking an adequate return for its shareholders from its involvement in the contract, but affirmed that their main focus was to please the Client with the outcome.

The PM team was especially interested in responding to the Client's requirement, [to] fulfil responsibilities under its contract, while building a good relationship with their new client.

The Client wanted to assist the local community, particularly aiming to restore the confidence of the tourism industry and the Village's economic livelihood.

My mind was wandering. Here I found my Client's overall mission at odds with my previous assumptions of their intentions. I found this interesting and thought-provoking. Here at this workshop my Client came across as an entity concerned and caring for the wellbeing of the local community. My thoughts then turned to the questions: Was it genuine? Or was it an attempt to repair public ill-feeling? On the one hand, from my previous interactions with people in the Village and reading the newspaper articles, I had come to assume that there was a growing distrust and a feeling of abandonment by the

community in the Village. My view was that my Client had perhaps been insensitive towards the local community's current dilemma. This was perhaps due to their main focus being to protect themselves from legal liability. Such an assumption was also supported by the meanings I had from the briefings we had received from the Client.

Feeling curious to understand the background to my Client's motivation, I later searched previous newspaper articles. The search pointed towards a newspaper article several weeks earlier that said "The lodge owners hailed the roadwork announcement as a way to restore public confidence in the stability of the hillside, but some feared the move may be too late for some; too late for those already hit by a slump in overnight stayers" and "...the roadworks were an important step to restore public confidence". I have come to assume that the Client's mission may have been motivated by this statement.

The Workshop then went into considerable discussion amongst the participants on how each participant saw the project and what the real mission of the project should be. I thought that the Client's mission summed up the project mission well. The Facilitator then summed up the discussion of the group in saying, "Am I hearing that each of you—as experienced professionals and practitioners—agree that the engineering of this project appears straightforward, and see the real challenge of the project to be restoring the confidence of the people of [the Village]?" At this point in the Workshop the focus shifted from the Client's overall mission of restoring "the confidence of the tourism industry and the Village's economic livelihood" to restoring "the confidence of the ...[Village] Community". After further discussion and a final review at the conclusion of the Workshop, the project team agreed that the Project's Mission would become:

"To contribute to the restoration of the confidence of the ...[Village] Community..., by reconstructing the ...[roadway] at ...[the village] to current Engineering Standards and community expectations."

From some of the previous project start-up workshops I had attended, project missions had been mostly focused on achieving project time, budget, specification, and client expectations. Unlike those previous project missions, I thought this project mission had depth and achieving it would feel something special. At the same time I had doubt about my own ability to deliver to these expectations. I thought the expectations being set too high; particularly because of the disruptive nature of the work, the tight timeframes, and the negative reception we had received so far in the Village.

But the project mission had significant meaning to me. It was one that was going to be easy to remember and I decided that this was going to be at the tip of my tongue throughout the project.

I was now trying to assess the situation. I was wondering why there might not have been adequate engagement with the local community at an informal and individual level. I perceived that the Client might have felt vulnerable and fearful of compromising their legal position: hence been cautious by only saying what was scripted by their legal team.

My mind was racing with thoughts on how I might start to respond. As with my approach in previous projects I was determined to adopt an “open book” approach in being honest and upfront on issues; of course without placing the Client at any legal risk. What this meant to me was that:

- *If a member of the local community did ask a question regarding the project or the site, I would answer the question fully and impartially.*
- *In dealing with the construction contractor or the design consultants, particularly on such matters as extensions of time and variations and payment matters, I would do so in an objective, reasonable and impartial way.*

The Workshop facilitator’s report titled, the Project Cooperative Workshop Report, captured the essence and outcomes of the workshop.

I believe that the Workshop influenced actions taken by ourselves (the PM team) and the contractor. Though the outcome of the Project Co-operative Workshop might not have identified specific measures in relation to community consultation, the project mission arising from the Workshop, provided the foundation for the project team's individually initiated measures towards community consultation.

From my previous experiences, I fully appreciated that community consultation should take place both at a formal level, through meetings, briefings and newsletters, and at an informal level, by building up a relationship with each of the stakeholders. They would then feel more comfortable expressing concerns or sharing information than at a formal briefing or through correspondence. I had also recognised that the interaction at the informal level is what complements the interaction at the formal level.

By now, I (and perhaps everyone else in the PM team) had a clear determination to accomplish our project mission.

If not already apparent from the earlier discussions, I was almost fixated with the thought that, in order to achieve our project mission, there had to be a clear demonstration, of the transparency of this project. The local community would then clearly recognise that the project team, and eventually the Client, did not have anything to hide despite what the critics and the media were saying. Through this high level of transparency I thought we could demonstrate that the project team (and the Client) can be trusted. Others in the PM team perhaps had thoughts similar to mine. We wanted to show the community that we were genuinely concerned for their welfare and that we were here to help, both in the psychological and financial restoration of the local community, by undertaking this project to their expectations.

In order to achieve this aim, we (the PM team) would have to recognise that despite the feeling of vulnerability, we would have to proactively intermingle with them as much as

possible, through a mix of regularly turning up in places where they would normally turn up and by giving them the opportunity to visit the project team impromptu whenever they felt like visiting us at the project office. We recognised that we would first need to build up an informal relationship in order for them to show interest in listening at the formal level through Community Briefings and Meetings.

Arising from the need for transparency the PM team identified several measures:

Firstly, from our Lodge Manager, we recognised that there was a longstanding tradition for key members of the local community to meet at the local Pub at 7pm each evening regardless of how busy they were. The project team's visitation to the Pub at this time would not only allow them to enjoy a drink and relax after a long and hard day's work, but also it would provide the local community with an opportunity to interact with the project team and get to know us personally. It may also provide them the opportunity to inquire of what was going on onsite or privately raise any concerns they might have.

Secondly, our project administrator agreed, that in her daily errands such as to collect and dispatch mail, she would walk in to the Village Square (as against driving) so that she could talk to as many people as possible.

Thirdly, a regime of weekly site inspections would be conducted by a member of the PM team (mostly myself) at a pre-agreed time for the benefit of the local community. These site inspections would provide locals and visitors alike with a first hand experience of what was going on onsite; with a detailed briefing of the project's progress; and again, with the opportunity to raise any questions with the expectation of an honest and open response.

Fourthly, there would be targeted informal visits to lodges where a member of the PM team (mostly myself) would visit to discuss upcoming work adjacent to, or within the limits of, their property before opening up new worksites. Alternatively, over an informal

coffee chat, the lodge representatives would have the opportunity and confidence to raise any matters privately away from fellow locals, feeling that they had the PM team's individual attention.

Fifthly, the local community would have the opportunity to visit the PM Office. The PM team would adopt an open door policy where, if a visitor turned up at the office, they would be made to feel welcome anytime of the day—regardless of how busy the office was—and their concerns or comments would never be brushed aside. We agreed that the fridge will always have beer and we would all be trained on the coffee machine. If there were any technical queries raised, then with the help of the geotechnical and design team, the PM team would always be willing to explain or discuss the concern or query.

Sixthly, a monthly project newsletter would be faxed out and placed on noticeboards around the Village to inform the local community of the progress and the schedule of key work activities planned for the next month.

Seventhly, there would be formal community briefings. These briefings would be timed to occur just prior to a major event in the Village, such as Easter Weekend or the Jazz Weekend, or prior to commencement of a major portion of the work. This would mean there would at least be three briefings during the first stage of the work.

Similarly, arising from the project start-up meeting the Construction Contractor took the following two initiatives:

1. Contractor Staff accommodation in the Village

The construction contractor's tender assumed that their staff would be accommodated at the closest town some 30kms from the Village. Following the Project Cooperative Workshop, the construction contractor altered their original decision by accommodating their staff at a lodge in the Village. Though more cost effective accommodation could be

found outside the Village, the decision to accommodate construction contractor's personnel locally provided the lodges with much needed income. As against the cost, this decision provided the construction contractor with the benefit of higher productivity and better utilisation of the possibly longer working hours; particularly during daylight saving (November to March).

2. Employment of local community

The construction contractor's tender assumed that their staff would be mostly sourced from the Contractor's home base and areas outside of the Village. This potentially would have attracted the payment of a living allowance.

As the opportunity presented, there was a willing and available casual workforce, but currently unemployed in the Village. Hence the possibility for the construction contractor to employ much of the local community, both men and women, was commercially attractive. The construction contractor would not only have the opportunity for saving, in the living allowance payable to their staff, but also the added expense of staff accommodation in the Village.

Analysis and Discussion

The most significant element in this case study is the explanation of how a group of sophisticated professional operatives moved from a technical consideration of the job at hand and their own perceptions of self-interest, to a vision of the project outside the documentation of the project and beyond their own contractual arrangements. Their relationships had transformed from a documented contractual position to a set of meanings that would inform and guide their practice. A mechanistic time, cost, and quality paradigm can not be applied to explain this evolution. It is however very real, very important, and probably was the main driver to this project later receiving a peer reviewed excellence award, despite having a significant budget overrun.

Using the ideas of meaning and interaction that we introduced earlier in this paper, we offer the following explanation of the transformative effect of this workshop:

1. Clearly, the project has significance for each of the participants in the workshop.

While the client articulated a concern about the village economy, the others wished to impress the client by doing a good job. This desire to impress was linked to many other values such as good professional work, status, and financial return. Many of the values (of the Client and the others) may not have been clearly stated (such as business expansion, reducing political fallout, business survival, interesting work etc.).

There are a multitude of meanings, some recognised and some implicit. What is clear is that the meanings extend beyond the documentation and contractual requirements. These extended meanings exist (some of them have been articulated by the attendees) but not all of them are necessarily recognised and understood. Meanings are everywhere.

2. The effect of the workshop was to refine a mission, very much in line with the client's mission, but with a significant shift towards the 'community', rather than economic, goal. Note that this shift arose from an interactive process. Two outcomes of this interaction were that a different mission statement was developed and that the participants adopted it. The meaning of the project was transformed (reconstructed) and negotiated.

3. The shift in meaning did not weaken the original client mission, but instead transformed it in a way that would promote and allow a more flexible response to the project. Now the project itself had a meaning, which was independent of but compatible with the private meanings of the participants. This brings a wholeness to the project, where it itself has a meaning and also has compatible meanings for the project participants. For example, if we look at some of the meanings that arise from

the contractors actions, we see, as Schutz (1973) states, an event can have many meanings and potentially different meanings for different people. The construction contractor's decision to accommodate their staff in the Village did have many different meanings, for different people:

- For the construction contractor, it reflected an opportunity to achieve both a longer day's work and greater efficiency from their staff. This, in return, would offset the slightly higher price they would have to pay for their staff accommodation.
 - Also for the construction contractor, there was an opportunity to utilise a willing and available workforce at an economical rate.
 - For the construction contractor's staff, there was the opportunity to live close to their place of work, hence less daily travel time to and from work and an opportunity to relax immediately after work.
 - For the PM team and Client, the project would have access to the construction contractor's key staff throughout 24-hours of the day in case of an emergency onsite.
 - For the local community, it was a gesture of the project team supporting the struggling Village economy and the lodges.
 - For the PM this would provide a level of much needed transparency to the project and a perception that the project team did not have to hide anything from the public. The PM hoped this would provide greater interaction with the local community and a change in perception that the project team cared about the local community and can be trusted.
4. The new meaning does not necessarily rid the project of conflicts of interests but it does articulate a 'project interest', which may frame and guide actions of participants.

5. The evidence for the motivation of meanings is demonstrated by the actions of PM team and of the contractor. They developed or changed their approach in response to the workshop. While there are good positivist explanations for their actions as noted in the case, the possibility for actions arising had been broadened; the broadened possibilities allowed better solutions to arise. We believe that the meanings developed in the workshop influenced the key project drivers.
6. The idea that one only has access to one's lived experience reflectively, and that one comes to understand meaning by reflection is not directly evidenced by this case. Physical logic would require one to have a sequence of experience before it can be mentally processed; the interval between experience and understanding is unclear. The case does show the project manager talking or reflecting to himself on the implications for action of the meaning of the project mission. Of particular note is his recognition and understanding that the meaning of the mission implied for him an 'open book' approach (which was not part of the as documented project actions).
7. Face-to-face interaction is very impactful. It can transform the way the participants decide to engage with the project. It is impossible to imagine such a transformation arising through mail, or email. It might be possible to imagine it happening via the telephone hook-up (though clearly much of the symbolic interaction would have been excluded).
8. Inconsistencies in meanings motivate people to examine the meanings. In this case, the PM is motivated to examine the motivation of the client in order to achieve consistency.
9. The project exceeded both its time and cost budget because of scope changes, and yet won a public project management prize. This does not accord with the project management objectives of meeting time and budget. However, the Client was happy and supported the submission for the prize. Clearly the project met some objectives that were more valuable to the client than meeting a particular time and cost budget. That extra value can only be found in the meanings that people have attributed to this

project; success was not defined by the initial scope, time and cost budgets; we submit that the meaning of the project, the *restoration of the confidence of the ...[Village] Community and the Park's regional visitors*, defined the criteria for success. This meaning was created at the workshop.

This analysis provides interpretations that are beyond an analysis that excludes meaning. Meaning is an important tool in making sense of the project manager's experience on this project. Accepting the concept of meaning, how we interpret and develop it, provides useful insights into the functioning of a vital element of project management, in this context in the shape of the project start-up workshop. The concept of meaning is a plausible explanation of the subsequent behaviour of the project participants. We also contest that the concept of meaning allowed a wider and more flexible approach to this project to develop. Hence, we suggest that meaning provides a valuable approach to explaining and guiding project management practice.

Conclusion

We have explored the concept of meanings through the interpretivist framework and demonstrated that this provides access to a richer description of what actually goes on in the practice of project management. We provided a simplified model of meaning, explaining its interpretation through reflection, and its construction and reconstruction through social interaction. The model we used broadly draws its theoretical framework from the work of the Chicago School of Sociology and of the Continental Philosophers.

We adopted an autoethnographic approach to presenting a case study of a project start-up workshop for a disaster recovery project. Our analysis offers rich insights into the drivers of project management behaviour, that go beyond those available from the widely accepted bodies of project management knowledge (PM BOK). These insights draw on the concept of meaning, its interpretation, and construction.

Our definition of meanings recognises meanings as being all around us, and that meanings need to be recognised and interpreted. Part of human life involves the recognition and interpretation of meaning. Human interaction is crucial to the construction of meanings, breakdown of previous meanings, and the reconstruction of new meanings. We demonstrate meanings as both an individual and a social construct. We assume that meanings are a motivator to action and show how this is a viable explanation for some of the events in the case study. We suggest that face-to-face interaction is a powerful form of interaction due to the ability to grasp (in the moment, or later reflectively) the co-presence and gestures of others at a moment in time, thus aiding the construction of meaning.

We postulate that meaning is a more important factor in defining project success than the time and cost variables. Some will see this as an affront to accepted project management thinking, yet time and cost variables are only relevant in so far as they respond to or link to something meaningful. Projects are executed for a purpose, to satisfy some value, to meet some objective with meaning, rather than to satisfy an aspect that does not have sufficient meaning. We have emphasised meaning as a valuable concept in project management and commend it as a way of interpreting project success.

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