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Abstract

Projects have been carried out since times immemorial, but professionalization of this trade has only begun recently. Because the societal impact of the work of project managers is increasing, the justification of this work *as a profession* is becoming more relevant. The 'body of knowledge' that project managers call upon is of crucial importance here. But existing BoK's are fragmented and there is (as yet) no unified theoretical foundation. Also research into project management is being done with theories from various domains, and not a specific project management framework. The theory of 'speech acts' could provide the required theoretical framework.

1   "Houston, we've got a problem"

The often cited Chaos reports by the Standish Group[1] tell us that there is a problem with projects: the majority should be marked as 'failed' on one or more critical aspects. And even though there is a discussion on these reports because the data that they are based upon is not being made public, there are many publications pointing out that we will not have anything like an unequivocal and repeatable procedure to project success for some time to come. The tolerance in society for this situation is remarkably high, if you think about the costs involved in failed projects. In the public arena, the most prominent cases are widely published, usually very large projects where either national or local government is involved: in the Netherlands for example the HSL (high speed train), passport, EPD (electronic health file), and the North-South metro line in Amsterdam. Of course there are also many projects within companies that – sometimes dramatically – run out of control, but if there is no impact on any consumer product then these project failures can more easily stay hidden from the public eye.

Even if we are lacking numbers on the measure of project success or failure, we can say something on the public perception of project success. Consider the following thought experiment: would you want to visit a regional hospital where the percentage of successful operations is equivalent to the percentage of successful projects in all companies in that region? And here we can define 'successful' as a scaled concept: total failure means that the patient has died / the project is cancelled prematurely, total success means that the patient is fully recovered / the project is delivered within predefined planning, budget and quality. If hospitals would have the same percentage failed operations as there are failing projects, all medical professionals might be put under guardianship; at the very least, education and reviewing would be under discussion. Such a public discussion cannot occur for project managers, because there is no generally accepted standard of knowledge and competencies that could serve as the foundation for a professional education.

2   What is a profession

Eliot Freidson, a sociologist who has studied the phenomenon of 'professionalism' extensively during the past decades, sees four characteristics of professions[2]:
1. A theory-based specialization of certain tasks that are not simple nor repetitive, because "contingencies of tasks vary so greatly that a worker must exercise considerable discretion to adapt his knowledge and skills to each circumstance in order to work successfully"[3]

2. Professions negotiate with one another about the boundaries between professions, and organizing the division of work is done by the professionals themselves, not consumers or managers or government;
3. Professions regulate the (their own) job market, that is: they decide on selection – only persons with qualifications that have been set by the profession itself can be admitted into the ranks of the profession;
4. For deciding about inclusion into or exclusion from the profession, specific 'credentials' are used that describe / prove the competencies of the (candidate) professional; therefore the professional education is also controlled by the profession.

These characteristics don't just come into existence by chance, but specific institutional arrangements are needed to achieve this. The following aspects need to be arranged in a uniform and legally recognized way:
1) Education that teaches the required knowledge and competencies to aspiring professionals in a structured manner;
2) A way of testing to accredit the professional as such;
3) A framework that regulates accreditation and testing[4];
4) Independent supervision of education and testing for professionals;
5) A code for responsible professional conduct;
6) An independent body for complaints and objections against professionals

For all these matters, there must be recognized organizations or institutions that are responsible for the particular subject area, and there must be cooperation or at least coordination between these organizations, otherwise there can be no uniformity. The relevant institutional bodies must also have enough 'societal credit' to be legally recognized.

3   Professional organizations for project management

The most important professional organizations for project management are: PMI, IPMA, AIPM and APM[5]. None of these is older than 50 years (as of early 2013).

PMI started in 1969 in the USA, IPMA (established in 1965) has European roots and is registered in Switzerland. AIPM, started in 1976, is the Australian professional organization and APM is the British organization that was established in 1972. All of them have as one of their goals to develop the professionalism of project management. To this end they finance research, support their members and maintain a certification program. At all four of these organizations, the basis for certification is a systematic description of minimum knowledge and competencies required. For PMI these are coded in the 'Project Management Body of Knowledge' (PMBOK), while at IPMA it is the International Competence Baseline (ICB) which can be translated into national variations that are required to have at least the breadth and depth of the ICB. The APM also has a 'Body of Knowledge' and next to this also a 'Competence Framework'; the AIPM has its 'Professional Competency Standards' (PCS). PMBOK, ICB, BoK / CF and PCS are not static documents. Over the 20-odd years these documents are in existence, various new versions and updates have been issued, sometimes with important extensions and revisions. As per end 2012, approximately 450,000 people are certificated via PMI, about 150,000 via IPMA, over 3,100 at AIPM and about 300 via APM.

4   Professionalization of project management

As per end 2012, the field of project management shows the following profile as regards the above mentioned characteristics of professionalization[6].

4.1   Education

Neither internationally, nor in the Netherlands is there any generally acknowledged or legally recognized education for project managers. There are of course many providers of trainings and courses on the market place. In the Netherlands, two institutions for higher education (Utrecht and Arnhem) offer courses (at Master level and Higher Vocational Education level), and training company NCOI has a number of courses on offer at HVE level that are focused at project management. However, none of these counts as a generally or legally accepted education to the profession of project manager.

4.2   Testing or qualification

Because there is no uniform and legally recognized professional education program, there also cannot be any such testing or qualification based on such education. There are of course professional organizations that have created their own certification scheme: PMI and IPMA are the best known, and also AIPM and APM maintain a certification program.

4.3   Accreditation of tests / certification

There is no overarching institutional body that governs and verifies or validates the testing / certification of project managers. The certification schemes of IPMA, PMI, AIPM and APM are examples of self-regulation and self-accreditation. Their 'recognition' is in the trust that they do or do not engender in the market place. PMI does have its own 'Global Accreditation Centre for Project Management Education Programs', but in the guidelines for such accreditation there is, oddly enough, no explicit requirement that a candidate education program should pay any attention to the PMBOK that is the basis for PMI's certification. IPMA too has a procedure whereby member organizations can qualify as 'IPMA registered training provider'; such recognition is always limited to a specific country and specific training program. Unlike PMI, IPMA does require that the candidate organization base its training or education on the NCB of the country (NCB is the localized version if the ICB).

4.4   Supervision

Because there is no uniform and legally recognized professional education program, there necessarily cannot be any overarching supervisory body in this area.

4.5   Professional code of ethics

Various professional organizations have their code of ethics. PMI, IPMA and AIPM each have created such a code in which there is no reference at all to their own various standards of knowledge and competency - implying that according to these codes it is very well possible to be good project manager while not meeting the professional standards of the same organizations. The APM document is called 'code of professional conduct', and here we do find explicit reference to the APM 'body of knowledge' and the 'competence framework' as standards for professional conduct.

4.6 Complaints and objections

At PMI, IPMA, AIPM and APM there are two kinds of regulations or procedures for dealing with complaints and objections; on the one hand aimed at complaints about the certification process (which is for the professionals themselves), and on the other hand about members of these organizations who don't abide by the code of ethics of that particular organization. In all cases there are internally appointed commissions that deal with all complaints and objections. There are no overarching national or international institutional bodies for handling of complaints about professionals, nor do any of these internally appointed committees have any public responsibility.

5 Institutionalization and justification

As professions further institutionalize, they gain in power; from the characteristics mentioned above it is clear that they gain a virtual monopoly on their own type of work (the profession itself determines and controls the requirements for admission into their peer group) and they strive to attain legal protection for this. The consequence of such power is that clients (in the broadest sense of the word) experience a large measure of dependence. This causes that for every institutionalized profession the societal trust in these professionals as a group and as an institution, is a very important value. The way the professional justification is shaped plays an important role here: on what grounds will stakeholders recognize the power of the profession, and will they also accept it? If there is insufficient justification (and it is hard to enforce this, recognition and acceptance have to be given, like trust) then no further institutionalization of the profession will be possible and the process of professionalization comes to a halt.

5.1 Institutionalized professions

Looking at 'recognized professions' in the Netherlands, we can see the pattern at work: doctors, engineers, lawyers are all examples of institutionalized professions, displaying all the characteristics mentioned above. Professionalization can be seen to be an ongoing process of systematization and 'objectification' of required knowledge and skills for the profession. The word 'objectification' is put between parentheses here, because the work content of the profession can be inherently 'subjective' in character – e.g. in law you can make objective descriptions of procedures and casuistry but the process by which a judge will come to a verdict is in itself a subjective process.

6 The trouble with knowledge and competencies

As we have seen above, the primary characteristic of any profession – and the starting point for societal recognition and (therefore) further institutionalization – is the body of theoretical knowledge and practical competencies that define the profession. The strength of this professional foundation is defined by how well, how complete and how coherent these are described. A strong systematic and theoretical foundation of knowledge and competencies are important for any profession, as it defines the limits of the profession, it describes the access criteria for aspiring professionals, and it provides transparency to stakeholders as to what may be expected from anyone claiming to be such a professional.

6.1 Multiple canons of knowledge and competency

PMBoK, ICB, AIPM Standards and APM-BoK and CF are the *de facto* systematizations of the required knowledge and competencies of the project management profession: these are

the canons. These four canons however are not put to the same theme. Not only do they exhibit differences in structure and content when compared with each another, each of them individually also is a rather mixed collection of topics and concepts. In the ICB version 3 this fact has been more or less acknowledged with an attempt at 'higher order' by grouping the topics in three categories that have been metaphorically dubbed "the eye of competency". APM mentions that there are five 'aspects of project management' but there is no further attempt to classify the topics of the APM-BoK into these categories, rather the APM-BoK topics are grouped into seven 'dimensions'. PMI has grouped the BoK topics into nine 'knowledge areas' whereas AIPM groups the topics into nine 'units'. Although there is some overlap in these various groupings, the overall picture is far removed from a uniform way of structuring the description of required knowledge for project management. Table 1 provides an overview of the way these canons are structured at the highest level.

	version	number of certifications	grouping of topics	number of topics
PMI / PMBoK	4.0	450.000	9 knowledge areas: • Integration management • Scope management • Time management • Cost management • Quality management • Human resource management • Communication management • Risk management • Procurement management	37
IPMA / ICB	3.0	150.000	3 competency areas: • Technical • Behavior • Context	46
AIPM / PCS	2008 (3rd edition)	3.200	9 units: • Scope • Time • Cost • Quality • Human resources • Communication • Risk • Procurement • Integration	92
APM / BoK & CF	5.0 (6.0 as of end 2012)	300	7 dimensions: • General • Strategic • Control • Technical • Commercial • Organization • People	52

Table 1

6.2   Problems

The profession of project management has three related problems with the knowledge and competencies that are the core and foundation of the discipline:

1) There is no consistent and generally accepted 'canon' of the knowledge and competencies that project managers should have; instead there are competing standards from PMI, IPMA, AIPM en APM that are – sometimes considerably – different from each other.
2) None of these 'canons' is based on a single coherent and unifying theoretical foundation; instead they are more like loose collections of 'best practices' and various concepts. There are however two common divisors: one is the 'project life cycle' model and the other is the so-called 'triangle of time, budget and quality', and these are linked by various techniques of planning and control.
3) In publications and discussions on the canons of knowledge and competencies, there is a growing level of criticism to be heard toward the more mechanistic and control-centered approach of project management. Various researches into complex projects or complexity in projects have pointed at the importance of *communication* as a major success factor.

Here are a few of these publications, in which either the theoretical foundation of project management, or the status of project management as a 'real' profession, is critically reviewed.

Lauri Koskela and George Howell[7] wrote an article with the saying title "The underlying theory of project management is obsolete"; they describe the limitations of the process model (project life cycle or PLC) that they say is implicit in the PMBOK definition of a project and many others. They propose an alternative (but still multi-faceted) model, in which they specifically mention "language/action perspective" as one framework for the 'execution' aspect within the 'management' part of project management.

Alex Brown[8] posted an article on his blog in which he analyzes various topics from the PMI 'body of knowledge' and characterizes these as 'not unique to the profession'. He proposes a focus on scheduling techniques, earned value management, delay-claim calculations, work breakdown structures, project start-up and closure, and finally advocates for an integration of these topics that he calls 'management techniques' – but does not offer a framework for this.

Svetlana Cicmil[9] and others present an analysis of the limitations of the project life cycle (PLC) model as a theoretical foundation. They show how the intrinsically linear and instrumental paradigm that underpins the PLC is becoming ever more insufficient as projects grow in complexity; they mention that many studies point to 'quality of communication' as the single most important success factor for (complex) projects. Their study proposes using the concept of "complex responsive process of relating" (described by Ralph Stacey[10]) as a tool for theorizing about how projects are run.

Seasoned practitioners like Tom Kendrick[11] and Scott Berkun[12], each in their own way, also focus on the importance of language and communication skills as primary requirements for successful project management.

Paul Giammalvo[13] published a thesis titled "Is project management a profession?" and concluded that the question must be answered with "no", mainly because the profession has failed to develop a methodology that can reliably and repeatedly lead to project success and that can build trust with stakeholders that professionals will be able to competently apply such a methodology. He does not offer a clear view of the way forward, but rather has some

mixed advice for those who believe PM is profession, those who believe that it is not, and those who believe that it does not matter.

Jon Whitty[14], specializing in research into project management guidelines and methods, backs up our above claim that the various 'bodies of knowledge' are rather loose collections of concepts with little or no scientific grounding. Project managers who turn to the BoK's and expect to find there solutions that are applicable in practice, will be disappointed. Instead, Whitty proposes to develop a new theory of project management based on concepts borrowed from the theory of evolution.

In sum: the 'canon of knowledge and competency' for project management is fragmented and lacks an adequate theoretical foundation. There are clear indications that language and communication skills should play an important role in the missing theoretical framework.

7   Toward a solution

We now need to find a unifying conceptual framework that can bring the many different elements from the various 'canons' together. Such a framework will have to meet the following criteria:
1) Sufficient conceptual breadth, abstraction and expressive power to be able to span all 'topics' from the various collections of knowledge and competency;
2) Sufficient conceptual depth and complexity to allow for future research and analytical application of the framework, and to be a relevant addition to the existing canons;
3) Sufficient descriptive force vis-à-vis the 'object' of project management practices.

7.1   Limitations

The criteria of predictive power and falsifiability have been purposely left out of the above list of criteria. It is not at all clear if it is possible to design a theory of project management that will lead to falsifiable predictions – there are important reasons to doubt this, and these are related to the nature of project management as 'object' for theorizing. Since project management is human activity, human conduct, any theory about project management is necessarily part of the social sciences. The study of human conduct means the study of a phenomenon where consciousness plays an important role – the implication of this fact is that the object of study, and therefore the object of theorizing, can (at least in part) only be observed indirectly and explained by making use of (necessarily subjective) qualitative interpretations. Furthermore, humans are endowed with free will – meaning that their behavior cannot be described using a deterministic of narrowly causal model[15]. Furthermore, the behavior we study consists largely of language-in-action. Even those activities that belong to the 'classical' domain of project management are by and large language-based activities. Planning, organizing, and budgeting: these are conceptual activities that are defined and executed in and through language, and they can only exist within ongoing conversations. And they are activities that always take place within institutional / organizational frameworks, and can only be properly understood within these particular contexts. For these very reasons, no theory of project management can hope to attain the explanatory power that the natural sciences have: the 'objects' that are studied are being brought into existence by human activity alone, and they have no independent existence without such human activity.
Finally: any theoretical framework we develop can only be expressed and communicated in language. This is of course also true for the natural sciences, but in the case of social sciences

we get into a regression trap that creates specific limitations to what we can know and to the way we can create knowledge.

Language is never unequivocal; there is always ambiguity, undecidedness and even inconsistency. Even for formal languages it is not clear if they can ever be designed, or implemented, without any such ambiguities. Such are the limitations that we must count with when designing our theory of project management.

7.2   Contours

Should we therefore abandon any attempt at theorizing? Certainly not, but we stay modest in our claims and remain aware of the inherent limitations of our enterprise. On the other hand, we can also derive some directions from these limitations – we will have to focus on theory of language and conversations, and in a program for education of project managers we should put emphasis on developing language skills and conversation / communication competency, on contextual judgment: in short, we must put 'formation' before 'training', because we now realize that no project method or handbook will ever be able to bring guarantee of project success. It is simply not possible to design any project methodology that, if blindly followed, will lead to the holy grail of project success, for the very same reason that it is not possible to design a hammer that will always hit the nail on the head. There are only hammers that could be more practical than others, but 'practical' is a context-dependent concept – if you happen to be left-handed you will want another grip, and also the length of the handle and the weight of the head will have to be different depending on the size of the nail and the material you are hammering the nail into. In much the same way we can find out the parameters for project management tooling and design instruments that are practical *in specific circumstances*. It is the job of the project manager to judge the circumstances, pick the right tools, and then also wield these in an effective manner – no matter how well designed the hammer, if you don't handle it correctly you will miss the mark.

8   Contents of the theoretical framework

So what should a theory of project management be about? It cannot be about all the possible (business) areas that a project can be about. A project to launch a satellite will make use of theories from physics and astronomy and mechanics, but that does not turn these theories into theories of project management. Likewise, a project to launch a new medication will make use of theories from chemistry and biology, but again that does not turn these theories into theories of project management. Only in the special, boundary case of a project to introduce project work into some organization could the theory of project management that is being used in the project also be a candidate theory for us.

A theory of project management must cover everything that happens when 'doing' a project, without bringing the particular 'business' contents of any single project into play. We can now describe our 'object' with the following definition of project management: *the creation and temporary maintenance of organizations with the aim to design and realize products for which it is not in advance completely known how they should be designed and realized, and all of this within the context of a specific client organization and society at large.*

Three aspects (that figure in all generally accepted definitions of what a project is) jump to the fore, and must be central to any theory of project management:

1) Organization – our theory will have to deal with organizations as they are meant to coordinate work and facilitate cooperation
2) Design and produce – our theory will have to cover processes of design and realization of whatever product is to be delivered by projects

3) Knowledge – our theory will have to cover how 'unknowns' are dealt with and how they are converted into 'knowns', both pertaining to organization and to product.

Regarding the second item – design and produce – the theory of project management will only have quite abstract stuff to say, and we can refer to the existing (generic) theories. The fact that both the product and the design and production process are 'not completely known' in advance is the very reason why we have projects in the first place. If that were not the case then we would not run a project but we would have routine production operation. By the time our theory of how to produce product X is sufficiently detailed, the design process is long finished and we are into 'business as usual'. That's the very reason why for (new versions of) products meant for mass production we usually first do a 'pilot' – it is meant to *discover* how this product can best be produced. After that knowledge has been found out, we know how to set up a routine production facility.

The first and the third item (organization, and knowledge) are thus the most important aspects of the theoretical framework for project management. The fragmented themes of the various 'canons of knowledge and competency' can be brought together on these two themes.

8.1 The primary importance of language

In the above analysis, it has been stated repeatedly that language and communicative skills could play an important role in finding a theoretical framework for project management. Now that we have named the themes of 'organization' and 'knowledge' as central to the framework, it might seem as if language and communicative skills have faded into the background. However, with these two themes of 'organization' and 'knowledge' we are in the middle of what has been called traditionally the humanities. There are interfaces (or more than that) with various domains here: epistemology, linguistics, language action perspective, pragmatics, sociology. The connecting link could be speech act theory, first set forth by John L. Austin[16] and later developed extensively by John R. Searle[17].

With the approach of speech acts theory and its kin, language pragmatics, we can approach the themes of 'organization' and 'knowledge' from an integrated (philosophy of language) framework. More specific, we can mention the following theories in order of granularity:

1) speech acts (Austin, Searle)
2) conversations: coordination, language action perspective (Winograd[18])
3) pragmatics: linguistic (Grice[19]), and communicative (Watzlawick[20])
4) rhetoric, argumentation theory (Toulmin[21])

8.2 Brief introduction into speech act theory

The theory of speech acts is based upon a lectures series (the William James lectures at Harvard) delivered in 1955 by the philosopher J.L. Austin, later published in a book famously titled "How to do things with words". In these lectures Austin builds the idea that all use of language is real action, hence the term: speech act theory. Austin distinguishes three aspects in all use of language: the 'locutionary' part (sounds that you produce when speaking any utterance), the 'illocutionary' part (the intention and meaning of an utterance) and the 'perlocutionary' part (the total effect that is produced in the hearer of your utterance). Austin also makes an analysis of what he calls 'performatives' – these are utterances that represent a (speech) act that *can only be achieved through that utterance*. They are language-only acts. If you want to promise to do something, then this can only be done by means of the utterance "I promise to do this". There simply is no other way of promising. Likewise a judge can only

adjourn the court session by saying "I declare this session adjourned". There simply is no other way of adjourning a court session. Performing these acts is linguistic in nature.

John Searle has elaborated upon the work of Austin, and has developed a both wider and more specified theory of speech acts. In his analysis every utterance has a *propositional* part (reference to some state of affairs in reality) and an *intentional* part (indication of intention or 'directedness' of the speaker in the utterance). According to Searle there are five types of intention possible for any speech act:

1) assertives – a **claim** that some state of affairs exists or does not exist in reality, effectively asserting something to be true or false; can also be formulated as a question or negation
2) directives – giving an **order** to bring about some state of affairs in reality; can also be formulated negatively as a prohibition
3) commissives – a **promise** to bring about some state of affairs in reality; can also be formulated as conditional or negative
4) expressives – to **express** that some (internal, subjective) state of affairs is the case in the speaker of the utterance
5) declaratives – to **bring about** or 'call to life' a certain state of affairs that is to be characterized as a 'status function', a new social fact with the internal structure 'X counts as Y in context C'.

Declaratives are a special case because they *assign a new (social) status function* to something that does not of itself have that function; when such a declaration is accepted by the hearers of this speech act then a new social fact has been created. Another reason why declaratives are a special case is that they entail rights and obligations, permissions and prohibitions – they embody elementary *deontic powers* and are therefore the building blocks of social power distribution mechanisms.

Because declaratives attach a (social) status for the phenomenon 'X' that now counts as 'Y', they are called *status functions* by Searle. Note that 'commissives' and 'declaratives' are a more fine grained description of what Austin still describes under the single category of 'performatives'.

Searle goes a long way to show how all phenomena of the 'social world' are ultimately built from *declaratives*, and that is the main reason that speech act theory can be used as the cornerstone for an integrative framework of project management theory.

Because there are only five elementary types of 'intentions' for speech acts, there are also exactly five elementary speech acts that we can utter. All conversations are built from these elementary building blocks. Through the *modulating* mechanisms of negation, question or conditional, and by repeated combination and nesting, we arrive at the intricacies of real-world conversations – on top of that, context comes into play to make it really interesting.

8.3   Some examples

So the basic model is this simple? Well, to quote an acquaintance of mine: "actually, it is a bit more complicated"[22]. Apart from the workings of modulation and combination mentioned above, things become more complex (and hence more realistic) because multiple intentions can be combined into one single utterance, and because the propositional part of utterances is often full of ambiguities and unclear references.

We can combine an order with a promise, for example when we utter a threat by saying "I will make sure that you're going to regret it if this is not ready by tomorrow." Or we can express contempt and cloak it in the form of a rhetorical question: "Do you think that adding more resources is the best way to achieve our deadlines?"

Interpretation of speech acts is more straightforward when the intention of the speaker is explicitly encoded in the primary meaning of the verb that is used, as in: "I promise that I will deliver within budget." When you would say "I shall stay within budget" then you're using the format of an assertion but most hearers will have no difficulty interpreting this utterance as a promise, at least when uttered in the context of some formal meeting. Things get less clear when you would say "The budget is of course one of the factors of project success." Depending on the context – for example what has gone before in this conversation – you may have either given a promise or just stated the obvious. And in the situation where your boss is asking you "I assume we don't have to discuss the budget anymore, do we?" and you nod, you most probably have made promise to keep strictly to the budget, without even saying a word – your nod will most likely not be seen as merely a confirmation that you agree to skip that subject in your conversation with the boss.

These examples also go to show that the 'intention' part of speech acts must often be derived from incomplete or non-explicit utterances, from indirect speech, from the context of the conversation, from non-verbal signals etc.

Finally 'declaratives': assigning of (status) functions – one prime example is money, where we endow pieces of paper and small discs of metal a social function *by the mere act of declaring that they are money*. Obviously, there is nothing in the physical characteristics of paper bills and metal coins that makes them intrinsically fit for the money function; it is purely by declaration that they count as money, and it is because of our *collective acceptance* of this status that they can function as money. This mechanism holds for all status functions. We should be aware that declaratives always function within a specific social context, limited to certain times and certain places. And we should be aware that as soon as we collectively stop accepting the declaration of paper to be money, our money will instantly be returned back to its original physical status as being just printed pieces of paper. All deontic power of money (the fact that it *allows* us to pay for products and *empowers* us to redeem debt) will also evaporate if the collective acceptance of the declaration comes to a stop.

It's easy to show this by taking a look at boundary situations – we can't use our money to trade with the Yanomami indigenous tribes in the Amazon because they have no collective acceptance of the status function that we have declared. Likewise, the precious shells that some peoples of the Pacific use as money in their inter-island trade would be of no use to them for buying whatever in one of our Western countries – we don't accept the status function that they have declared these shells to have.

It should now be easy to think of examples from project management life: projects are full of phenomena that have come into existence through declaration, where a status function has been given to some object that did not of itself have that status. Just think of the humble spreadsheet that is declared to be the project budget, or the employee that is being assigned to play to role of project manager. Declaring these numbers to be the approved budget, and declaring this person to be the mandated project manager, both entail a complex series of rights and obligations: there is deontic power that comes with declaratives[23].

9   Conclusion

The whole intricate network of power and influence that people weave amongst them is created mainly through language, through speech acts – what claims, what orders, what promises are being made; what insight do we gain into another person's head and heart by the 'expressives' they utter; and what new status functions are being created by declaration.

All our obligations, rights, claims, liabilities and prohibitions, all expectations and promises, all intentions and agreements, all are engendered through speech acts and are also maintained or again revoked or rebutted through speech acts.

It is therefore impossible to be a successful project manager if you don't 'hear' the intentions in the utterances of your stakeholders, nor can you succeed if you're not able to successfully make your own intentions heard by all stakeholders in your project – as these are the ways that the proper relations of power and influence are created.

One important implication is that the project manager must learn the home language, culture, customs and habits of all stakeholders as thoroughly as possible. All this also has deep implications for the way that project managers should be trained – I hope to expand on that subject in another article.

Two further lines of research are suggested to underpin the lines set forth in this essay.

1) Using the theories of speech acts, conversation, pragmatics and argumentation to 'rewrite' all topics of the canons discussed above, thereby showing the viability of the claim that they can function as a unifying theoretical framework for project management

2) Performing a qualitative research in analyzing a series of video-recorded conversations from real-life project situations, applying the theories of speech acts, conversations, pragmatics and argumentation to show how these can be applied in understanding how the actual 'mechanisms' of distribution and use of power and influence work.

10 End notes

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[1] Standish Group, Chaos reports as quoted on various websites

[2] Eliot Freidson, *Professional Powers: A Study of the Institutionalization of Formal Knowledge,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press (1986)

[3] Eliot Freidson, *Theory of Professionalism: Method and Substance;* International Review of Sociology, 9(1), 117-129 (1999)

[4] Because the core of every professional is knowledge and competencies, qualification for the profession must be at the person level. Certification and education are two ways to become qualified. Although IPMA does know certification of organizations, this must be considered a derived or second-order form of qualification.

[5] PMI: www.pmi.org; IPMA: www.ipma.ch; AIPM: www.aipm.com.au; APM: www.apm.org.uk

[6] All information in this section was derived from the websites of PMI, IPMA, AIPM and APM.

[7] Lauri Koskela & Greg Howell, *The underlying theory of project management is obsolete;* Proceedings of PMI Research Conference 2002 Ed. by Dennis P. Slevin, David I Cleland, Jeffrey K. Pinto. Project Management Institute (2002)

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[9] Svetlana J. K. Cicmil, Terry J. Cooke-Davies, Lynn H. Crawford, and Kurt A. Richardson. *Exploring the complexity of projects: Implications of complexity theory for project management practice*, PMI / Wiley (2009)

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[15] There are models of causal description and interpretation of human behavior that use a non-deterministic approach, e.g. as described by John Searle in "Rationality in action" (Bradford, 2003)

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[21] Stephen Toulmin, *The uses of argument.* Cambridge University Press (1969)
[22] Thank you Pekka Kerttula for this lovely quote on the frictions of reality.
[23] For more examples see *http://www.goossensbv.com/?p=364* en *http://www.goossensbv.com/?p=332*