

Proactive Project Management

How to make common sense common practice



Morten Fangel

Proactive Project Management

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Preface

I would like to welcome you as a reader and user of this book, *Proactive Project Management!* I hope the content will inspire you and provide you with useful methods to further develop your competencies in project management and will benefit the structure and practice of your project management.

The content of this book can be applied for project management of minor and major projects of various types – both for internal development assignments involving changes and for external delivery assignments. It is my intention that everyone who contributes to the management of projects will be able to profit from reading and applying the book. In other words, the book focuses not only on project managers, but also on project owners, project participants and project consultants.

I recommend that you start by studying the initial Chapters 1 to 4 in order to gain the best benefit from working with the chapters that follow. It is especially important that you become familiar with the way the book differentiates between: to lead project management – and to perform project management. In my opinion, this differentiation is key to becoming both a more reflective type of project manager – and being more proactive in the way you practise the management of a project.

The book's terminology has been coordinated with the self-assessment tool *Competencies in Project Management*, which I edited for the Danish Project Management Association – in cooperation with a broad group of project managers and project management consultants. It encompasses the Danish *National Competence Baseline, NCB*. The coordination means that this book is also suitable for preparing for the IPMA Certification® of Project Managers, in which case the NCB is used as a frame of reference and self-assessment tool.

As a supplement to this book there are tools available on www.fangel.dk. Owners of the book may use the tools for handling management tasks in their own project. To gain access to the templates, the owners of the book can simply register on the web-site.

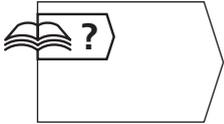
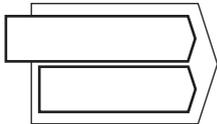
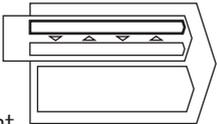
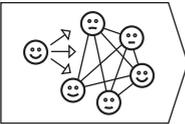
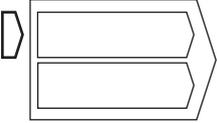
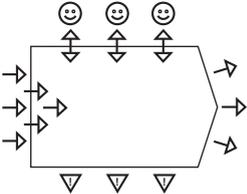
This book summarizes the results derived from the development of principles, methods and practices in project management which I have accomplished through many consultancy tasks and training courses for private and public organisations. If no other references are stated, the methods and tools described have been developed by me – with good inputs from clients, course participants, and other literature sources. Appendix C presents a summary of the previous books which I have written or edited.

Throughout the book I have included stories from my work as practitioner, consultant and instructor in project management. These stories are designated by Italics and printed in grey type – as are these lines. The idea is to make it easier for the reader to locate what to read – and not read.

Enjoy the reading and the application of the book!

Morten Fangel

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How to use the book

To benefit from this book, it is important that you have understood its underlying principles. Consequently, in the first chapter, the purpose, the approach and the structure of the book will be explained.

Furthermore, the chapter explains the distinction between low, medium, and high level of the management effort in projects. In the book's subsequent chapters we are referring to this distinction – as a tool for scaling the management effort in your project.

1.1 The purpose of the book

1.2 The approach of the book

1.3 The structure of the book

1.4 Three management levels

1.5 The book – in brief

1.1 The purpose of the book

The book provides a coherent set of principles, methods and practical hints that can help you to be more **proactive** when managing your project. Proactive management implies that the management effort takes place before the management challenge arises!

The concept of proactive management has often been expressed as *well begun is half completed*. Being proactive is both common sense and universally accepted – also for the management of a project: To plan before execution; to see potential risks before they occur; to focus on the whole rather than single parts.

But many examples from practice show that being proactive is *not at all natural*.

When a project or a new phase in the project is initiated, attention is spontaneously focused on the project content. This is the natural reaction when we start a new task. At the first meeting the project manager might suggest that it would be practical to arrange more than only the next meeting, i.e., some kind of proactive management.

But focus often remains on the project content for as long as possible, because it is the project execution that satisfies our need for professional performance and gives us the experience of being important and interacting with others.

If the participants in the project are competent and prepared for co-operation, we can progress rather far by following our natural tendency to focus on the content of the project. But later in the project, we will typically face problems that are symptoms of a lack of management effort –see the flow to the right in Figure 1.1.1: Some may feel that their interests are not respected; others disagree on the importance of performing according to the plan; there is no presentation ready for the meetings because the presenter thought another person was responsible; the attendance fades away, because nothing really important takes place at the meetings, etc.

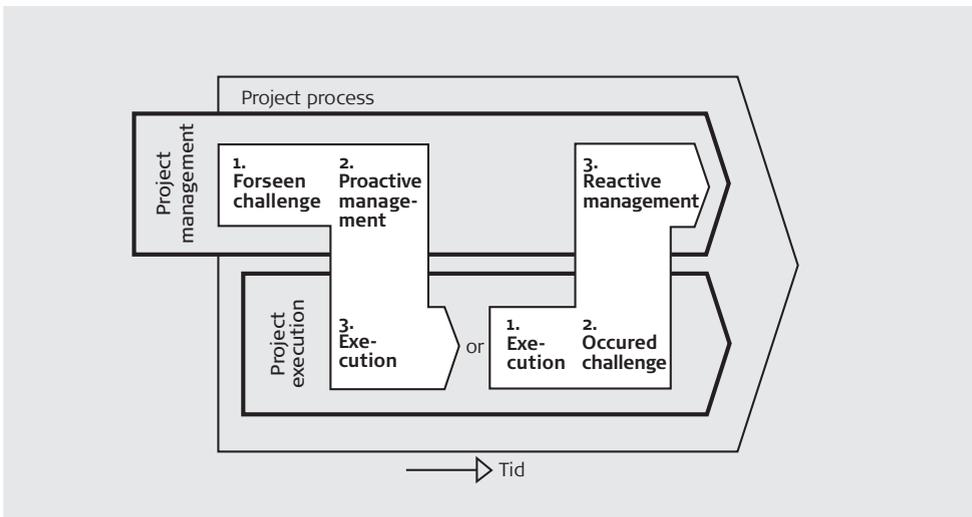


Figure 1.1.1 The project includes processes for both management and execution of the project. The interaction between the two could either be proactive or reactive.

As a *reaction* to such problems in a project, the necessary management effort is mobilized – fire-fighting is needed. Such a **reactive management** implies that we are only explicitly performing project management when a significant management challenge has occurred – either originating in the environment or from conditions in the project process.

The presented pattern could be seen as a **natural law for projects** – almost like the power of gravity:

- From the start, and for as long as possible in the process, we focus on the project execution, i.e., the solution of the project task itself.
- Attention given to management aspects is used reactively when challenges threaten the progress of the project.

There are many good reasons for this pattern:

- We are stressed by time – we know perfectly well that a proactive management effort would be preferable, but feel or assume that there is not sufficient time in the moment.
- Uncertainty around the project is too great – we have to know more about the content before a reliable plan can be created.
- Management of the project can be a rather diffuse experience – for many participants, it is much more inspiring to discuss the content.

Part of the explanation is also that it is typically more complex to handle proactive management tasks than reactive ones. Reactive management means to extinguish only one fire – while proactive management means to ensure the entire house against fire.

We do *not* ensure proactive management of a project simply by trusting in common sense and in what is universally accepted. A conscious effort is needed to counteract the natural law as presented above. The starting point is that you consciously aim at shifting the time spent on project management away from reactive management and toward a more proactive approach in all the project phases.

One way of promoting proactive management is to get the project owner, together with the project manager and the project participants, to *recognize this tendency* to concentrate on the project execution – even while relevant management tasks in the project are on the agenda.

Part of the story is also that we may call **non-active management** – i.e. to “turn a deaf ear” toward occurring management challenges, and to hope that they will adjust themselves. In contrast to this lack of involvement, even reactive management appears more positively: Action is needed when the problem occurs!

In brief, to perform proactive project management is not natural for many of us. It is not something we just do because we know that *well begun is half completed*. My experience tells me that we need principles and concepts that remind us of the importance of proactive management – and methods and tools which in practice help us to overcome the “natural law”.

This book aims at transferring *common sense* into *common practice* – by assisting you to become *more* proactive when managing your project.

1.2 The approach of the book

To perform good project management implies to practise three different areas of competencies:

- **Experience application**
To have experienced different ways of handling projects and, as a consequence, to be able to reflect and to apply different modes of action in current situations. Part of this project experience is also that your experiences from previous projects help you to keep your nerves steady throughout a project.
- **Method application**
Includes having explicit knowledge of various methods and tools that could be applied for the handling of project management activities. This competence implies that you know when and how to apply them appropriately. To gain benefit from the application of methods and tools, you must also be able to apply them in an appropriate interaction with the persons involved in the project.
- **Leadership behaviour**
Deals with being able to *perform* leadership behaviour that ensures your success with the management of the project in various situations and with different management tasks. This is a matter of establishing trust, handling relationships and facilitating cooperation.

This structure is identical to the structure introduced in the self-assessment tool *Competencies in Project Management* – also named the Danish *National Competence Baseline, NCB*. Lit. 2.

As it appears in Figure 1.2.1, the three competencies overlap each other. This indicates that the most competent project management takes place when relevant elements of experience, methods and behavioural competencies are performed at the same time.

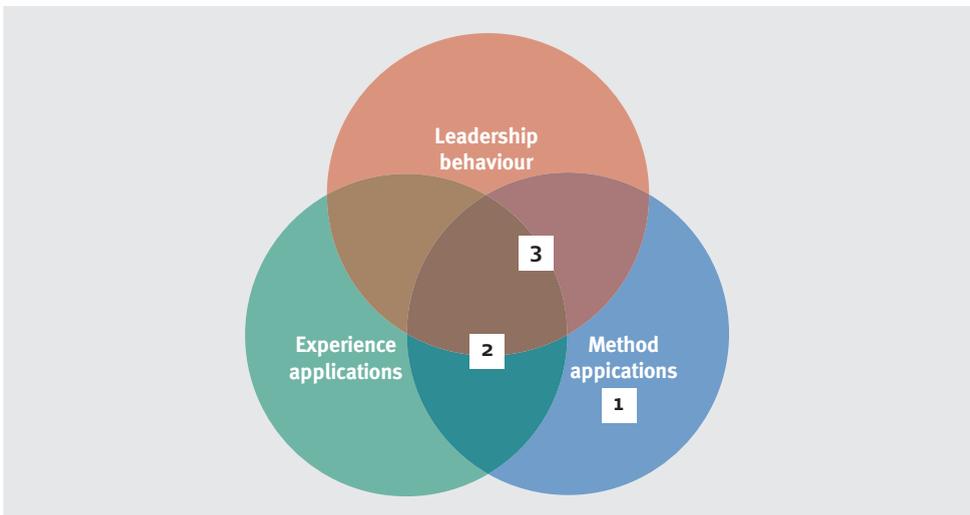


Figure 1.2.1 Interaction among the three areas of project management competencies – indicated graphically as seen in “Competencies in Project Management”.

I claim that if a project manager only has experience and good leadership behaviour, he/she will be inclined to perform reactively in the management of the project. In order to promote a proactive management effort, the relevant method competencies are needed. The project management methods serve as a lever for applying relevant experience and they establish the scene for performing relevant behaviour.

For example, if you are both experienced and talented in performing traditional chairmanship at an introductory meeting on a new project, you may end up with reasonable results. But if you add to your experience and your behaviour-based talents by supplying a list of contents for a master project plan as method, you will be able to achieve a more targeted communication – and ensure that you “have reached every inch” of the project.

The concept of this book is to *approach project management from the method application point of view* – closely combined with performed behaviour and applied experience. Referring to the Figure 1.2.1, it has been my ambition to deal with the entire “blue circle of method application” consisting of the three numbered sections:

1. The book encompasses not only the simple method description – as symbolised in the bottom right-hand side in the Figure.
2. The aim is also to provide relevant project experiences that promote your competence in practicing methods and tools, i.e. the middle overlapping areas in the Figure.
3. Further, it will as well give practical hints that support an adequate behaviour that will promote the effect of your method application, i.e. the upper overlapping area in the Figure.

It is, however, beyond framework of this book to give extensive practical examples on the application of methods, e.g. alternative project phase models and ways of structuring project organisations.

It is also beyond the framework of this book to give detailed descriptions of various behavioural patterns, e.g. which performed behaviour is appropriate when handling an unpleasant decision in your project group.

However, it is the general perception in the book, that performing relevant leadership behaviour is the key issue. The application of methods and experience should be considered as *supporting functions* for their leadership behaviour – or a way of qualifying the communication in and around the project.

1.3 The structure of the book

The first three chapters present the basis for planning and evaluating project management – at all stages of a project process:

- Chapter 2 introduces the book's **model**, stating different ways of structuring the process of managing a project – with related terminology. This corresponds to a length-width-degree system which helps you clarify your managerial position in a project, your direction, and how to get there. The chapter also explains how the various dimensions of the model are used throughout the book.
- Chapter 3 focuses on how to *lead* the actual management process – see Figure 1.3.1. First we indicate how you – at a given stage of the project – proactively **plan** the management activities which are needed in the next period of the project – including who should be involved in the management activities. During the planning, the project management model in Chapter 2 is used for structuring and inspiration. Later, the chapter presents guidelines on how to **evaluate** the actual management effort during a project process.
- Chapter 4 deals initially with different ways of performing the management roles in a project – and when to apply the roles. After the introduction, the chapter focuses on the role of **facilitating** the handling of the management activities. Now the performed behaviour is especially important. The facilitator role is a synonym for the *communicating project manager* – and an alternative to the *steering project manager*. It is one of the leading themes of the book that facilitation is a means for the involvement of others in the project management activities, and for creating more value from the project management effort – compared with a project manager handling the activities alone.

The following part of the book is divided into sections according to the four management phases of a total project process. In each section, the first chapter deals with *leading* the management phase that is in focus. Then follow – except for project close-out – one or more chapters which focus on how to *perform* project management, including recommended methods and tools which typically are applied in the considered management phase – but also at other stages of the project lifecycle:

- Chapter 5 is about leading the first project management phase – where the task is **preparation** of a project. This phase is typically lasting from the approval of an idea to the initiation of the project. The relevant methods in Chapters 6, 7 and 8 present guidelines on how to analyse the project and its context, how to perform the master project **planning** – and how to **anchor** the project in relation to the influencing parties.
- Chapter 9 gives you the basis for *leading* a suitable **start-up** of the project after its initiation – or after a shift from one execution phase to the next one in the project. The methods in Chapters 6, 7 and 8 are also relevant here – while Chapter 10 presents additional guidelines for **detailed planning** of the next period in the project.
- Chapter 11 is about *leading* the management of the project **execution** – and organising an entire **evaluation** of the project – typically when passing from one execution phase to the next. Chapters 12 and 13 present methods and practical hints for *how* to perform both **ongoing** project management and the stepwise **follow-up** of

the project execution. In addition, the methods presented in the previous Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 10 are useful during the project execution.

- Chapter 14 concludes with guidelines on how to *organise* the managerial close-out of the project, where the task focuses in particular on creating learning for the participants to apply in future projects.

Both the three introductory Chapters 2, 3 and 4, and the four Chapters 5, 9, 11 and 14 which focus on organising the management phases of the project, deal with how to *lead* the project management – in order to promote that you are proactive in the practical management of a project.

So, the principle behind the structure of the book is that the chapters concerning types of *management activities* are placed after the *management phase* in which the methods and tools in question are typically useful for the first time.

For example, Version 1 of a master project plan is prepared at the end of the preparation phase. During the start-up, a more specified Version 2 is typically produced in cooperation with the project parties. As part of the evaluation of the project, an update is typically needed based on the results achieved. And finally, as part of the close-out, we recommend preparing a final version that reflects the actual completion of the project.

In comparison with Chapters 1 to 10, we have chosen to treat the topics in chapters 11 to 14 in a more summarized way. Not because these chapters are less important for the successful management of a project – but because it is the topics in the first 10 chapters that contribute primarily to project management.

To help get an overview of the book, **different colours** are used for each chapter – see Figure 1.3.2. The idea behind the choice of colours is that the introductory, cross-sectional chapters, and the book's appendices have the mixed colour grey. The other chapters follow the colour spectrum, with red as the symbol for the overall leadership

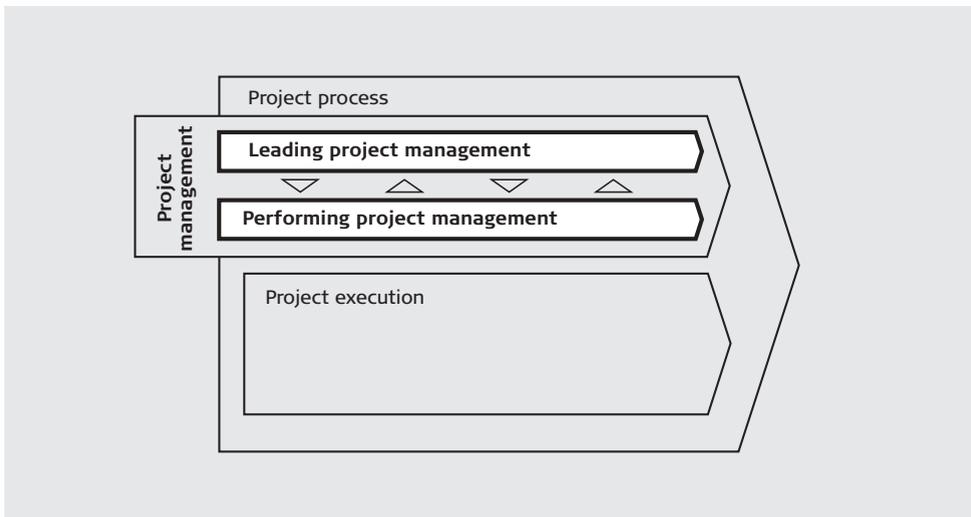


Figure 1.3.1 We distinguish in the management process between performing and leading project management, including to plan and evaluate management activities.

of the project management and blue as the symbol for the ongoing project management work.

The linkage across time between the project management phases and types of management activities is illustrated in **Appendix D** at the back of the book (see fold-out). Here, the entire project management is divided vertically into the typical management phases, while the typical management activities are stated in the front column. The diagram indicates the stages at which a main activity takes place, and at which stages a treatment of the specific activities is made.

The diagram also refers to the book's chapter numbers – so that it can be used as an index to relevant chapters in the book for a particular stage of a project.

The diagram's structure and the applied terminology will be further explained in Chapter 2. The purpose of this early reference to the diagram is to explain the interaction between the two types of chapters in the book and to draw attention to the use of the diagram as an index.

The **examples** in the book deal with how to gain an initial understanding of why to apply a method, the method's scope and/or the challenges that might be associated with its use.

Types of chapters in the book

Figure 1.3.2

1	How to use the book		Grey
2	Projects and project management	<i>Lead the management</i>	Grey
3	Leading project management	<i>Lead the management</i>	Grey
4	Facilitate management activities	<i>Lead the management</i>	Grey
5	Project preparation	<i>Management phase</i>	Red
6	Project analyses	<i>Management activity</i>	Yellow
7	Master project planning	<i>Management activity</i>	Green
8	Project anchoring	<i>Management activity</i>	Blue
9	Project start-up	<i>Management phase</i>	Red
10	Detailed project planning	<i>Management activity</i>	Green
11	Manage project execution	<i>Management phase</i>	Red
12	Ongoing project leadership	<i>Management activity</i>	Blue
13	Stepwise project follow-up	<i>Management activity</i>	Blue
14	Project close-out	<i>Management phase</i>	Red

1.4 Three management levels

It is important to adapt the management effort in your project to what is needed in your current project. In this book, we talk about to “scale” the management effort. I have chosen in most of the chapters to give proposals for method application related to three levels for the management effort in a project.

- **Management Level 3**
High level with almost consistent application of project methods and relatively large amount of time spent on project management.
The project manager has the management of the project as his/her main task.
- **Management Level 2**
Medium level with modified application of methods and moderate time spent on project management.
The project manager handles the management of the project along with other tasks within and in addition to the project.
- **Management Level 1**
Low level with limited application of project methods and relatively limited time spent on project management.
The project manager is the main executor of the project and handles project management as an additional task.

The main content of each specific chapter corresponds to Management Level 2. At the end of each chapter, you find an overview of the presented methods in the chapter, along with a scaling of the application by indicating what is typically used at Management Levels 1, 2 and 3. In addition, it is stated when the methods are used in a project process. The idea is to stimulate your own scaling of what and how much effort to invest in your project management.

The three management levels are named in accordance with the three levels in IPMA Certification® of Project Managers – which in Denmark is administrated by the Danish Project Management Association on behalf of IPMA, the International Project Management Association:

- Level B: Certified Senior Project Manager corresponds to Management Level 3
- Level C: Certificated Project Manager corresponds to Management Level 2
- Level D:
Certificated Project Management Associate corresponds to Management Level 1

In previous publications, I have introduced B, C and D to designate the three management levels. But, with a view to the increasing interest in IPMA Certification, I have chosen in this book to adapt the naming of the three Management Levels to level 1, 2 and 3 of management complexity.

The intention of coordinating this naming of the Management Levels with the levels for the certification of project managers is also to make the book a better tool for your preparation for participation in the certification programme.