

Projects trapped in their freedom

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No changes, please

The ability to adapt to changes along with short response time is heavily emphasised in disciplines such as strategic management and supply chain management. In contrast, study after study indicates that framing a project from changes is a key success criterion for projects (Olsson 2004).

The potential freedom of projects as temporary organizations is large. It is so large that major management attention is directed towards reducing and controlling flexibility. Projects appear to be trapped in their freedom (Olsson and Magnussen 2006).

More information, or keeping options open

The gap between what is known in the beginning of a project, and what ideally should be known, can be called a front-end dilemma. A common approach is to strive for more knowledge. A flexibility approach, on the other hand, can mean to postpone final commitments in the early phase, as shown in the figure below.

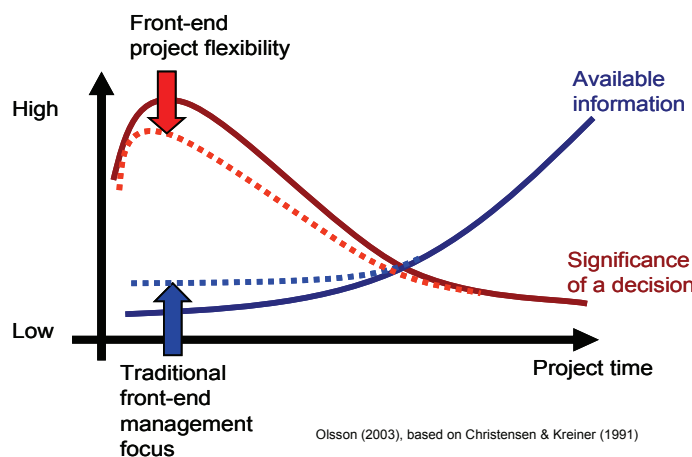
An orderly response to a changing world

Olsson and Samset (2006) point out that the potential drawbacks of flexible projects are substantial, both in terms of efficiency and effectiveness. There are

on strategic aspects of projects is like to generate a growing interest in project flexibility. The substantial and well documented drawbacks of project flexibility on projects efficiency will be a major challenge. However, in a strategic perspective, it will be equally important to manage project flexibility, as to avoid flexibility.

Flexibility management

Olsson (2006) proposes the following generic characteristics of successful approaches project flexibility management.



Objective	Approach
Avoid adjustments (after locking of scope)	Late locking of project scope and fast execution
Manage (limited) adjustments	Shield off areas of uncertainty
Avoid adjustments (in modules); Manage adjustments (between modules)	Incremental commitments
Manage adjustments	Absorption

References

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Focused, yet adaptive

Flexibility is generally not desirable when the unit of analysis is limited to a project seen in isolation, but it can be rational when a wider context is included in the analysis. The arguments in favour of flexibility emphasise the possibility for increased effectiveness while the arguments against flexibility typically highlight the problem of reduced efficiency (Olsson 2004). Flexibility is often seen as a threat to delivering the project on time and within budget.

also indications that the drawbacks are largest when projects do not prepare for subsequent adjustments. This notion is consistent with previous works on flexibility, which view managing flexibility as an orderly response to a changing world.

Strategic perspective on projects

A strategic perspective on project management means to emphasize the link between projects and strategic objectives of an organization. It means that project management also will include to do the right projects, not only doing them right, which has been the traditional focus in project management. A growing emphasis