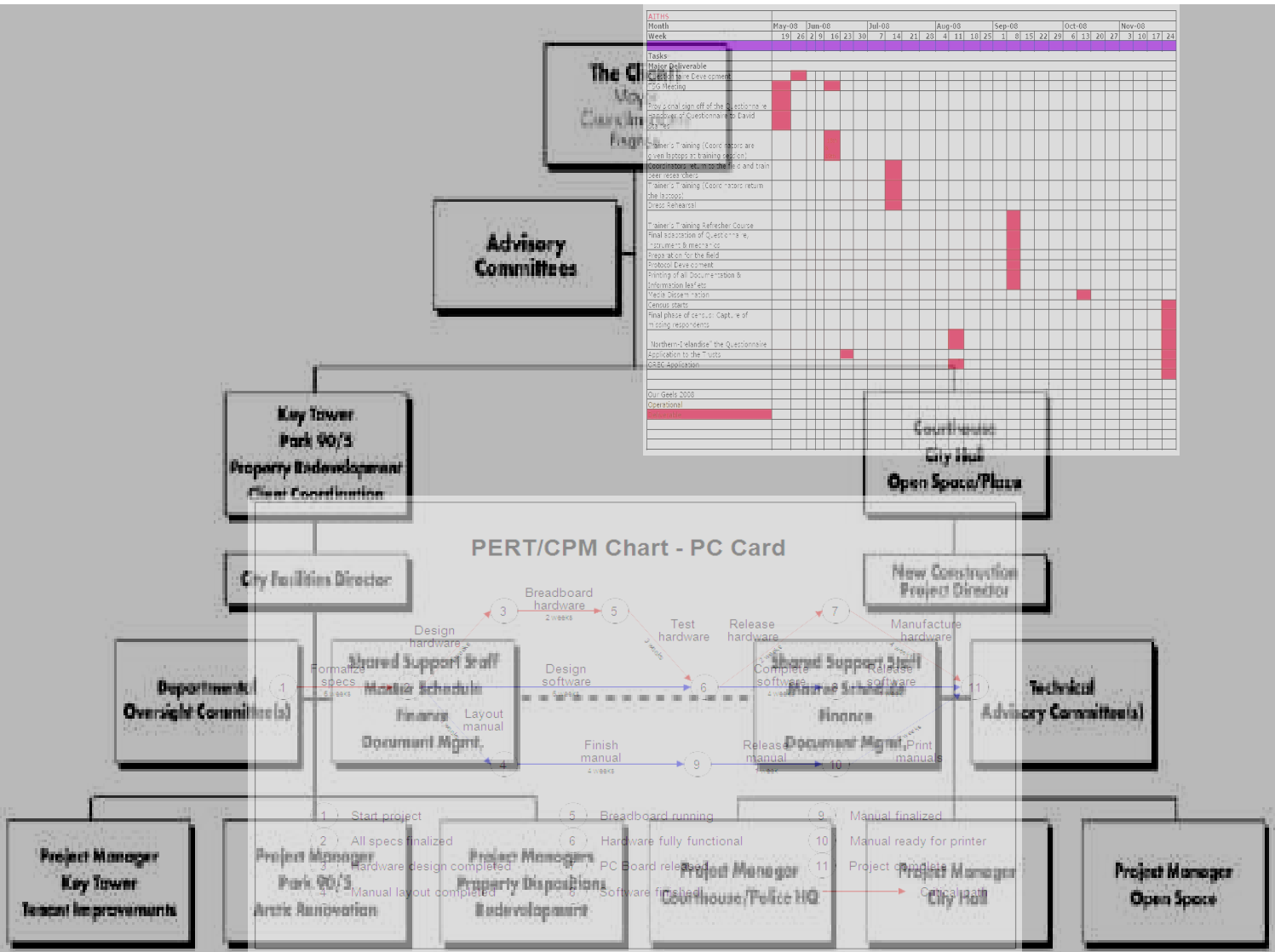




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An Innovative Approach to Project Management: Integrating Entrepreneurship Using a Biological Model

For further information, please contact us at:

Consulting Connoisseurs
 Office 4, Sai Baba Plaza
 Sector-15, Airoli
 Navi Mumbai 400 708
 India
 Tel: +91 961 942 8209
 info@consultingconnoisseurs.com
 www.consultingconnoisseurs.com

THE QUALITY OF BEING PREDICTABLE WITH GREAT CONFIDENCE

Do you think you can improve your Project Management Style? Modern Project Management finally falls into three models functional, matrix or projectized. Each of these models have been tested with time and have really not stood the acid tests for project management. Seeing this room for innovation, I am currently looking at a model that actually defies the logic of conventional project management. I call it the Biological Model. Lets dive into the details!

Every model works with certain assumptions. The biological model is one that bases itself on intra /entrepreneurial skills of the employees in the organization. It starts off with a functional model, however, enabling growth in lateral scope and vertical scope as the project moves on. There is no definite structure of the team. Each team member works on his set of ideas to see how they fulfill the goals of the project. Its like cells growing in a culture medium... they grow into ideas like cells forming tissue. After the idea reaches a critical mass, the inter-relationships between the various streams are evaluated and the strategic decision is arrived at. Such a model allows people to 'own and work their ideas through' on a project. There is also a good scope for innovation in the project. As the intrapreneur works his way through, he also develops his team to support the idea depending on what the idea requires. This enables an unimpeded growth of the tissue and makes it gel well into the body of the project that is being cultured.

The success of this model, however, relies heavily on the management structure. Since every cell will tend to grow and become a big tissue, there is a greater need to coordinate the growth of these tissues. The control of direction needs to be clearly defined, identified and communicated. This model requires the management to control each of the interfaces and ensure that each of the concerned tissues operate and grow smoothly.

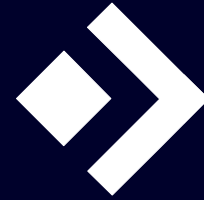


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While conventional project management talks of information flow and chain of commands, this model requires a flat structure; therefore, an ocean of information with appropriate information tools that enable people to sift through the required ones and discard the rest. Needless to say, intrapreneurial competence and subject expertise is a key to this model. The management also needs to be reactive enough to address the needs of the intrapreneurs. For this model to succeed, the management must ensure that the success of the intrapreneur must gain priority over the management of the organizational structure. This is a critical success factor for this model. This also means, in other words, that the underlying infrastructure of management processes like accounting, legal, staffing and hiring resources must be simple, flexible and fast. Decision variables for the decision-making must be well defined and well communicated. They should be iterated with sufficient feedback to avoid wastage of time on 'wrong directions' of thought. Decision levels need to be delegated properly in order to avoid overburdening and thus, 'bottlenecking' the coordination effort.

While this model ensures good quality decisions and project management, it also runs high risks. The highest risk is that of scope. When a 'cell' is absent or grows extremely slowly in one area of the media, it means that the scope element is not being developed appropriately. In such a situation, the likelihood would be to wind up with 'fire-fighting measures' in that area. This would occur due to the simple fact that the growth of the other cells and tissues would take time till they span this part of the medium. Hence, the management needs to understand, in concrete terms, the scope of the project. It is extremely risky to prioritize areas as important as this could create the 'out-of-sight-is-out-of-mind' situation. Hence, the management must ensure that they understand every deliverable or the 'work breakdown structure' associated with the project. This point defies conventional logic in management sciences that insist on a simple priority action plan. The management, as a contrary in this case, needs to be prepared to accept flat information that helps them control the entire span of the project. This is easier said than done in most cases.



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Having understood the program plan of the project, the next risk associated with this model is that of decision making. While on the one hand, the quality of decisions is expected to be better, on the other hand, decisions and information could become 'Event Driven' rather than being 'Schedule Driven'. Aligning these 'events' with the 'schedule' calls for a focus on the Project Time Management. The intrinsic nature of working of this model calls for ownership. However, when it comes to coordination, there must always be a clear and single owner of delay for each train. Most projects however, have transfer of ownerships. While most companies and professionals would argue that the ownership needs to be transferred due to the different nature of jobs (like civil works, mechanical works in industrial construction or requirement gathering and programming in software), I insist that the owner of the last deliverable must be the owner of the chain. This owner needs to check the alignment of the scope, cost and time issues with the project.

As we see here, the key issues are the areas of growth and the rates of growth for the management. The critical success factor is the management style, structure, infrastructure and the communication (I am listing this last point separately for obvious reasons!). As a tool, the management of uncertainty in large programs is the key. However, with the strategic options concerning the deliverables for the individual elements in the scope are variable, it makes sense to look at controlling these options from a schedule / time management perspective.

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About the Author



Rotarian Nikhil S. Gurjar is the President of Consulting Connoisseurs, a new generation management consulting company based out of Navi Mumbai. The company specializes in providing solutions based on both conventional methods in management consulting as well as the state of the art tools using modeling and simulation. With several years of experience in Europe and the US, Nikhil Gurjar is one of the few experts in the country who understands and uses these tools for business applications and policy research. He is also associated with agencies like CII, PPMAI, MSME for different types of services. Before the launch of the company, Nikhil was the Head of Planning at a very large Greenfield steel project in the US. For more details, visit www.consultingconnoisseurs.com.