



PROJECT MANAGEMENT CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE

A.J. CLARK SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING
Civil & Environmental Engineering Department



PUTTING THEORY TO PRACTICE OR PRACTISING THEORY?

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A Brief Introduction

- Construction management
- Lecturer in Project Management
- Human relations
- Social, technical and organisational change
- Inter-firm/Inter-organisational relations
- Professional Development Programme in Project Management (PMPDP)
- Professional Doctorate in Project Management

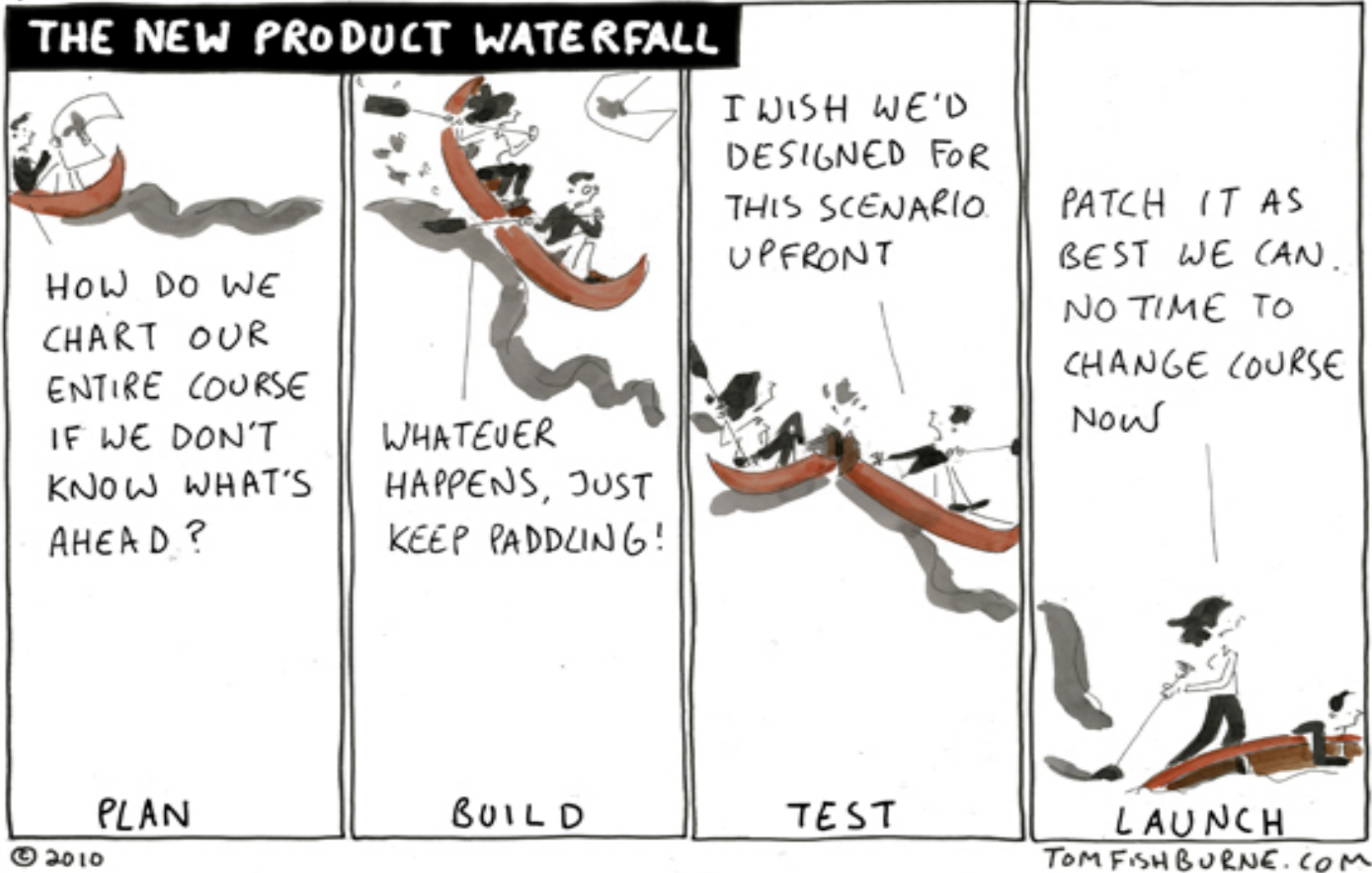
Scope of Presentation

- Project Management: Practice v. Theory
- Some criticisms:
 - Theory before practice?
 - Narrowness of project management theory
- Some suggestions:
 - From 'Grab and Go' to Engaged scholarship
 - From co-production to practitioners as co-researchers
 - From reflective to reflexive practitioner

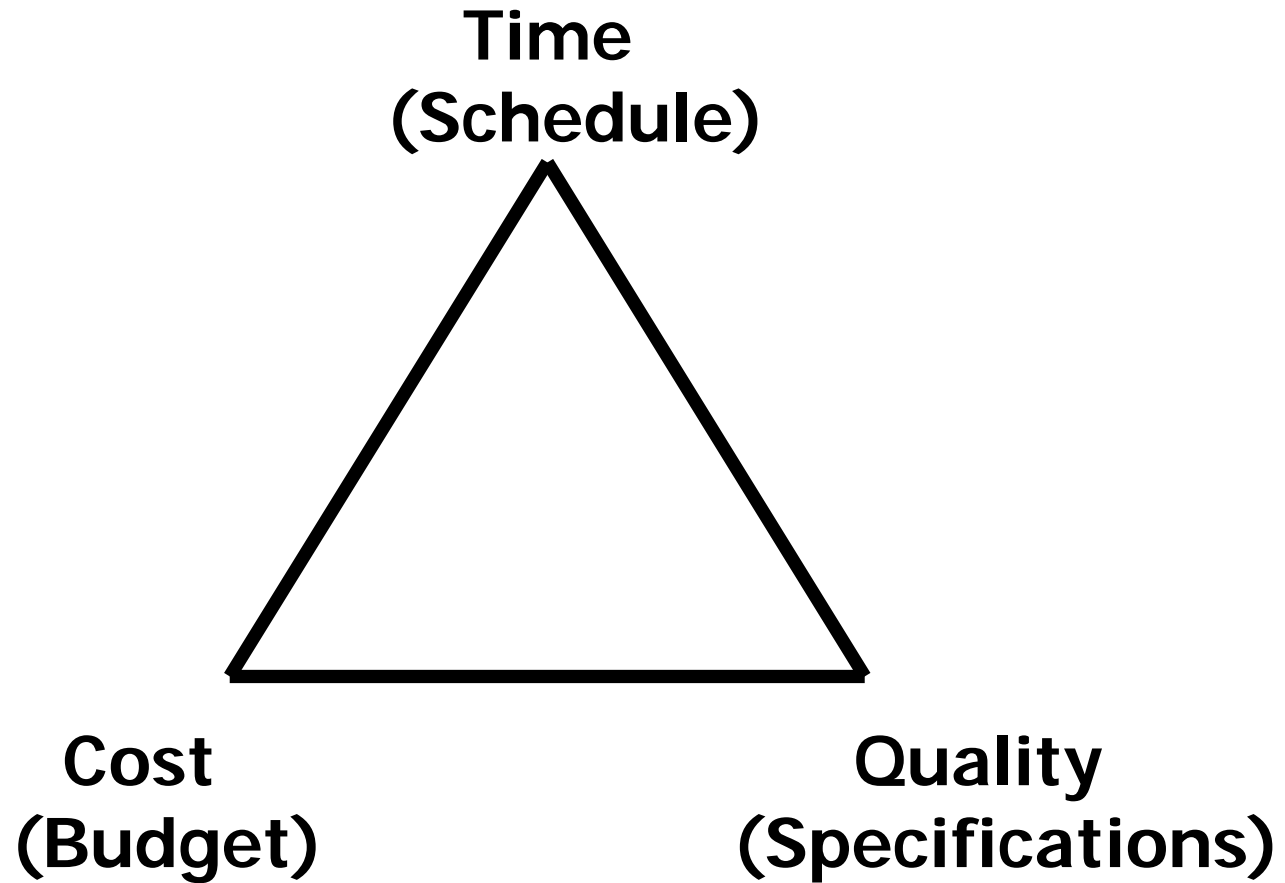
Project Life Cycle as Theoretical Basis

BRAND CAMP

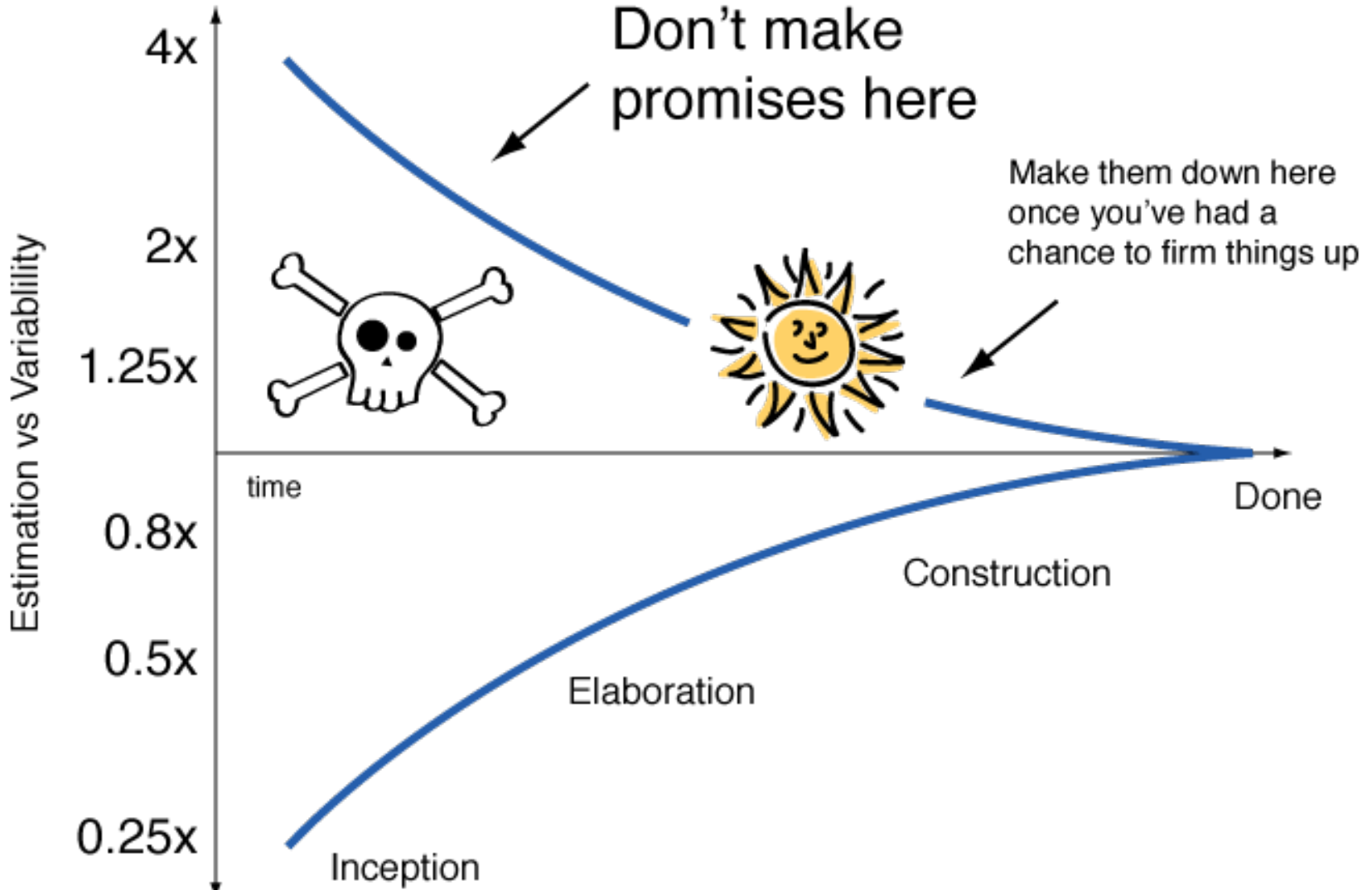
by Tom Fishburne



The Iron Triangle



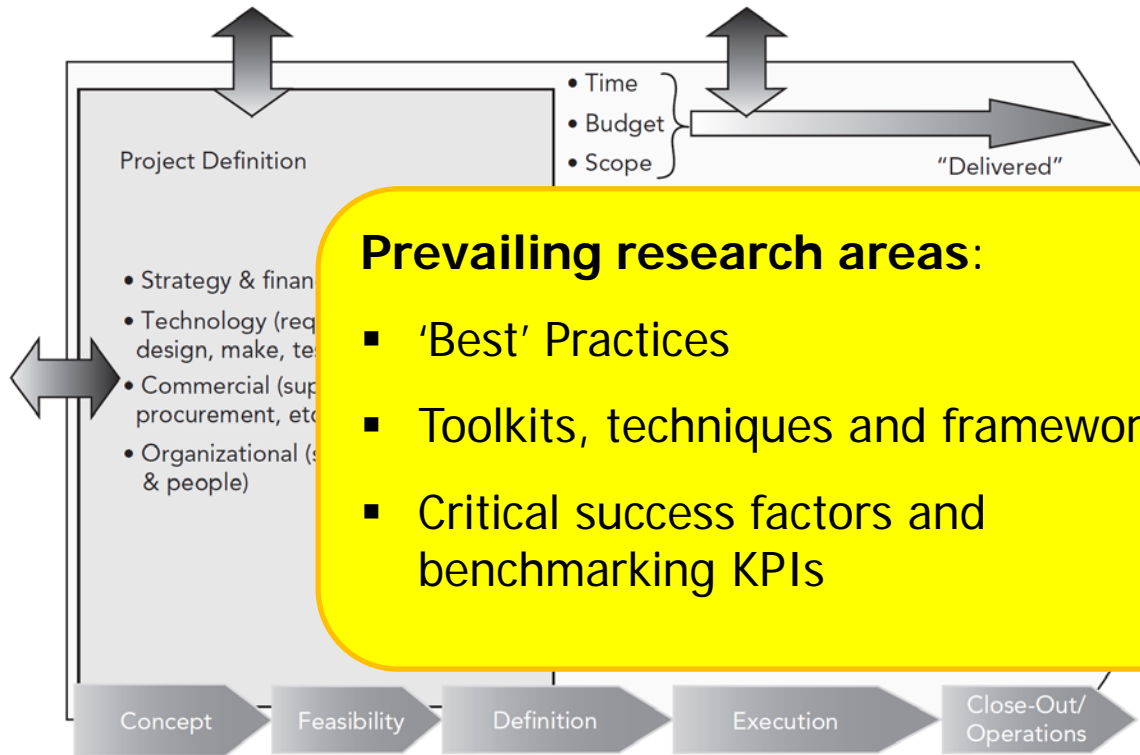
The Cone of Certainty



No Project is An Island...

The 'management of projects' conception extending the *PMBOK® Guide* to include the front-end definitional stages

Interaction with the business and general environment

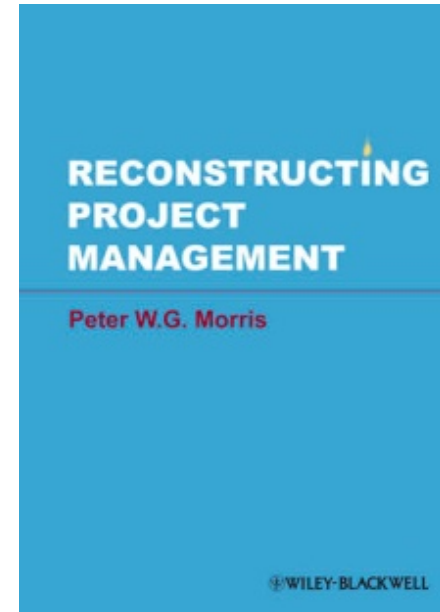


Prevailing research areas:

- 'Best' Practices
- Toolkits, techniques and frameworks
- Critical success factors and benchmarking KPIs

THE MANAGEMENT OF PROJECTS

involves managing the definition and delivery of the project for stakeholder success. The focus is on the project in its context. Project and program management and portfolio management sit within this framework.



Adapted from: Morris, P. W. G. (2013: 62) *Reconstructing Project Management*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

What do practitioners tell us?

- Who am I and what am I doing here?
Legitimacy of project managers and the management of projects
- Tools and techniques *versus* intuition and informal relationships
- Communicating across boundaries (disciplines, organisations)
- Making others see the point of project management (and to see the 'problem' from the other's viewpoint)

PM Research Neither Academic Nor Practical

In the project research community, we believe that projects are the engine of growth and innovation and therefore should be seen as critical to senior leaders in industry and government. Unfortunately, we have not been able to make that case clearly and leaders rarely consider the management of projects to be of concern to them [...] In short, we felt that much of project management research is **“mired in the middle”**, **neither sufficiently rigorous for the academy nor sufficiently insightful for practitioners.**

Source: Reich, B. H., Liu, L., Sauer, C., Bannerman, P., Cicmil, S., Cooke-Davies, T., Gemino, A., Hobbs, B., Maylor, H., Messikomer, C., Pasian, B., Semeniuk, M. and Thomas, J. (2013: 938; *emphasis added*) Developing better theory about project organizations. *International Journal of Project Management*, **31**(7), 938-942.

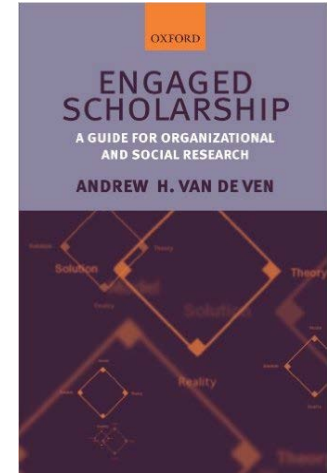
Have We Lost Our Roots in PM?

By focusing exclusively on the phased approach, the PM discipline has missed out on these two high-impact areas of management. This does damage at two levels: damage to the discipline by relegating it to an engineering-execution niche rather than occupying the influential center stage, and damage to companies because it denies them a powerful weapon in innovating and evolving strategy. Again, companies *do* apply trial-and-error and parallel approaches in their novel projects because they have no choice, but in doing so they go against their professional PM training rather than being supported by it.

Source: Lenfle, S. and Loch, C. (2010: 49; original *emphasis*) Lost roots: how project management came to emphasize control over flexibility and novelty. *California Management Review*, **53**(1), 32-55.

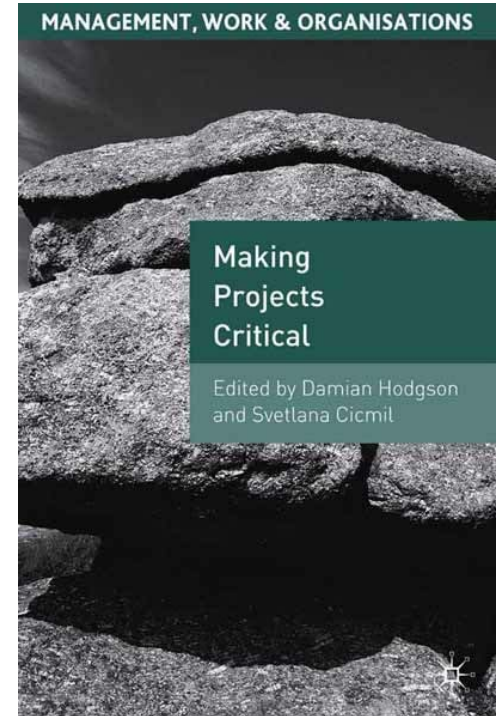
Unengaged Scholarship

- A research problem or question is posed but no evidence is presented that grounds the nature and prevalence of the problem.
- A single, theoretical model is proposed, but no consideration is given to plausible alternative models or questioning the status quo.
- The research design relies on statistically analyzing questionnaire or secondary data files (such as PIMS, patent data, or census files) without the researcher talking to any informants or respondents in the field.
- Results are presented on the statistical significance of relationships with little or no discussion of their practical significance and implications.



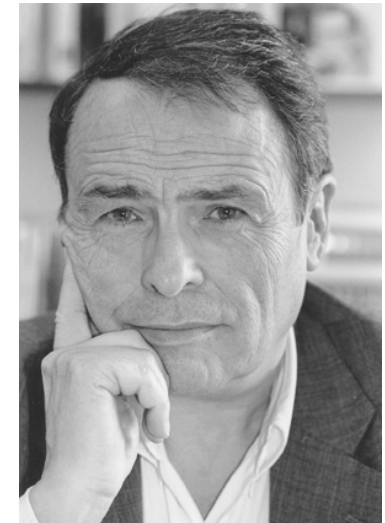
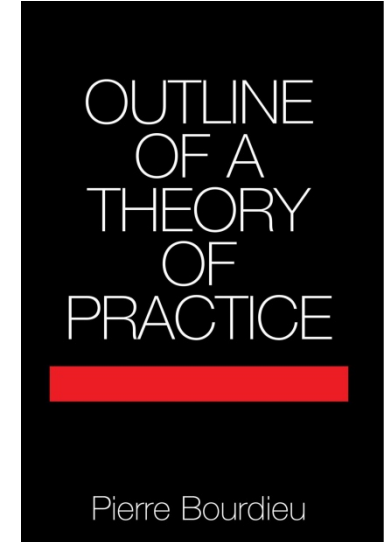
Towards a Critical PM Scholarship

- ~~What is a 'Project'?~~
- What do we do when *we* call something a 'Project'?
- Projects as socially constructed
- Actualities of project work
- What people say, what people do, and what people say they do



Understanding Practice

Habitus: Systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations [...]
Objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor. (p. 53)



Is Bourdieu necessary to be a practitioner?

Practice is a dynamic interplay between past and present, individual and collective, and between contexts of culture and contexts of situation [...] the objective and the subjective are fluid, continuously interacting and relational.

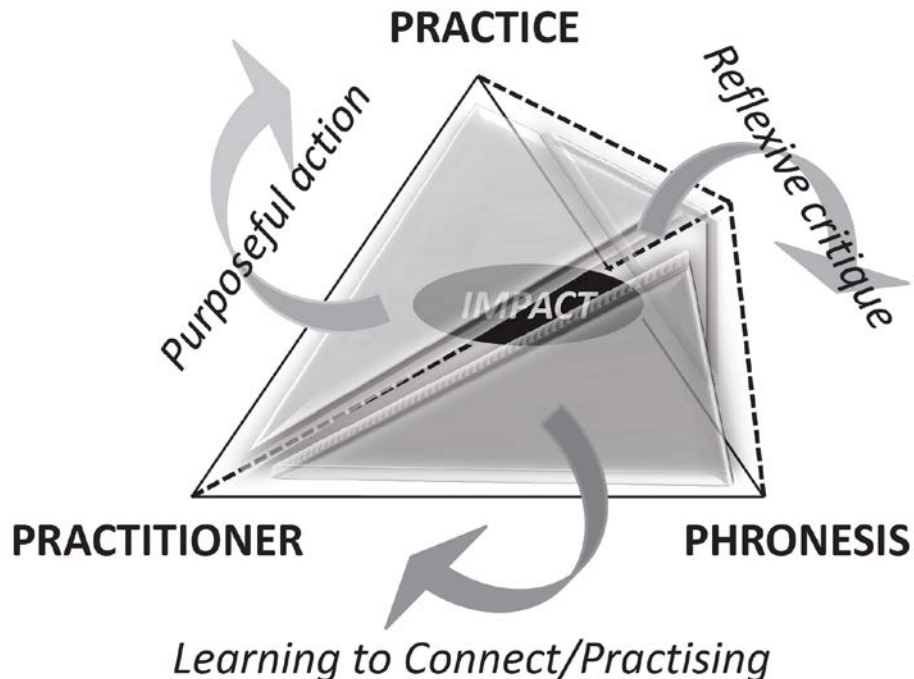
Source: Räisänen, C. and Löwstedt, M. (2014: 125) Stakes and struggles in liminal spaces: Construction practitioners interacting with management-consultants. *Engineering Project Organization Journal*, 4(2-3), 123-133.

Habitus is better conceived as a way of knowing inscribed in bodies, acquired mostly during upbringing [...] as a by-product of participation in daily activities largely without raising it to the level of discourse. In this sense, it is clear that for Bourdieu habitus is not a way of understanding the world as much as a way of being in the world.

Source: Nicolini, D. (2012: 56) *Practice Theory, Work and Organization: An introduction*. Oxford: University of Oxford Press.

Aristotelean Roots of Knowledge

- Three intellectual virtues
 - Techne (knowing what)
 - Episteme (how we know)
 - **Phronesis (practical wisdom)**



Source: Antonacopoulou, E. P. (2010: 221) Beyond co-production: Practice-relevant scholarship as a foundation for delivering impact through powerful ideas. *Public Money and Management*, **30**(4), 219-226.

Professional Doctorate in Manchester

- Part-time PhD Programme over 4 – 6 years
- Privileging practice and the practitioner
- NOT application of theory, but active theorising in practice
- Knowing thyself before/and knowing others
- Framing and communicating ongoing impact
- Eight residential units to encourage engaged/committed scholarship, and...
- Writing and communicating not as techniques but as an ongoing process of dialogue
- Better theories AND practices!

Postscript: Academics as Consultants?

We [consultants] should be focusing on work, not discussing about other things. We spend too much time in reflexive reasoning. We should think of deliverables and timing instead. Let's keep our psychological arguments out of the client's office, if not out of our minds.

Source: Czarniawska, B. and Mazza, C. (2003: 284) Consulting as a liminal space. *Human Relations*, **56**(3), 267-290.





Q and A