

# The impact of Puritan ideology on aspects of project management

Stephen Jonathan Whitty\*, Mark Frederick Schulz

*School of Information Technology and Electrical Engineering, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Qld 4072, Australia*

Received 23 March 2006; accepted 24 May 2006

## Abstract

This paper examines the impact of Puritan ideology on various aspects of project management. By using a memetic approach to project management research, this paper traces the development of the ethos or spirit of project management from its Puritan origins. It argues that contrary to traditional thinking, project management has developed against a background of Puritan elements (memes) that are favourable to the development of capitalism. Moreover, it is suggested that these religious origins continue to impact in a conservative way on how the project management discipline evolves; limiting its development, oversimplifying the process of managing people, and consequentially thwarting nonconformists.

© 2006 Elsevier Ltd and IPMA. All rights reserved.

*Keywords:* History of project management; Puritan ideology; Memetic; Spirit of project management; Religion; Doctrinal supremacy; Protestant work ethic; Scientific management; Managerialism

## 1. Introduction

The origins of project management (PM) are traditionally considered to be deeply rooted in antiquity [1], with its present day methodology and body of knowledge (BoK) born out of the construction and military weapons industry [2]. I suggest this is an oversimplification that portrays PM in a pragmatic and secular manner with no reference to its anecdotal, mythmaking, and religious origins.

PM is used today in all aspects and areas of commerce and industry, and this trend is likely to continue [3]. So why do people individually and collectively believe in PM, and why is it spreading so profusely [4]? The reasons are more complex than those suggested by our traditional view of PM as an efficient method of increasing productivity. It has been suggested that one possible reason for the rising faith in PM is that it provides a sense of meaning, purpose, and control to work in a fast changing society that leaves many feeling threatened and insecure about

an unforeseeable future [4]. I suggest one possible explanation for its profuse dissemination is that as a concept it survives better than any other in our Western capitalist corporate environment.

In this paper I employ a memetic approach to PM research (see Whitty [4]) which observes over time the evolution of memes and the behaviours they create. I put forward the case that Puritan memes have influenced the development of the 'spirit' of PM. Furthermore, that these memes have evolved through, and been shaped by, the ideological eras known as Newtonianism, Liberalism, and Taylorism.

I begin with a brief overview of memes, how they spread, and how we can begin to observe them by the behaviours they create. Next, I highlight significant memes that provide the social backdrop for Western religiosity. I then define the spirit of PM, and subsequently illustrate the evolution of its inherited traits. Finally I reflect on the impact such Puritan origins have on various aspects of PM such as; how it evolves, how it is studied and practiced, the role of the project manager, the project team and the profession, as well as the impact on the project organisation and how the PM body creates knowledge.

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +61 7 3365 9797; fax: +61 7 3365 4999.  
E-mail address: [jonw@itee.uq.edu.au](mailto:jonw@itee.uq.edu.au) (S.J. Whitty).  
URL: [www.itee.uq.edu.au/~jonw](http://www.itee.uq.edu.au/~jonw) (S.J. Whitty).

Fig. 1 summarizes the influence Puritanism has had on the formation of memes that underpin the ideological eras known as Newtonianism, Liberalism, and Taylorism, and

the influence they have all had on PM. Table 1 summarizes the final discussion of this paper and highlights the impact of Puritanical memes on aspects of PM.

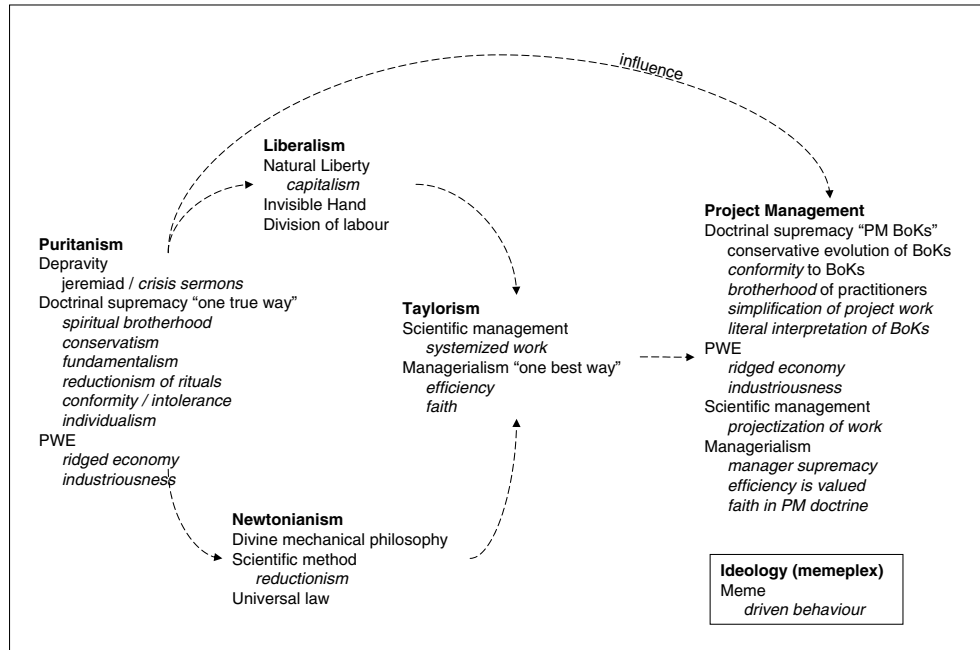


Fig. 1. The evolution of Puritan memes and their influence on PM.

Table 1  
The impact of Puritan memes on aspects of PM

Aspect of PM	Meme/driven behaviour	Impact on PM
Evolution	Doctrinal supremacy/ <i>conservatism</i>	Traditional task orientated Puritan work values reinforced. Values of mission, vision, and purpose reinstated. PM language reinforces dichotomist thinking. Traditional practices and BoK will be conserved. Formation of breakaway BoKs.
Study and practice	PWE/ <i>industriousness ridged, economy</i>	PWE continues to be designed into accredited PM training. PWE reinforced by competency certification and mandatory corporate accreditation.
	Scientific management/ <i>projectization of work</i>	Complexity of problems is ignored by redefined problems simplistic and reductive project terms.
Project manager	Managerialism/ <i>manager supremacy, faith in PM doctrine, efficiency is valued</i>	Project manager is a moral agent, a guardian and advocate of correct PM doctrine and practices. Project manager role is institutionalized securing promotional pathway.
Project team	Doctrinal supremacy/ <i>conformity and intolerance, brotherhood of practitioners</i>	Team members conform and accept traditional PM teachings. Team member promote themselves as practitioners of the doctrine.
	Depravity/ <i>Jeremiad</i>	Team members share a communal identity, struggle against the PM doctrine, and reinterpret events in light of that struggle.
Profession	Doctrinal supremacy/ <i>brotherhood of practitioners</i>	PMBOK® Guide provides guidelines for PM behaviour. Practitioners owe their allegiance to the profession. Conformity is premium, dissent is penalized.
Knowledge creation	Doctrinal supremacy/ <i>conservative reductionism</i>	Restricted evolution of traditions and BoK. Complexity of reality is simplified and misinterpreted by use of metaphors and anecdotes.
Project organisations	Doctrinal supremacy/ <i>fundamentalism</i>	Literal interpretation and application of PM doctrine. Senior management cannot conclude that PM is a waste of time and money.

## 2. Memes

Dawkins [5] argues that memes behave in ways similar to biological viruses except that they spread from mind to mind. Gladwell [6], without using the term meme, describes cultural trends as social epidemics that spread like viruses. He suggests that individuals contaminate one another with their preferences until a tipping point is reached and the effects of these preferences spread through a population. I suggest this is the case with PM, as various memes came together and mutated in the minds of some during the mid-20th century.

### 2.1. Meme identification

PM has been described as a memplex (groups of memes that replicate better as a group) with the language, stories, beliefs and ideas of its scholars and practitioners at its core [4]. One way to identify the memes that are driving certain cultural activities is to observe the behaviours and language used by the individuals or group concerned with the activity. Those imbued with a spirit of PM could be detected by such behaviours as breaking down work into tasks, plan making, team forming, assessing risk, and budget monitoring. They might also use words such as scope, deliverable, milestone, and Gantt. The memes that drive such behaviour and language are, I suggest, born out of the historical period known as the Reformation, and have evolved and mutated with others over time to form new memplexes or ideologies (collections of memes) such as Puritanism, Newtonianism, Liberalism, and Taylorism. Whilst this discussion focuses on particular memes that have led to the development of the spirit of PM, it must also be recognised that there are more general memes at work in Western society that provide the backdrop for religiosity, capitalism, scientific management and managerialism to evolve.

## 3. Memetic backdrop

There are memes that are largely common to all Western (Jewish, Christian, and Islamic) societies. The by-product of their replication creates behaviours which can be characterized as an obsession for control of one's environment and the pursuit of meaning. These memes drive our Western cultural and religious behaviour and make real our sense of humanity, consciousness, and meaning. Moreover, they fortify our illusionary experience of design, thinking, time and space.

### 3.1. Humanity

Rappaport [7] suggests that the origins of humanity go hand in hand with the origins of religion, as no society is devoid of what observers would agree is religion. Further, he suggests that the human species can only live in terms of meanings it must itself invent.

When comparing human beings with other living things, most people consider the human species to be superior in inherent worth [8,9]. It was Aristotle's great-chain-of-being meme which first ascribed hierarchical rank to every form of life [9,10]. Dawkins [11] argues that our discontinuous mind, which describes the world in qualitative classes such as tall or short, black or white, organised or disorganised, falsely divides animals up into discontinuous species which are conveniently grouped and named. For example, the species category "apes" conveniently excludes humans. And whilst we might admit that we are like apes or descended from apes, we seldom realise that we actually are apes, particular African apes [11].

### 3.2. Meaning

Part of our humanness is to appropriate meaning where there is none. There is a common dissonance between physical and social laws. Physical laws and the affairs of our society contingent upon them will manifest whether or not these laws are known or not. In contrast, the social laws by which humanity lives are constructed, and not only increase our capacity to conceive the social world but to misunderstand the physical world too [7].

PM is successful at appropriating meaning to work. A memetic approach to PM regards a project as an elaborate construct where the description of progress is a story, restricted by PM language, where meaning is appropriated existentially [4]. Project managers frequently become so egotistically involved in the stories of their project that their identities are immersed in them, causing them to support their project despite contradictory evidence, because failure suggests a threat to their own self-esteem [12].

### 3.3. Design

The design of all living things as well as ecosystems is an illusion [11]. The illusion being that the former have parts that intricately harmonize and regulate to keep them alive, while the latter have species that do something similar [11]. However, bacteria, fungi, plants, and animal that are with us today are the ones that have successfully *exploited* the others in their environment [11].

Blackmore [13] argues that human foresight is, as is knowledge in humans, animals, or plants, brought about by adaptation. Human personal and interpersonal skills as well as intelligence and aptitude are well regarded in modern society. In the corporate and project environment the ability to plan, organise, and deal with unexpected events is further celebrated. As with plant and animal characteristics [14], human characteristics are the result of cultural, social, or memetic selection [13]. The complex infrastructure of a modern Western society condemns certain behaviours and rewards others. Rewards take the form of cultural inclusion and acceptance through employment, promotion, and membership to a community that enables us to live and reproduce, passing our behavioural

characteristics and tendencies onto further generations who will again undergo further selection. Human behaviour such as planning, organising, and deal with unexpected events, is therefore a hardwired product of interactions between genes, memes and the environment.

### 3.4. *Consciousness*

Dennett [15] suggests that our minds, even our sense of self, the construct of ‘me’ and ‘I’, are an illusion created by the interplay of memes. The human mind being an artefact created as memes physically restructures the human brain to make it a better environment for memes.

### 3.5. *Thinking*

Bernstein [16] suggests that our current ‘rational’ way of thinking began when humans abandoned the meme that events are due to the whim of the gods and embraced the meme that we are active, independent agents who can manage risks. Our language furnishes the world with qualities like good and evil, abstractions like democracy and communism, values like honour, valour, generosity, and imaginary beings like spirits and gods. All of these are reified, made into real ‘things’, by social actions contingent upon language [7].

The language of PM dichotomizes our thinking of the project environment and filters our experience of it. If project progress is poor, the project team may be frowned upon. If progress is good, they might be hailed as heroes. Thinking in this way we tend to make generalisations and simple assumptions about the way the world really is.

### 3.6. *Time and space*

The evolution of human thought and cognition has no doubt been influenced by our obsession with monitoring time [17]. Western religions reflect on historical divine actions to give significance and meaning to their beliefs [18]. However, most Eastern societies create an impression about time experimentally rather than purely cognitively, seeing continuity and connectivity between life cycles and generations; history being more of a reflection on human action [18]. Generally speaking an Eastern (Buddhist, Hindu, Taoist) perception of time is global and circular, whereas the Western (Jewish, Christian, and Islamic) Newtonian perception is temporary and linear [19].

Western societies are conditioned by time. Before the standardisation of US time zones in 1883 time consciousness was something of a novelty as numerous local time zones had existed. From 1883 on, time was no longer to be announced by the rising sun or the church clock; it was to be measured and announced by managers [20], and the conservation and efficient management of time and physical space would be deemed a virtue.

A memetic approach to PM highlights that it is only the methodologies and technologies that focus on the accelera-

tion of time, as opposed to the slowing of time, which survive in a Western capitalist culture. A PM that comprises all aspects of time such as speed, slowness, waiting, pausing, and hesitating, could reveal and promote completely new possibilities [21].

## 4. The spirit of project management

The spirit of PM can spread across a company [22]. The spirit is different to PM per se, in that it illustrates the ethos, disposition, or fundamental values of a community or brotherhood of practitioners. It has been characterised as a component of project leadership that creates and energises a team’s morale, directs their activities, and saves managerial time [23]. The spirit can be further observed by how the PM literature places more emphasis on tools, techniques, and processes than it does on cultural aspects [24]. The spirit is a philosophy of control and use of existing resources [25]. In essence the spirit of PM can be characterized as a systematic, methodological, and frugal approach to the management of time, cost, and resources, including people, for its own end.

The spirit of PM is well established in both social and corporate settings. Some regard it as commonsense thinking and the natural outcome of logical reasoning about how work should be done. I have observed the spirit of PM as evangelical praise, admiration, and recognition for project managers who completed projects on time and within budget. These are also qualities cited in recruitment advertisements for project managers. Organisations have even been called upon to build a skilled cadre of project managers as a strategy for gaining competitive advantage [26].

A memetic approach to PM questions the inevitability of the existence of the spirit of PM. I suggest it has been brought about by a particular world view that can be traced back through the ideological eras of Taylorism, Newtonianism, and Liberalism, to Puritanism which has itself significantly influenced the nature of Western society.

## 5. Puritan ideology and capitalism

Commentators on capitalism argue that its existence is inevitable, that it is fundamental to human nature. Weber [27] argues against this, suggesting that the ‘spirit’ necessary for capitalistic activities is not inevitable. Moreover, that modern capitalism prospers because Western society has embraced particular habits and internalised certain values. In an attempt to understand the evolution of Western capitalist culture we must appreciate the complex relationship between the economic environment and social values. Moreover, we cannot talk about social values without discussing political and religious views, and there are significant characteristics of our modern Western capitalist culture, including PM behaviour, that have been powerfully influenced by the Reformation.

### 5.1. Reformation

The Protestant Reformation was brought to the fore in the early-15th Century when Martin Luther [28] protested against the Roman Catholic (Catholic) practice of selling indulgences. He argued that salvation was a free gift to each individual and that it was not necessary for a priest to perform the sacrament as a means of salvation. England's religious reform movement was based on that of Luther's, and in 1529 Henry VIII summoned the Reformation Parliament and severed ties with the Catholic Church. The Church of England replaced the Catholic Church, and though there was a brief restoration to Catholicism under Queen Mary I, her successor Queen Elizabeth I grew England into an industrious and strong God fearing nation devoted to a Protestant work ethic.

### 5.2. Protestant or Puritan work ethic (PWE)

Before the Reformation, Western people did not see their occupations or businesses as being 'in service' to God. Rather, work was perceived as a necessary evil, a means to an end not an end in itself. Weber [27] points out how the word 'calling', a product of the Reformation peculiar to Protestant peoples, has the religious connotation of a task set by God. This meme developed by Luther [28] gives religious significance to worldly activities, specifically work. For Protestants, serving God meant participating in, and working hard at worldly activities, as this was part of God's design and purpose for each individual. Working hard is seen as the means of showing ones love and appreciation for God.

Luther himself was a traditionalist. He did not have the spirit of capitalism (the pursuit of wealth for its own sake). However, his meme evolved in the environment of the different Protestant churches that practiced self-denial, ridged economy, and advocated strict religious discipline and virtuous conduct.

### 5.3. Puritanism

The Puritans were informed, committed, and radical Protestant fundamentalists who were united in a spiritual brotherhood. The depravity meme underpins the Puritan world view. This meme suggested that all things are naturally deprived, in a state of chaos, and in need of purification. For the Puritans the Reformation had brought the Church under the control of the monarchy while leaving its religious practices mainly intact, and made religious doctrine subservient to politics [29]. They argued for a restructuring and purification of church practice through biblical supremacy and a belief in the priesthood of all believers. That is to say that religious and moral authority is grounded solely in Scripture, and that God is equally accessible to all individuals. Individualism is therefore implicit as they had established the individual as the rightful interpreter of the Bible independent of an inherited

social and cultural order. Reductionism is a by-product of their beliefs as they reduced and pared away the ceremonies and creeds of the Church to its barest essentials, with emphasis on clear and simple ideas and forms of ritual life [30]. Often called dissenters, they were barred from professions that required religious conformity and this forced them to become active in new industries. They dominated the import/export business and were enthusiastic to colonize America.

The depravity meme drives behaviour such as the crisis sermon or jeremiad, which are bitter laments of the state of society and its morals with prophecy of its impending downfall [31]. Baxter [32–34], one of histories memorable and influential Puritan preachers, objected to relaxation, idleness, and distractions (possessions) to the pursuit of a righteous and meaningful life. Work is regarded as so important that people should consider that life has no purpose or meaning without work. The result of an industrious lifestyle was a community that was wealthy and industrious. These proto-capitalists saw their wealth as a gift from God and they stamped out anything that might interfere with their way. Non believers were considered to be in error and were not to be tolerated.

Puritans did not talk of the accumulation of personal wealth, per se, until Adam Smith [35] justified it as part of the natural and divine plan for mankind. This justification took the form of a meme called natural liberty.

### 5.4. Natural liberty

Smith [35] is often thought of as the forefather of capitalist thinking though he never used the term capitalism, preferring to describe it as an economic system of natural liberty. He suggests that even though human nature is self serving, as long as every individual seeks the fulfilment of their own self interests the material needs of the whole society are usually met. Further, for society to benefit there must be no monopolies so competition can operate freely, creating a tendency to keep prices of products in line with consumers' needs.

It is important to note that the term 'natural' has significant meaning for Smith. This meaning is best illustrated by considering his 'invisible hand' meme on which he constructed his political economy, sanctioning self-interested behaviour in an attempt to reconcile the dissonance of how a society of selfish individuals could be created by a beneficent God.

### 5.5. Invisible hand

Smith's [35] invisible hand meme is a metaphor for the apparent guided behaviour of self-interested individuals to promote an end that benefits the whole of society that was not a part of his/her original selfish intention. Smith's philosophical argument was inherently theological, providential, and deterministic, and endeavoured to reconcile the two conflicting human propensities that

selfish individuals build virtuous societies. He justified the complexity of self-serving human characteristics as a mechanism used by the Deity to unfold a divine plan that is not now, nor can ever be, apparent to humans. Today the invisible hand meme continues to provide a resolve to the dissonance between selfish and virtuous behaviour, and continues to spread through mainstream university economics textbooks with no mention that the hand is that of the Deity [36,37]. However, carriers of the meme are implicitly justified to feel that their selfish behaviour can in the long term be virtuous. During his time Smith established a new liberalism, in which the social organisation is seen as the product of human action but not necessarily of human design.

As well as being figuratively responsible for the natural liberty and invisible hand memes, Smith [35] also described the division of labour, a meme with significant influence on the spirit of PM.

### 5.6. *Division of labour*

The division of labour meme can be characterized as a scientific approach to management. A possible mutation of it is the efficiency meme which was heavily drawn on by the scientific management movement of the early part of the 20th century, and still has relevance for many managers today [38]. A version of the efficiency meme could be Gulick's [39] POSDCORB (planning, organizing, staffing, directing, coordinating, reporting, and budgeting) meme that adhered to Fayol's [40] tenets or principles of organisation and management (forecast and plan – prevoyance, organise, command, co-ordinate, control), and Taylor's [41] framework for organisation (clear delineation of authority, responsibility, separation of planning from operations, incentive schemes for workers, management by exception and task based specialisation). All these examples are strong precursors for the PM we recognise today.

Smith [35] however, did fear that the division of labour would de-skill society, proposing the solution of government investment in public education. Taylor [41] further believed that society would be greatly enhanced by improving the efficiency of production through a scientific approach to management.

## 6. Scientific management

The scientific revolution (a prelude to the wider Enlightenment movement) refers to the historical changes in thought and belief that unfolded in Europe somewhere between 1550 and 1700 AD. Its beginning is marked by Nicholas Copernicus (1473–1543), who asserted a heliocentric (sun-centred) cosmos; and it ends with Isaac Newton (1642–1727), who proposed universal laws and a mechanical universe [42].

It was Descartes, a significant influence on Newton, who argued that God had created the universe (including animal life but not humans) as a perfect clockwork mechanism

that functioned deterministically thereafter without intervention [43]. However, it was Newton who marked the shift from a closed, finite, hierarchical, qualitative cosmos to an infinite, homogeneous, quantitative universe. In short, Newton's meme was the universal law that all things are one; one matter, one space, one time, and one set of laws.

The meme of a clockwork universe in which big problems can be broken down into smaller ones, analysed, and solved by rational deduction, has strongly influenced science, engineering, medicine, and organisational leadership. Conventional management thinking assumes that work and organisations can be thoroughly planned, broken down into units, and optimised [44]. As with Adam Smith and Descartes, Newton's new science of post-Restoration England was consciously religious in inspiration and implication. Newton believed that the discovery through experiment of certain immutable laws governing the physical world was proof positive of a divine omniscience and will [45].

The industrial revolution hailed new challenges in management and organisation, and new methods for dealing with these issues were needed. Taylor [41], a man whose passion for constant improvement was heavily influenced by his Quaker roots [46], employed the scientific method to systematically analyse human behaviour at work, and began to create a science of management. His scientific management model for complex organisations was based on the idea of a machine where individual people are the equivalent of machine parts, both being interchangeable and cheap. The task-oriented optimization of work or Taylorism meme influenced the breaking down of work to its smallest task or unit to figure out the universal law or 'one best way' to do each job. Taylorism spread successfully because productivity using its methods went up dramatically.

Taylor's [41] meme of scientific management and Gulick's [39] meme of administrative management are the foundations of classical organisational theory that underpin innumerable companies and bureaucracies today. The Gilbreths [47] built on the scientific management meme by using human motion studies to simplify work. They improved efficiency by categorizing and eliminating unnecessary or repetitive motions. Henry Gantt [48] (known for the Gantt chart), an associate and protégé of Taylor, contributed the pay-for-performance meme. This was where workers are rewarded for achieving higher levels of productivity, and not punished if they didn't; and where all workers are trained and their managers rewarded for training them.

A significant memetic influence of the Puritan depravity meme and the Newtonian mechanical philosophy on Taylorism brings about the meme of managerialism. This states that people need to be managed and there is one universal true way of doing so. Its central doctrine is that all things, particularly organisations, can be optimised by the application of generic management skills and theory. In short, it is the pursuit of efficiency. It consists of four components: efficiency as the primary value guiding managers' actions

and decisions; faith in the tools and techniques of management; a class consciousness among managers; and a view of managers as moral agents.

To summarize, memes provide the backdrop to our religiosity and construct the illusion that we are a special species, more awake to the world than others, with the ability to discover our predestined purpose. Memes drive us to solve social puzzles and appropriate meaning where there is none. They also influenced the Protestant and subsequent Puritan ideology, the central memes of which were depravity, doctrinal supremacy, and the PWE (Fig. 1). Consequentially this led to a conservatism and fundamentalism, where knowledge is considered to come from one traditional source, and where the interpretation of that source is literal. The Puritans reduced their ceremonies and creeds to bare essentials, and established the individual as the interpreter of the Bible, which led to a strong sense of individualism. Combining this with effects of the PWE meme produced an industrious and wealthy community that practiced a ridged economy.

Newtonianism marks the era of scientific enquiry. Newton's science was formed around the themes or memes of natural philosophy, where nature results from the mechanical interactions of particles; and the Hermetic tradition, where nature results from alchemical and magical concepts. Newton pioneered the scientific method which was a revolutionary meme for investigation, and by its application he formulated universal laws of nature.

Liberalism marks the era from where the reformed teachings of Protestantism would ignite a work ethic that would drive the economic traits of capitalism. Adam Smith was but one who provided the meme, the intellectual rationale, for a natural liberty that was invisible and divine by design, and further endorsed liberalism with the division of labour.

Taylorism marked the era of efficiency. Taylor embraced liberalism and applied Newtonian science to the corporation. From then on work was to be systemized, efficiency glorified, and the managerialism meme would complete the foundation for the spirit of PM.

I suggest the spirit of PM emerged from the unification of four significant memes that were influenced by Puritanism, namely; doctrinal supremacy, PWE, scientific management, and managerialism. Doctrinal supremacy places various PM BoKs around the world as sources of authority for project activity. This drives behaviour that conserves and restricts the evolution of the BoK, enforces conformity, binds practitioners in a form of brotherhood, simplifies the complexity of project work, and fosters literal interpretations of the BoK. The PWE presents work as a virtue. This drives industrious behaviour that is powered by a ridged sense of economy of time, cost, and resources. Scientific management introduces a task orientated and mechanistic approach to management and leads to the projectization of work. Finally, managerialism endorses project managers (persons imbued with the spirit of PM, who show allegiance to the PM profession, and regard effi-

ciency as the primary guide for their actions) as the interpreters of PM doctrine.

## 7. Aspects of PM

I suggest that the spirit of PM influences various aspects of the PM discipline, such as; Evolution, Study and Practice, Project Manager, Project Team, Profession, Knowledge Creation, Project Organisations, and consequentially impacts upon them in significant ways.

### 7.1. Evolution

A doctrinal supremacy amongst PM practitioners leads to a conservatism that supports the traditional work values of a Western capitalist society. The PM doctrine seeks not only to conserve these values, but reinstate others such as mission, vision, and purpose. Through its language it simplifies the world, dichotomizing thinking and branding behaviour; success or failure, efficient or inefficient, on time or late, manager or team. PM will portray itself as progressive, but any advances will be only small incremental 'safe' changes, whilst most of its practices are conserved. PM is well adapted to the business landscape. Any major changes would jeopardize its survival. However, there is always the possibility of breakaway denominations forming with their own peculiar fundamentalist interpretation of the PM doctrine. The emergence of P2M in Japan is an example of this.

### 7.2. Study and practice

The Project Management Institute's (PMI) member code of ethics states "it is vital that PMI members conduct their work in an ethical manner in order to earn and maintain the confidence of team members, colleagues, employees, employers, customers/clients, the public, and the global community" [49]. This conceptualises the spirit of PM in terms of a work ethic where the trust of others has to be earned. Further, the pledge is founded on the principles of the pursuit of excellence in ones work. Moreover, it highlights a member's obligations to their behaviour, one of which states that a member should conduct their activities in a manner that "will maintain appropriate, accurate, and complete records with respect to such research and professional activities". Puritans often preached sermons on themes such as care about detail in work, the need for absolute trustworthiness and reliability, and honesty in fulfilling contracts or agreements.

These PWE behaviours will continue to be designed into the teachings of PM training courses that are sanctioned by PM professional bodies. Further, the practice of such behaviours will be measured and rewarded by the certification of competency standard which are already being extensively used [50].

An example of this is the Australian Government's Defence Material Organisation (DMO) where large

numbers of project directors and project managers are obliged to become members of the Australian Institute of Project Managers (AIPM). Also, there is a mandatory requirement for the competence of all DMO project directors and managers to be measured against the DMO's Program Managers Certification Framework which includes and goes beyond that of the AIPM's Registered PM (RegPM) Certification Program. The US Department of Defence (DoD) has likewise developed its own extension to the PMBOK® Guide [51]. In the case of the DMO it is likely that there will be a future mandatory requirement for all subcontractor organisations to impose similar requirements on their project staff.

The practice of PM and the implementation of projects is today regarded as significantly important to every level of society [52]. In short, a projectization of civil society has taken place [53], and this causes complex social problems to be redefined into simplistic understandings and reductive terms [54]. Consequentially this fractionalizes problems and ignores complex interdependent behaviours. Projectism is a form of Newtonian universalism, a clock-work approach to getting things done. And in some settings it is proving to be a problem rather than a universal solution [54,55].

### 7.3. Project manager

Much of a project manager's behaviour is driven by the managerialism meme. It presents him/her as an advocate for the spirit of PM in the sense that they will oppose to their corporate culture, and society in general, a set of work ethics that are purported to be the very foundation of good organisational practices and a foundation for building a productive and compassionate organisation. In this way project managers will become more or less the guardians of managerial normality, keepers of the PM faith, which further validates the assumptions of managerialism.

Managerialism will ultimately transport PM to the executive level. Schuler [56] characterizes the effect of managerialism by the shift in function of Human Resource (HR). Traditionally HR functioned as an employee advocate, under managerialism it has become a core member of the management team requiring HR professionals to be concerned with the bottom line, profits, and organisational effectiveness [57]. HR issues are therefore addressed as business issues, and this is how HR managers have secured a place for themselves on the management team. Project managers are likewise making themselves indispensable [58]. They will strive to become core members of the management team and finally achieve a promotional pathway for their profession. With the underpinning structure of the profession institutions and their influence on professional certification and corporate accreditation, the role of the project manager will be institutionalized.

### 7.4. Project team

The project team can be likened to that of the PM laity in that they conform and accept its doctrinal supremacy by participate in and accept the teachings of, the rites, rituals, and life of the PM belief system, but are not able to administer the faith and proclaim PM as a certified project manager would.

The team meme implies more than just cooperative effort. It suggests a common identity, comradery, a brotherhood of mutual respect and ethical behaviour where members continue to unite in the struggle of conflicting management opinions. Project events too will be reinterpreted in light of this struggle, in a jeremiad manner, suggesting that team members still have a long way to go to master the PM doctrines.

Ethical behaviour is considered by employers to contribute to the bottom line [59]. Consequentially, employers try to hire ethical people because those with strong moral and religious values are less likely to behave opportunistically and will be more productive [59]. Project workers therefore promote themselves as having such attributes.

### 7.5. Profession

Those of the Victorian era embraced agnosticism and atheism and were anxious to maintain Christian morality without Christian belief. They were however unsuccessful at maintaining that social capital. There was a public ideology that posed the question 'what are we all here for?' and believed that the answer was to achieve our best selves. This ideology continues to underpin how we organise society today with structures such as professional bodies, sporting associations, political groups, bowling leagues and gardening clubs, all rich in ritual, thereby affirming the place and relationship each individual has in the brotherhood with one another [60]. With the demise of religion and the disappearance of large manufacturing environments that once enforced a work ethic, project workers will be implicitly united by their BoK in a brotherhood of practitioners, and provided with guidelines for their behaviour.

The PWE assumes that people will work hard putting the needs of their organisation before their own. I suggest that a PM professional body will create a state of affairs that will cause conflicting allegiances. If a project is to be considered a temporary organisation within an organisation, and PM is to be acknowledged as a virtuous profession, does a practitioner owe their allegiance to the project, the organisation, or their profession? I propose the profession will win as projects and the business of corporations becomes transitory. Peters [26] used the word "cadre" when referring to project managers. It is worth noting this is a term used to describe the inspired founders of political cults [61]. A PM professional body may foster cult like traits, as there is an ideological conviction of PM that strives toward perfection; the one best way to manage resources, to schedule, to build teams, etc. Such

professional bodies have membership ranks which are awarded for allegiance to, and competency of, the PM doctrines. Authority figures tell those who are vulnerable what to do, and those who follow through the proposed action find that each small step makes it easier to take the next step [61]. Conformity is a premium, dissent is penalized.

### 7.6. Knowledge creation

Current and future members of the PM profession may feel that they are in receipt of special knowledge from a traditional source (e.g. PMBOK® Guide) in the same way that the Puritans consider their writings to be factually accurate, and thus inerrant. I suggest this will lead the PM profession to a type of religious conservatism, where the evolution of traditions and knowledge is restricted. Those organisations who have invested time and money in gaining PM accreditation will surely not welcome a radical overhaul of the criteria.

Doctrinal supremacy leads to knowledge creation that is constrained by conservative reductionism. Our traditional approach to knowledge building in PM is constructivist which considers the individual as an active agent or constructor of knowledge, creating a reality from the sensory input of their experiences. This sense or meaning-making perspective highlights the complex socio-psychological processes through which individuals in an organisation interpret and misinterpret phenomena and thus socially construct or enact their ‘realities’ [62,63]. Unavoidably over time, the individuals’ stories become distorted and simplified (using reductive mechanical or ecological metaphors and anecdotes centred around the language of the PMBOK® Guide) due to cognitive or political reasons [64].

### 7.7. Project organisations

The project organisation is one in which the project is the primary unit or business mechanism for coordinating and integrating all the main business functions of the organisation [65]. Such embodiment of PM ideology is a form of fundamentalism.

AAPT is an example of this. As one of Australia’s three largest telecommunications and internet carriers it has invested heavily in PM [66]. AAPT with the assistance of the AIPM have restructured their organisation in the form of a PM business unit (PMBU) [67]. The spirit of PM is noticeable in their organisational philosophy; “we not only achieved our goal of PMO Level 5 but exceeded our timeframe in doing so in just 6 months”, “we have achieved our goals faster and more thoroughly, thereby benefiting our customers earlier than planned, an achievement which has not gone unrecognised” [67]. It is clear that speed and apparent efficiency is rewarded, but not so clear what benefits were realized for the customer.

AAPT have committed time to learning PM techniques and using the process, while senior management have spent organisational money on the implementation of Micro-

soft’s PM software, in turn putting their professional credibility on the line. AAPT project managers and senior management would suffer a dissonance if they concluded that PM was a waste of time and money. People work to reduce the dissonance between incompatibles [68,69], and one way to reduce the dissonance is for all concerned to have faith in the PM doctrine.

## 8. Concluding remarks

In this paper I have argued that by observing the behaviour of PM practitioners, their organisations and professional associations, a strong case can be made that PM behaviours are being driven by significant memes that are either directly Puritan or have evolved from Puritanism. Further, that consequentially the impact of such memes on the discipline of PM, particularly its practitioners, is considerable.

Of most concern is the canonisation of the PM BoKs. As a PM practitioner I harbour the hope that scholars and practitioners are evolving the discipline in a free and unconstrained manner, the result of which I further hope will help me personally in my work. My argument suggests this is not the case, and that the framework and content of the various BoKs has been locked down. I suggest that a significant amount of PM journal papers and text books reinforce the spirit of PM, reinterpret past BoKs in a new light (e.g. PMBOK® Guide Third Edition), or highlight “ways to cope” with the project environment. Through no fault of their own, scholars and practitioners alike are being driven by powerful memes that not only drive their behaviour but create the very fabric of their society. We owe it to ourselves to break free of the tyranny of these Puritan memes. But first, we must acknowledge that our past and present actions have been determined by them.

## Acknowledgements

I thank the anonymous referees for their valuable and constructive comments on previous versions of this paper.

## References

- [1] Packendorff J. Inquiring into the temporary organisation: new directions for project management research. *Scand J Manage* 1995;11(4):319–33.
- [2] Cleland DI, Ireland LR. *Project management: strategic design and implementation*. 4th ed. McGraw-Hill Professional; 2002.
- [3] Kloppenborg TJ, Opfer WA. Forty years of project management research: trends, interpretations, and predictions. In: Slevin DP, Cleland DI, Pinto JK, editors. *The Frontiers of Project Management Research*. Project Management Institute, Inc; 2002. p. 3–29.
- [4] Whitty SJ. A memetic paradigm of project management. *Int J Project Manage* 2005;23(8):575–83.
- [5] Dawkins R. *The selfish gene*. Oxford: Oxford university press; 1989.
- [6] Gladwell M. *The tipping point: how little things can make a big difference*. New York: Little, Brown and Company; 2000.

- [7] Rappaport RA. *Ritual and religion in the making of humanity*. Cambridge University Press; 1999.
- [8] Taylor PW. The ethics of respect for nature. In: Sample RJ, Mills CW, Sterba P, editors. *Philosophy: the big questions*. Blackwell Publishing; 2003.
- [9] Tucker WH. *The science and politics of racial research*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press; 1994.
- [10] Numbers RL, Stenhouse J. *Disseminating Darwinism: the role of place, race, religion, and gender*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1999.
- [11] Dawkins R. *A devil's Chaplain: selected essays*. London: Phoenix; 2003.
- [12] Brockner J et al. Layoffs, equity theory, and work performance: further evidence of the impact of survivor guilt. *Acad Manage J* 1986;29(2):344–73.
- [13] Blackmore S. *The meme machine*. Oxford University Press; 2000.
- [14] Dawkins R. *Climbing mount improbable*. London: Viking; 1996.
- [15] Dennett DC. *Freedom evolves*. New York: Viking; 2003.
- [16] Bernstein P. *Against the Gods: the remarkable story of risk*. New York: John Wiley & Sons; 1996.
- [17] Suddendorf T, Corballis MC. Mental time travel and the evolution of the human mind. *Genet Soc Gen Psychol Monogr* 1997;123(2): 133–67.
- [18] Moran D. *The best guide to eastern philosophy and religion*. St. Martin's Griffin; 2001.
- [19] Abi-Hashem N. Psychology, time, and culture. *Am Psychol* 2000; 55(3):342–3.
- [20] Crainer S. One hundred years of management. *Bus Strategy Rev* 2003;14(2):41–9.
- [21] Geißler KA. A culture of temporal diversity. *Time Soc* 2002;11(1): 131–40.
- [22] Dinsmore PC. *Winning in business with enterprise project management*. American Management Association; 1998.
- [23] Shenhar AJ. Strategic project leadership: leading projects for business success. In: PMI global congress, Europe; 2003.
- [24] Henrie M, Sousa-Poza A. Project management: a cultural literary review. *Project Manage J* 2005;36(2):5–14.
- [25] Kerzner H. *Project management: a systems approach to planning, scheduling and controlling*. 2nd ed. USA: van Nostrand Reinhold; 1998.
- [26] Peters T. *Pursuing the Perfect Project Manager*; 1991. Available from: [http://tompeters.com/col\\_entries.php?note=005297](http://tompeters.com/col_entries.php?note=005297).
- [27] Weber M. *The protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*. Los Angeles: Roxbury Publishing Company; 2002.
- [28] Luther M. 95 Theses: with the pertinent documents from the history of the reformation. In: Aland K, editor. *Concordia Publishing House*: Saint Louis; 1967.
- [29] Gill C. *Mayflower remembered: a history of the Plymouth pilgrims*. New York: Taplinger Publishing; 1970.
- [30] Albanese CL. *America: religions and religion*. 3rd ed. Wadsworth Publishing; 1998.
- [31] McKnight D. Schooling, the Puritan imperative, and the molding of an American National Identity: Education's "errand into the wilderness". In: Pinar W, editor. *What is curriculum theory? (Studies in curriculum theory)*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Association; 2004.
- [32] Baxter R. 1615–1691, *The reformed pastor; 1656*. 2nd ed. Epworth Press: London; 1950.
- [33] Baxter R. 1615–1691, *The saints' everlasting rest*. In: Fawcett B, editor. *Edinburgh: Waugh & Innes*; 1833.
- [34] Baxter R. 1615–1691, *Christian directory*. Soli Deo Gloria Ministries; 1997.
- [35] Smith A. *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations*. London, New York: George Routledge and Sons; 1892.
- [36] Viner J. *The role of providence in the social order: an essay in intellectual history*. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society; 1972.
- [37] Hill L. The hidden theology of Adam Smith. *Eur J Econ Thought* 2001;8(1):1–29.
- [38] Fairholm MR. Different perspectives on the practice of leadership. *Public Admin Rev* 2004;64(5):577–90.
- [39] Gulick L. Notes on the theory of organisation. In: Gulick L, Urwick L, editors. *Papers on the science of administration*. New York: Institute of Public Administration; 1937. p. 3–13.
- [40] Fayol H. *General and industrial management*. London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons Ltd; 1949.
- [41] Taylor FW. *The principles of scientific management*. New York, London: Harper & brothers; 1915.
- [42] Ferngren GB, editor. *Science and religion: a historical introduction*. The Johns Hopkins University Press; 2002.
- [43] Bell ET. Gentleman, soldier, and mathematician: descartes. In: *Men of mathematics: the lives and achievements of the great mathematicians from Zeno to Poincaré*. New York: Simon and Schuster; 1986. p. 35–55.
- [44] Morgan G. *Images of organization*. London: Sage Publications Inc; 1997.
- [45] Holmes G. *Science reason and religion in the age of Newton*, Book review of the *Newtonians and the English revolution 1679–1720*, by Margaret C Jacob, Harvester Press; 1976. *Brit J History Sci* 1978; 11: 164–71.
- [46] Kanigel R. *The one best way: Frederick Winslow Taylor and the enigma of efficiency*. Viking Adult; 1997.
- [47] Gilbreth F, Gilbreth L. Applied motion study. In: Spriegel WR, Myers CE, editors. *The writings of the Gilbreths*; 1953, Irwin, R.D.
- [48] Gantt HL. A bonus system for rewarding labour. In: Merrill HF, editor. *Classics in management*. New York: American Management Association; 1960.
- [49] Project Management Institute, *PMI Member Ethical Standards*; 2000. Available from: [http://www.pmi.org/prod/groups/public/documents/info/ap\\_memethstandards.pdf](http://www.pmi.org/prod/groups/public/documents/info/ap_memethstandards.pdf), January 2005.
- [50] Crawford L. Senior management perceptions of project management competence. *Int J Project Manage* 2005;23(1):7–16.
- [51] Bahnmaier WW. DoD Extension of the Program Management BOK; 2003. Available from: [http://acc.dau.mil/simplify/ev.php?ID=17374\\_201](http://acc.dau.mil/simplify/ev.php?ID=17374_201) and [http://acc.dau.mil/simplify/ev.php?ID2=DO\\_TOPIC](http://acc.dau.mil/simplify/ev.php?ID2=DO_TOPIC).
- [52] Lundin RA, Hartman FT, editors. *Projects as business constituents and guiding motives*. Springer; 2000.
- [53] Sampson S. The social life of projects: importing civil society to Albania. In: Hann C, Elizabeth D, editors. *Civil society: challenging western models*. London: Routledge; 1996. p. 121–42.
- [54] Tandler J. Why social policy is condemned to a residual category of safety nets, and what to do about it. In: Mkandawire T, editor. *Social policy in a development context*. Palgrave Macmillan; 2002.
- [55] O'Donovan I. Designing effective management education programmes. *Int J Public Sector Manage* 1995;8(3):39–51.
- [56] Schuler RS. Repositioning the human resource function: transformation or demise? *Acad Manage Exec* 1990;4(5):49–60.
- [57] Huemann M, Turner JR, Keegan AE. Human resource management in the project-oriented organization: questions for future research; 2004. Available from: [http://www.rgc.at/fileadmin/rgc/images/Dokumente/Personnel\\_Mgt\\_in\\_the\\_POC.pdf](http://www.rgc.at/fileadmin/rgc/images/Dokumente/Personnel_Mgt_in_the_POC.pdf).
- [58] Gedansky L. Inspiring the direction of the profession. *Project Manage J* 2002;33(1):4.
- [59] Bowie N. Companies are discovering the value of ethics. In: Rae SB, Wong KL, editors. *Beyond integrity: a Judeo-Christian approach to business ethics*. Zondervan; 2004.
- [60] Putnam RD. *Bowling alone: the collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon and Schuster; 2000.
- [61] Tourish D, Wohlforth T. *On the edge: political cults right and left*. M.E. Sharpe; 2000.
- [62] O'Connell D. Book review: sensemaking in organizations. *Admin Sci Quart* 1998;43(1):205–8.
- [63] Weick KE. *Sensemaking in organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage; 1995.

- [64] Barley SR. Images of imaging: notes on doing longitudinal field work. *Organ Sci* 1990;1(3):220–47.
- [65] Hobday M. The project-based organisation: an ideal form for managing complex products and systems? *Res Policy* 2000;29:871–93.
- [66] Microsoft, Telecom Company Reduces Overhead with Enterprise Project Management Solution; 2005. Available from: <http://www.pcubed.com/Work/AAPT%20EPM%20Case%20Study.pdf>.
- [67] Newton C. Project Managed Organisation or Project Managed Business Unit? An alternate approach; 2005. Available from: [http://www.aipm.com.au/html/aipm\\_conference\\_papers\\_2006.cfm](http://www.aipm.com.au/html/aipm_conference_papers_2006.cfm).
- [68] Cialdini RB. *Influence: the psychology of persuasion*. New York: Morrow; 1994.
- [69] Festinger L. *A theory of cognitive dissonance*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press; 1957.