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Proposal of an Actions and Achievements Organizational Management Methodology (A2OM2) in order to face cultural management improvement goals

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Abstract

Provided the proliferation of methodologies to define the strategic and operational context for an organization this article explores the need of some methodological aspects that are not rigorously covered by the existing tools. Specifically explores the difference between the methodologies focused on the management contents and the ones focused on the improvement of the management culture in order to identify and use the links between both contexts. This exploration found its justification as organizations are finding barriers to relate their methodologies to real proposed achievements, actions and people within the organization. A preliminary model and four methodological principles are identified as the basis in order to generate a common structure facing these barriers.

After a literature research it was found that there are no recognized tools which help to put the methodologies all together to work with results. Aspects of the process of methodology appliance in organizations were identified. Main aspects are related to the lack of common language; fusions between new and existing management methodologies and to certain situation of the organization management culture and those of their individual members. These facts encouraged to generate an integration-focused methodology based on principles to manage organizational actions and achievements as well as to explore the value that can be generated for the organization and for the individuals applying this methodology.

1. The context of an organizational management model

Currently, there are many methodologies and knowledge frameworks to understand management, and consequently for using them to increase the probability of success of endeavors and goals within various kind of organizations (management content methodologies). But even when these methodologies already demonstrated proven success in some cases, organizations are still identifying needs when they try to relate all their methodologies. This might be a reason why when they are applied for real actions and people, usually there are different perceptions of what each methodology should do, either originated on the authors or the appliers. There are no recognized tools which help to put the methodologies all together to work, assuming that each individual management methodology has been evaluated as coherent with the organization.

Therefore, the need to have a methodology to understand many methodologies with a common management language (management culture improvement methodologies) has been identified, and the principles of relation between actions and achievements has demonstrated flexibility and effectiveness in both theory and practice, improving the ability to get the most of the content methodologies. In this paper, these principles are explained and the framework is understood.

Specifically when organizations try to practice how to improve their management practices, they often discover the need to climb from the current management system to a more integral management system, then they try to find structured methodologies for this more integral management, without knowing the difference between the management content methodologies and the management culture improvement methodologies.

Among others, some of the concepts this paper is built on, it is the culture concept. According to Rolstadås (2008), "the development of a quality conscious organizational culture is a responsibility both for the base organization and the project organization" This shows the importance of linking efforts and tools done by the project team with the entire organization.

While organizations define their direction or strategies there is the need to relate the strategic environment with the operational environment. The later understood as the specific project results. Machicao, T (2009) summarizes that critical success factors in order to achieve alignment between project's results and strategies are:

- (a) the formulation of corporate strategy or shaping the future of the base organization; -corporate strategy created as a means of thinking through and articulating how an organization's corporate goals and objective will be pursued and achieved (Morris, 2005)
- (b) the definition of success to the stakeholders –under the perspective of delivering value more than just activities;

(c) the implementation of corporate strategy through defined project strategies.

The importance on how these elements interact during the front-end phase is definitely critical for success and all the organizations studied have focus primarily on them.

Benko and McFarlan (2003) point out that organizations are under increasing pressure to perform better and create more value. The alignment approach presented by those authors state that it enhances (1) shareholder value, (2) better meet corporate objectives, (3) increases efficiency, (4) reduces risks, and (5) provides options to face uncertain future. They think alignment is about building organizational capacity to respond effectively to whatever future.

Normally, in the organizational environment, many operational tools are used, but we want to highlight the use of methodologies as a concept that gives freedom and can be adapted. Not just using it as following a recipe.

Mainly, organizations without a high level of management maturity choose a management methodology available in the market because they often find that either their strategic achievements are not those planned, or having strategic and operational achievements defined (and even sometimes having actual operational achievements), the alignment between both is not clear and sometimes difficult to understand. Farther more, organizations expect from the methodologies to solve complex organizational problems (drafted in Table 2) only installing the methodologies upon the process flow. Surprisingly, many organizations are disappointed with these methodologies.

Therefore, two hypotheses were raised in this work:

- The first one is that in many cases, this disappointment is not because these available methodologies are not useful for those problems, but because of the management culture barriers.
- The second one is that A2OM2 can be useful to face this step of methodology implementation.

Some practical parameters that usually used to measure how the organization is applying some methodologies are:

- (a) The level of management maturity
- (b) The level of usage of management models or methodologies (for both strategic and operational context)
- (c) The level of personnel acceptance towards methodologies

In the following table, the analysis of the 2 described hypotheses is done for these parameters.

Table 1: Potential positive impacts mapping using A2OM2

POTENTIAL POSITIVE IMPACTS MAPPING, USING A2OM2			
	Level of management maturity	Level of usage of management models or methodologies	Level of personnel acceptance towards methodologies
Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Basic definitions of the A2C are improved and clarified for the whole organization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A simple language is available to define and communicate A2C 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The access of all kind of organization's actors to the management concepts and contents is improved
High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Basic well structured definitions are easily communicated to the whole organization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A simple language is used to improve the benefit communication of the available methodologies to the whole organization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personnel who already accepted the management methodology and is using it, find A2OM2 to improve the creativity and the ability to explain and transfer new improvement for the whole organization

2. The principles of Actions/Achievements Organizational Management

The relation between actions and achievements have called the attention of the management culture, specifically when the rule about the triple constraint begun to be discussed and innovated. During the 80s, most of the models dealing with strategic or operational management suggested to define success as the completion of endeavors under budget and on schedule, obtaining the planned scope. Some of the models begun to criticize the limitations of the constraint: first, proposing the quality as an additional parameter of success, and more recently, trying to define the stronger link between operational and strategic management.

Currently, the latest versions of the accepted standards related to project management and organizational project management, stress a bit more on the concept of getting a deliverable done, rather that only finish an activity, or also on define the milestone before the phase, even when the formal definitions still mix both concepts. Even though, the standards still need a better understanding of the importance of defining a more accurate difference between action and achievement and all the benefits derived of using this concept to build management systems.

The Action/Achievement distinction principle

For this context, an action can be defined as an endeavor of any level of importance or any extension that involves effort from a person or a group of people. An achievement is any description of a successful concluded situation. One of the cornerstones of A2OM2 is the difference between these two concepts. Actions should be understood as the way to get achievements. This principle is generated to explain why the dissociation between action and achievement causes trouble in management systems. If an achievement is confused with an action then any suitable technique can be used to manage it, because all management techniques are conceived either for an action or for an achievement. If one or many actions are used to describe an achievement, then the achievement is not verifiable neither controllable.

The Action/Achievement mutual alignment principle (Definition of the Action/Achievement Couple (A2C) as a molecular concept)

Once the action/achievement distinction principle is understood, additionally it is necessary to affirm that every action leads to only one achievement and every achievement is consequence of only one action. If multiple actions are identified associated with one achievement, it probably means that only one action is defined as the action which leads to the correspondent achievement and the other actions are either in other level of effort or not actually related to the achievement. A common mistake is to define an action without defining the correspondent achievement, which causes disorientation and lack of criteria to decide how much volume of resources to use or which resources to use, understanding that two very similar actions can use different kind and amount of resources depending on what the scope of this action is. Another common mistake is to define an achievement without an action, which causes the impossibility of concretion of the achievement.

The Action/Achievement Couple (A2C) aggregation principle

Once the Action/Achievement Couple (A2C) is defined as the minimal unit of management definitions, the feasibility of aggregate many A2C from one level to conform a A2C of a superior level is analyzed. The current management models and standards are making clearer that some concepts need alignment. The concept of alignment is very important because it is very connected to the direct practice point of view. It is usually the need of coherence of something very practical which is being done, the fact that raises the need of alignment with the strategy. Or if at a higher level there are organizational policies being developed, these policies and their impacts need alignment with the organizational vision. Thus, a practical method of alignment is proposed, in order to start the alignment process.

The proposal is to start the process always organizing couples of actions and achievements (A2C) in a way in which a superior couple defines a superior action

gathering all the actions from the inferior couples, and also the superior couple defines a superior achievement in such a way that all inferior achievements (defined in the inferior couples) are contained in the superior achievement. This principle can be applied in any level of the organization, but analyzing all necessary levels according to the maturity of definition of achievements that the organization possesses. The method of aggregation is not covered here, but the most typical ones are: (i) the matrix-style one, in which many higher achievements are related may to lower achievements through a matrix of assignment of links between each lower achievement and all higher achievements, or (ii) the brand-style one, in which groups of lower achievements are related to only one higher achievement. Both definitions assume that always, all achievements are coupled with its correspondent action.

The multiple context Action/Achievement alignment principle

Once complex aggregative structures of action/achievement couples (A2C) and the way in which they can improve the accuracy of the definition of the organizational management structure, are understood, a better way to understand how this capacity of structure definition can help to generate value to the organization is proposed.

As a general structure, two main organizational contexts are defined: (i) the strategic context, (ii) the operational context. Within the strategic context, all strategic A2C are included (mission and vision, policies and impacts, strategies and strategic objectives). Within the operational context, all operational A2C are included, but classified by three kind of couples: (i) the actual continuous operational A2C, (ii) the necessary temporary operational A2C and (iii) the ideal continuous operational A2C.

Table 2: Action/Achievement couples alignment structure definition

Multi-level A2C alignment structure		
Strategic context		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mission > Vision • Policies > Impacts • Organizational Strategies > Strategic Objectives 		
Operational context		
Actual Continuous Operational A2C	Necessary Temporary Operational A2C	Ideal Continuous Operational A2C
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actual Processes > Process Results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portfolios > Institutional goals • Programs > Objectives • Projects > Scopes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideal Processes > Process Results

This structure should work as follows:

- (a) The first concept defined for the organization is the set of strategic A2C, which defines hierarchically different levels of strategic achievements

explaining what large term results the organization needs to reach (this includes well known concepts as strategic management).

- (b) Then the actual continuous operational couples are defined guaranteeing that the operational achievements are linked to the immediate higher level of achievement defined within the strategic context (this includes well known concepts such as process design and process alignment, or process result indicators design).

Many organizations stop at this point. These organizations conceive that a single operational definition is enough to achieve the strategic results. From the practice, when the organization realizes that the strategic achievements are not being reached (or many times when they change so frequently without any pattern), a typical reaction is to create projects or initiatives. Some other organizations prefer to conceive first new processes (ideal processes) that represent how the organization would like to work operationally, even without changing the strategic definitions.

The way in which the A2OM2 methodology suggests to continue is as follows:

- (c) Conceive and define the ideal continuous operational A2C, including for instance ideal processes (with their correspondent process results) in order to have a clear reference to identify to which status the current processes should be shifted.
- (d) Finally define the necessary temporary operational A2C, which includes all portfolios, programs and projects with their correspondent achievements (and even all couples below the project/scope couple).

3. The Actions and Achievements Organizational Management Model (A2OM2): Theory and Practice

A2OM2 is conceived as a practice-oriented tool in order to make optimum usage of theory. The following analysis shows a synthesis of the barriers of the management practice in the organizations that are to be faced by this methodology. Then, the methodological principles put to work together, followed by the management tools and finally the potential benefits.

Common barriers

What is stopping the current methodologies to be successful? The main barriers are classified by organizational context. Within the strategic context, usually the strategic definitions use a complex or not accessible language which is seldom related to the construction of operational definitions. This fact usually generates the

isolation of the strategic decisions, and obviously this generates the isolation of strategy decision makers from the operational decisions. This distance is beginning to be understood as management culture improvement challenges.

Table 3: Main barriers face by most of current methodologies

Main barriers classified by organizational management context		
Strategic context		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complex (non accessible) language to define vision and mission • Isolation of strategic decisions from operational decisions 		
Operational context		
Actual Continuous Operational A2C	Necessary Temporary Operational A2C	Ideal Continuous Operational A2C
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing processes without clear operational parameters • Existing processes without a related achievement • Existing processes unrelated to strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project defined as a capsule isolated from the organization • Project unrelated to ideal processes (even sometimes unrelated to real processes as well) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No ideal processes conceived • Ideal processes with no proposal about the achievement improvement • Ideal processes without estimated resources • Ideal processes unrelated to strategic context • Limited capacity of cost/benefit estimation

Regarding the continuous actual operational context, if the organization has a very low management maturity, usually the processes are not defined and most commonly, the achievements of the processes are not defined. Some organizations still conceive a process with operational indicators but without the necessity of defining an achievement indicator. If the organization is a step more mature, sometimes even having operational achievements related to processes, the barrier is not to have them linked adequately to the strategy. These barriers become even more common for ideal continuous operational definitions. The worst condition about this aspect is not having an ideal process defined, but even when it is defined, any improvement of the achievement is defined compared to the one defined in the actual process. Also, a weak link with the strategy can be a problem. But probably the most common barrier detected is the poor ability to identify a benefit/cost rate over the actual process.

Finally, when the uncertainty about the actual and ideal continuous operation definitions is high, the concept of the temporary initiatives (mostly projects, and sometimes programs and portfolios) becomes unclear. Many projects are usually defined as static endeavors, sometimes isolated from the organization or linked only through a complex relation to a strategic objective, concepts already criticized by recent literature.

A2OM2 theory principles working together

How the model is supposed to work? The proposal of A2OM2 methodology is based on the project definition, but not restricted to project definition. Specifically about project definition, getting the most of the standard definition of the project (Project Management Institute, 2008), a project should be also defined being clear about its organizational identity, and about the dynamic nature.

- (a) The project is a bridge of improvement, guaranteeing the transit from the one or some actual process to one or some viable ideal processes, both with their correspondent achievements also defined.
- (b) The project is also a dynamic endeavor. This means that being soundly related to the organization's processes improvement, it does not need to restrict its definition of success to finish on time and under budget, but mainly accomplishing the highest rate of benefit/cost all the time. Obviously, in practice, this fact will have an impact explained later.

Given a clear understanding of a project firmly related to the organization as the bridge between the actual and ideal operational definitions, and able to be dynamic under clear change parameters, the whole organization is benefited by a clear definition of a A2C structure, as follows: the transit of the actual (perfectible) processes all the way to the ideal processes is able to be standardized, with clear methodologies based on the definition of clear A2C. This transit becomes a fluid and creative process for the organization, harnessed by clear strategic definitions that are again better understood through the definition of A2C. This way, the same language is used to define both strategic and operational couples.

Table 4: Comparison between organizational management common barriers and contribution of A2OM2 model

POTENTIAL WITH A2OM2 TOOLS		
Strategic Action/Achievement Couples (A2C)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vision clearly defined as an achievement, and structurally related to mission • Tools available to define vision in a more structured fashion • Defined cost/benefit analysis for process improvements 		
Permanent Actual Operation A2C	Temporary Operational A2C	Permanent Ideal Operational A2C
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing processes with defined performance indicators • Potential changes identified 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project clearly defined as a bridge of process improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideal processes defined • Ideal processes with estimated resources defined

An additional organizational ability earned is the potential to know the benefit/cost

rate of any level of actions and achievements.

Conclusions

The current tools of general management are diverse and prolific, but many times the organizations, even when they are supplied with solid human resources and the correct decisions, find difficult to apply practically these tools, because there is a lack of common language to make fusions between new and existing management methodologies and between different management products. Research shows that even when the field of definition of solution concepts is widely explored, the tools to put all together are not yet clear enough to affirm that a standard process exist in order to implement management tools.

This fact encouraged to generate a management-language-focused methodology called Actions and Achievements Organizational Management Methodology (A2OM2), which based on four methodological principles: (i) the Action/Achievement distinction principle, (ii) the Action/Achievement mutual alignment principle, (iii) the Action/Achievement Couple (A2C) aggregation principle and, (iv) the multiple context Action/Achievement alignment principle, proposes a simplified and easily standardized way to communicate organizational management concepts and contents usable by organizations with low or high level of management maturity, usage of management models or methodologies or, personnel acceptance towards methodologies.

In this work, the appliance of A2OM2 methodology is then evaluated versus all defined parameters and a set of conclusions is evaluated in order to map what can be called the management culture improvement impact, using A2OM2. Thus, an easy way to estimate the value of management culture improvement methodologies can be differentiated from the value of management content and direct management tools usage. Finally, A2OM2 demonstrates that its four principles and the model defined helps to improve the ability of the organizations to success reaching achievements using available methodologies, but covering still usually uncovered aspects of the cultural aspects of its management.

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