



EPSRC Network 2004-2006

Rethinking Project Management

Final Report

May 2006

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1. Rethinking Project Management (EPSRC Network 2004-2006)

Rethinking Project Management is a UK Government-funded research network¹ that held its first meeting in March 2004 and its last meeting in January 2006. Its primary aim has been to develop a research agenda aimed at extending and enriching mainstream project management ideas in relation to the developing practice. Following a two-year research programme, an agenda has emerged in the form of five directions for future research, which is scheduled to be published in a special issue of the *International Journal of Project Management* later this year. A separate report for practitioners is also being prepared and a series of seminars is planned for different industry groups. Appendix A contains the rationale behind the Network and further information can be found at www.rethinkingpm.org.uk.

2. Purpose of this Report

The main aim of this report is to present the primary output of the research programme, namely a framework of five directions for future research and potential research topics for further development. These directions, together with other ideas for future research, are discussed in detail in a forthcoming special issue of the *International Journal of Project Management*, with the intended audience being not only the PM research community, but also researchers in other management areas for whom the Network's findings might be of interest. This report also summarises: (i) the methodology used to guide the research programme, and, (ii) the results of an evaluation of the Network carried out at the final meeting. With regard to the more immediate implications of this research programme, a separate report is being prepared for practitioners which will be available later in the year. As EPSRC states, the objective of these networks is not simply to define new research topics, but to also "*facilitate the transfer of knowledge to a broader community*".²

3. Network Philosophy of Approach

To understand what has been produced, it is necessary to understand what the Network has been rethinking and the underlying approach to the rethinking process. It was Keynes who suggested that people who described themselves as practical men, proud to be uncontaminated by any kind of theory, always turned out to be the intellectual prisoners of the theoreticians of yesteryear. Whether we agree or not with Keynes' assertion, it does remind us that all practical activity in any professional field is theory-laden, in the sense that all practical action is based on some theory or knowledge, irrespective of whether the practitioner is aware of the theory guiding their action – see Fig.1. In addition to personal knowledge and experience, practitioners also draw on published knowledge in professional fields – bodies of knowledge and methodologies etc - which are rooted in the accumulated experience of those fields. Against this background, the Network's concept of 'rethinking' has been to research how published knowledge in project management – mainstream theory in Fig.1 – should be enriched and extended with new concepts and approaches to support practitioners working on 21st century projects. To do this, project management theory and practice cannot be separated as *if* they are the concern of two different groups of people, namely 'academics' and 'practitioners'. To develop new concepts and approaches requires **organised interaction** between theory and practice, between academics and practitioners, and it is *this* concept which has been the driving philosophy behind the whole Network programme.

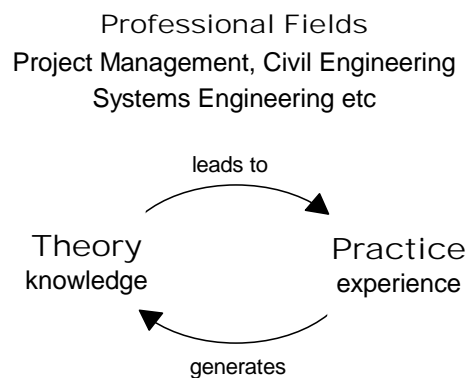


Fig.1

4. Network Participants and Organisations

Details of the Network participants are summarised on the next page.

¹ Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC)

² www.epsrc.ac.uk

- ❖ Academics from fifteen UK universities covering both business and engineering schools, and a number of overseas academics from Canada, Europe, Australia and the US.
- ❖ Senior practitioners from private, public and voluntary sector organisations including: Rolls-Royce, Human Systems Ltd, the Big Food Group, Warburtons, Daresbury Laboratories, Newcastle University, FAME National Project (ODPM), Newcastle-Gateshead Initiative, Office for Government Commerce (UK Government), GlaxoSmithKline, Ministry of Defence (UK), Sharefirst/South East England Development Agency (SEEDA), Airbus, High-Point Rendell, Halcrow, Royal Liver Assurance, and the National School of Government (UK Civil Service).
- ❖ Representatives from the Association for Project Management (APM), the Project Management Institute (PMI), the Major Projects Association (MPA), and the International Project Management Association (IPMA).
- ❖ The lead organisers of the Network are Dr Mark Winter (University of Manchester) and Charles Smith (Charles Smith Consulting Ltd), who are referred to in this report as the 'principal organisers'.

Acknowledgements. The lead organisers would like to acknowledge the various speakers who contributed to the Network programme, and the Network participants who contributed to the meetings.

5. Network Programme

After the first two meetings in March and July 2004, the original programme was aligned more closely with the interests and perspectives of the participants. Seven core areas of concern were identified: *projectification, managing multiple projects, actuality of projects, dealing with uncertainty, managing business projects, the profession and practitioner development*. The investigating team agreed to focus subsequent meetings on these seven areas of concern and details of the programme of meetings are shown below.

PROGRAMME	Date	Location	Areas of Concern
Meeting 1	30 th -31 st March 2004	Manchester	Shaping and Planning the Network
Meeting 2	15 th July 2004	London	Emerging Themes and New Perspectives
Meeting 3	20 th -21 st October 2004	Newcastle	Projects Across Sectors (Business Projects)
Meeting 4	27 th -28 th January 2005	London	Projectification and Managing Multiple Projects
Meeting 5	26 th -27 th May 2005	Strathclyde	Actuality of Projects and Uncertainty
Meeting 6	21 st -22 nd September 05	Bath	Profession and Practitioner Development
Meeting 7	24 th -25 th January 2006	Manchester	Directions, Messages and Network Review

6. Directions for Future Research

This section presents the primary output of the Network - a framework of five directions for future research – based on a comprehensive analysis of all the research material produced over a two-year period, including sensemaking papers, meeting minutes, meeting notes, practitioner presentations and papers from other events. Collectively, the five directions represent the most discernible pattern of ideas to emerge from the Network as a whole, and the purpose of the framework is to contrast these ideas with many of the dominant ideas in the published literature on project management. For each direction, a '**from**' position is identified – the mainstream position (as its perceived) – and a '**towards**' position representing the new direction of thought. The five directions also represent a particular direction *overall* and this is shown using the downward arrows to distinguish between two kinds of theory: theory **of** practice and theory **for** practice, leading to actual theory **in** practice – see Table 1 on the next page.

Rethinking Project Management (EPSRC Network 2004-2006)

Table 1 – Directions for Future Research

IMPORTANT NOTE: the word 'Towards' means to enhance the 'From' position rather than to discard it.

Theory ABOUT Practice

Direction 1

The Lifecycle Model of Projects and PM ➔ Theories of the Complexity of Projects and PM	
<p>From: the simple lifecycle-based models of projects, as the dominant model of projects and project management.</p> <p>And from: the (often unexamined) assumption that the lifecycle model <i>is</i> (assumed to be) the actual 'terrain' (i.e. the actual reality 'out there' in the world).</p>	<p>Towards: the development of new models and theories which recognise and illuminate the <i>complexity</i> of projects and project management, at all levels.</p> <p>And towards: new models & theories which are explicitly presented as only <i>partial</i> theories of the complex 'terrain'.</p>

Implication

The need for *multiple images* to inform and guide action at all levels in the management of projects, rather than just the classical lifecycle model of project management, as *the* main guide to action, (with all its codified knowledge and techniques). Note: theories ABOUT practice can also be used as theories FOR practice.



Theory FOR Practice

Direction 2

Projects as Instrumental Processes ➔ Projects as Social Processes	
<p>From: the instrumental lifecycle image of projects as a linear sequence of tasks to be performed on an objective entity 'out there', using codified knowledge, procedures and techniques, and based on an image of projects as temporary apolitical production processes.</p>	<p>Towards: concepts and images which focus on social interaction among people, illuminating: the flux of events and human action, and the framing of projects (and the profession) within an array of social agenda, practices, stakeholder relations, politics and power.</p>

Direction 3

Product Creation as the Prime Focus ➔ Value Creation as the Prime Focus	
<p>From: concepts and methodologies which focus on: <i>product creation</i> – the temporary production, development, or improvement of a physical product, system or facility etc – and monitored and controlled against specification (quality), cost and time.</p>	<p>Towards: concepts and frameworks which focus on: <i>value creation</i> as the prime focus of projects, programmes and portfolios. Note however: 'value' and 'benefit' as having multiple meanings linked to different purposes: organisational and individual.</p>

Direction 4

Narrow Conceptualisation of Projects ➔ Broader Conceptualisation of Projects	
<p>From: concepts and methodologies which are based on: the narrow conceptualisation that projects start from a well-defined objective 'given' at the start, and are named and framed around single disciplines, eg. IT projects, construction projects, HR projects etc.</p>	<p>Towards: concepts and approaches which facilitate: broader and ongoing conceptualisation of projects as being multidisciplinary, having multiple purposes, not always pre-defined, but permeable, contestable and open to renegotiation throughout.</p>



Theory IN Practice

Direction 5

Practitioners as Trained Technicians ➔ Practitioners as Reflective Practitioners	
<p>From: training and development which produces: practitioners who can follow detailed procedures and techniques, prescribed by project management methods and tools, which embody some or all of the ideas and assumptions of the 'from' parts of 1 to 4.</p>	<p>Towards: learning and development which facilitates: the development of reflective practitioners who can learn, operate and adapt effectively in complex project environments, through experience, intuition and the pragmatic application of theory in practice.</p>

Source: Winter M, Smith C, Morris P and Cicmil S (2006) Directions for Future Research in Project Management: The Main Findings of an EPSRC Research Network. Special Issue of *International Journal of Project Management* (forthcoming).

Very importantly, the five directions in Table 1 are not meant to be *the* agenda for future research, but *an* agenda to inform people already working in the field, and those interested in developing new research in the management of projects. Moreover, many of these areas are not 'new' to academics and experienced practitioners, but this is not what the Network has sought to achieve: what the five directions represent are the principal areas in which new thinking is needed to guide practitioners in the management of projects. An extensive discussion of these directions and their relationship to mainstream project management thinking is contained in the forthcoming special issue of the *International Journal of Project Management*.

7. Potential Research Topics

This section identifies some possible future research topics which were the outcome of discussions, centred on the five research directions, at the final meeting of the Network in January 2006.

First-Cut Topics Summarised from Meeting 7

Topic		First-Cut Definition
1	Project management capability in organisations	How organisations perceive capability development from project management (PM), to management of projects (MoP), to management by projects (MbP). Impact of type of organisation on capability development (eg. action-based vs political). Inter-organisation relationships and interactions.
2	The lived experience of projects	The effects of project life on individuals (especially project managers). Careers and autobiographies. Individual accounts (including failure), relating to Network 'towards' and actuality. Roles undertaken by designated project managers. Different roles in the context of conception of the project and variation through the lifecycle.
3	Consequences of defining work as projects (projectification)	The motives for defining work as projects (eg. to gain funding, senior management control and accountability). Consequences (eg. early definition of 'what' loses possibilities for handling uncertainties). Effects of the naming and labelling of projects.
4	The management of projects in practice	A network of academics and practitioners focusing on the actuality of projects: how practitioners actually manage projects and how organisations develop capability etc. Learning from practice. Use of stories in a project environment to understand: ambiguity and complexity, emotional investment, gap between expected and actual, planned vs emergent. Project managers as authors.

Initial Reactions to Topics 1-4 at Meeting 7

As well as identifying the example topics, the group also identified the following criteria for judging good research proposals: (i) potential to create value: relevance to practice and theory development, impact on practice and theory, adventurousness, providing leadership, value for money, (ii) proposal quality: clarity of purpose and methodology, soundness ('do-ability'), quality of research team, and, (iii) integration: of diverse views and culture.

Following the experiences of the Network's approach to learning from practitioner experiences, a preference was expressed by the group for future research to be based on methodologies that reflect this approach, namely, learning from practitioner stories about lived experience, ethnographical studies, and grounded theory etc. A view was also expressed by many of the participants at meeting 7 that there could be significant value in forming a network of academics and practitioners to work on an integrated programme of research based on many of the topics above. Work is now underway to explore how these ideas might be taken forward.

8. Initial Work on Messages for Practitioners

At the final meeting of the Network, the principal organisers initiated discussions on draft messages for practitioners by presenting eight example messages. Expressed in the form of imperatives and directed at particular audiences, these messages were extracted from the Network sensemaking papers to capture the themes and issues arising. Group discussions then generated further messages and expansions. It was noted that there are often contradictions implied within these messages – that one piece of advice can be countered by the opposite advice. This should be accepted – the advice highlights the complexity of projects and the need to consider the issues in a reflective and pragmatic manner.

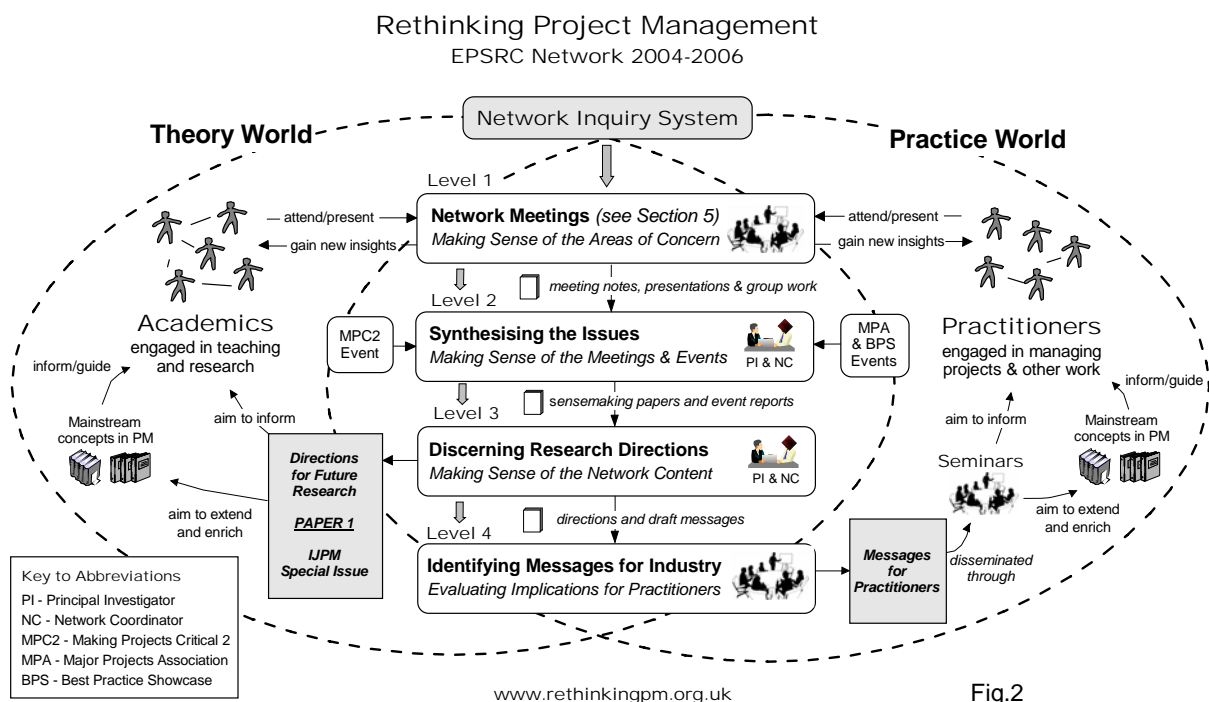
The following table integrates the outcome of these discussions and provides a starting point for further work in this area.

Topic		Draft Message
1	Projects in general, across sectors	Recognise the diverse social practices that reflect different interests and agenda.
2	Driving organisations towards project work	Recognise and avoid the limitations of PM: lost creativity, and local initiative and energy etc. Be critical in the adoption of project management techniques, recognising social context.
3	Delivery of organisational strategy	Beware of premature projectification, and beware of fraudulent projects. Understand the tension between normative and creative approaches.
4	Shaping and reshaping projects	Be able to deal with complex situations at the front-end and throughout the project lifecycle. Recognise diversity of project concepts. Handle contradiction between needs to avoid change and be flexible in project execution.
5	Transformational projects & programmes	Understand the importance and role of value creation through projects and programmes.
6	Managing the delivery of projects	Be able to deal with ambiguity, cope with the unpredictable and handle situations of uncertainty and value conflict.
7	Promoting PM as a profession	Recognise and nurture the diversity of professional capabilities required in project work.
8	Education, training and development	Recognise the importance of developing craft capability as well as knowledge acquisition. Recognise and develop capability in new knowledge areas.

As already stated, work is now underway to prepare a separate report for practitioners which will be available later in the year.

9. Network Research Methodology

With the emphasis on 'rethinking' project management, significant attention was given to the process of inquiry, and how this should be organised to achieve the Network's primary aims. Given the complexity of the phenomena under investigation and the different perspectives of the people involved, the inquiry process was organised as a *learning system* to help the Network 'learn' its way to an agenda for future research, and the associated messages for industry. Being a learning process, it was also necessary to conceptualise *how* the Network would do this, particularly given the complexity of the phenomena under investigation and the different perspectives of the people involved. Moreover, it was assumed from the start that seven meetings would not be sufficient to produce the desired outputs and that significant between-meeting activity would also be needed. This would include analysis of *each* meeting, followed by analysis of *all* the meetings to discern the main insights and implications for research and practice. To help achieve this, the approach adopted was essentially that of *organised sensemaking*, at multiple levels within the inquiry system of the Network. Fig.2 on the next page shows the conceptual design of the Network - consisting of four levels of activity - linked together in such a way as to show the Network progressively 'learning' its way to the research directions and the associated messages for practitioners.



Source: Winter M, Smith C, Cooke-Davies T and Cicmil S (2006) The Importance of 'Process' in Rethinking Project Management: The Story of an EPSRC Research Network. Special Issue of *International Journal of Project Management* (forthcoming).

In reality of course, the actual inquiry process was much more iterative and dynamic, but the basic pattern of activity was essentially the model shown in Fig.2, and it was *this* model that was used to guide the primary work of the Network, as the next few paragraphs show.

Level 1: Making Sense of the Areas of Concern. Each meeting was seen as a process of making sense of the specific area(s) of concern. Each meeting programme was carefully crafted to guide the meeting process, which usually involved a selection of presentations by invited speakers from industry and academia, followed by structured discussion involving the meeting participants. For the practitioner presentations, the focus was on 'practice stories' about real experience, encompassing not only current developments in practice, but also issues that the practitioners perceived as being relevant to the primary focus of the meeting. This was particularly important for the meeting discussion, and many of the practitioner presentations were reviewed prior to the meetings to ensure they aligned with the learning objectives of the programme. In summary, all the meeting programmes were deliberately crafted to serve the twin purposes of generating relevant material for the research agenda, whilst also being events from which people would (hopefully) learn new insights relating to project management.

Level 2: Synthesising the Issues (*Making Sense of the Meetings and Events*). As Fig.2 shows, after each meeting, a sensemaking paper was then produced by the Network coordinator (NC) and the principal investigator (PI), synthesising the perceived issues and themes arising from that meeting. The PI and NC also attended three further events between December 2004 and June 2005 in order to relate the thinking of the Network to relevant 'conversations' taking place elsewhere. Sensemaking reports for these events were also produced as further material with which to develop the research directions, and copies of all these papers and reports have been placed on the Network website. A full list of the working papers produced during the two year research programme is included in Appendix B at the end of this report.

Level 3: Discerning Directions and Messages (*Making Sense of the Network Content*). The inquiry process at this level was essentially about making sense *across* all the meetings (and other events) in order to discern the dominant patterns and themes arising from the Network as a whole. In May 2005 an interim report was written by the PI and NC identifying the emerging directions at that time, based on a comprehensive analysis of all the material produced so far (comprising sensemaking papers, meeting minutes, meeting notes, presentations and reports from other events). Although not a

requirement of the funding body (EPSRC) to produce such a report, its purpose was to provide a starting point for developing the new research agenda and a framework for making sense of the rethinking process. A set of 'learning propositions' was also created and maintained to help with this process.

Level 4: Identifying Messages for Industry (*Evaluating Implications for Practitioners*). As well as discerning directions for future research, Fig.2 shows the other main output of the Network, namely the more immediate messages for practitioners in the practice world. Work on defining and disseminating these messages has already begun, reflecting an additional aim of the Network organisers to make a more immediate contribution towards enriching the knowledge of practitioners. As the following statement from EPSRC shows, the objective of EPSRC networks is not simply to define new research topics, but to also "*facilitate the transfer of knowledge to a broader community*". To help achieve this, a separate report for practitioners is in preparation and a number of seminars are planned for different industry groups.

10. Network Evaluation

10.1 Has Project Management Been Rethought ?

Being a research programme concerned with 'rethinking' project management, it seems appropriate now to ask: *has project management been rethought?* The answer to this question relates to the particular 'rethinking' concept which was expressed in one of the Network's two primary aims:

to identify and define a new inter-disciplinary research agenda aimed at enriching and extending the subject beyond its current foundations.

As this report shows, a new research agenda *has* been defined, which is not meant to be *the* agenda for future research, but *an* agenda to inform people working in the field, and those interested in developing new research in the management of projects. In essence, the research directions in Table 1 represent a fundamental rethink of mainstream project management ideas, aimed at enriching and extending the subject beyond its current foundations. They represent the starting point for an agenda, which will be published in a special issue of the *International Journal of Project Management*. With regard to the quality and recoverability of these findings, the whole Network programme has been carefully documented throughout, including minuted notes, minutes and sensemaking papers for each meeting, an interim report containing an early draft of the five directions, documents relating to all the planning meetings, and documents relating to key decisions made in the course of the programme. In other words, the Network output is 'recoverable' in the sense that the main findings can be discerned from the documentation available. This is not to suggest that different organisers and participants would have produced the same conclusions, only that the output produced from this particular programme is **defensible** against the Network process.

10.2 Has the Network Been Effective ?

There are two aspects to be considered here: firstly, the effectiveness of the Network in contributing to other relevant areas of activity, and secondly, the effectiveness of the Network in relation to its longer-term impact on research and practice. Starting with the first of these, four areas in particular have been significantly influenced by the Network research programme.

1. New research projects, involving participants from the Network, eg. *Understanding the Value of Project Management (PMI, 2004-08)* led by Dr Janice Thomas of Athabasca University, Canada.
2. Collaborative research papers, involving participants from the Network, eg. papers for the PMI and EURAM research conferences.
3. Participants' research and teaching: a number of participants have commented favourably on how the Network meetings have informed their own teaching and research.
4. Practitioners' thinking: recent feedback from an APM corporate forum³ was very positive about an early preview of the Network's main findings.

³ Presentation to UK APM Corporate Forum, 28th March 2006, Leeds

With regard to the longer term impact of the Network research programme, it is clearly too early to judge its overall contribution to research and practice. Possible criteria for judging the research impact could be the influence of the IJPM Special Issue on future research, and similarly, criteria for judging the impact on practice could be the influence of the seminar programme on the future actions of practitioners. Both aspects are very important and could be picked up at a later stage to provide a more complete evaluation of the Network.

10.3 Participants' Critical Insights

As part of the Network evaluation, a critical insight/incident analysis was carried out to draw together a compilation of the main learning points for individuals involved in the Network. Prior to the final meeting, participants were invited to respond to the following question:

"can you provide a few examples (up to 5) of what you perceive as critical incidents and/or insights during the course of the Network. These might relate to content and/or process, i.e. PM theory and practice, and/or, the Network process of rethinking mainstream ideas in PM."

Fourteen participants provided feedback covering a wide variety of comments. The essence was extracted from each of the statements and summarised in a number of linked cognitive maps (using Decision Explorer software). The maps show linkages between the statements – both causal and connotative. Causal links imply that one statement has implications for the other, and connotative links imply a link between two statements or similarity. The wording used by the participants was retained but presented with anonymity. The four maps were presented at the final meeting and were reviewed by five syndicate groups for comment and additions. The pattern of these comments was: suggested changes in the wording to tighten/sharpen the statement, new statements and links.

The resulting maps represent five clustered views on the work of the Network: the nature of projects; the realities of the profession; rethinking PM/blame/theory; specific comments about the role of trust and goodwill in the success of the Network; and the role of multiple perspectives in the Network process. A full set of the pre-meeting and post-meeting maps are available separately on the Network web site - *Network Review: Report on Critical Insights and Incidents*. An overview of some of the key insights is shown in Appendix C.

10.4 Network Evaluation – General Comments

As well as the critical insights, Network evaluation sheets were also completed by those attending the final meeting in January 2006. The questions posed were:

- ❖ what did you like?
- ❖ what could be improved?
- ❖ what struck you as interesting?

The results were overwhelmingly positive. There were more than 90 positive statements, 40 proposals for improvement, and 60-70 specific points of interest.

There was strong support for the organisers, the overall programme and the individual meetings, the presentations by practitioners, the interaction between practitioners and academics, and the sensemaking papers. There was also support for the collaborative IJPM Special Issue papers.

A number of points for improvement were made, from which several themes can be identified. These, together with the responses of the organisers, are summarised below.

1. The Network could have been more international.

Out of a total of 34 participants who regularly attended the meetings, there were representatives from Canada, France, Norway, Sweden, Australia, and the US. Others were invited but were unable to attend. It is considered that this attendance was sufficient to give the Network an essential international dimension while retaining its identity as a UK-funded research network.

2. Tensions between the language of academics and practitioners – that the practitioners could have got more out of the Network.

Academics and practitioners jointly discussed the matters arising at the meetings. Where there appeared to be significant differences in interests between these parties the discussions were structured to make these differences explicit and hence draw out matters of interest to both parties. However, the efforts of the Network were primarily directed towards a research agenda and this is reflected in the primary output being a set of directions for future research.

The need to keep more detailed records.

Presentations were given by experienced practitioners, who were not formally asked to provide copies of PowerPoint presentations, or to provide a written paper. Brief résumés of the talks are included in the meeting minutes. Academic presenters, on the other hand, were asked to provide written papers, made available on the Network website, although not all did so.

The aim of this approach was to encourage an open discussion about sensitive and confidential issues. The primary substance of value was the quality of the argument and dialogue – between presenters, other practitioners and academics. This was captured in learning propositions, which were recorded and made public in the Network sensemaking papers.

It is noted that this approach created some difficulty for those writing papers arising from the Network, who do not have access to the raw data on which the conclusions are based. However, it should be noted that the purpose of the Network was to develop a research agenda, not to perform the research. The issue of the quality and retention of research data should be addressed in the continuing development of full research proposals.

The truncation of discussions.

At the meetings, there was considerable discussion of detailed issues. It was sometimes felt that these were incomplete: that the discussion groups could have developed their thinking further to reach more rounded conclusions.

In practice it was not practical to extend the discussions. There was no apparent willingness to continue discussions outside the domain of the facilitated meetings. In principle it would have been possible to review the sensemaking paper of each meeting at the opening of the next, so that the participants could have had more opportunity to review the contents of these papers.

In practice, however, there was a considerable amount of scope to be covered in a limited available meeting time, and it was felt that it was more important to move onwards, generating new material, at each meeting. In summary, the participants were very strongly engaged in the business of the Network, but only while they were in attendance at the meetings. The organisers were not able to generate any discussion of significance outside the meeting structure.

11. Options for Continuing the Network

At the final meeting of the Network, discussions took place about continuing the Network beyond the current funding from EPSRC. Strong support was expressed and it was suggested that the format of the European Institute for Advanced Studies in Management (EIASM) might be an appropriate basis for taking the Network forward. Such a format would substantially remove the administrative burden of organising activities (workshops and conferences etc) on individuals and institutions. It was agreed that a steering group led by Dr Harvey Maylor of Bath University Management School would consider the options for future activity. As a first step in this direction, a meeting has been held with EIASM resulting in a recommendation to explore funding opportunities (EPSRC and EU) for a first workshop aimed at identifying synergies between a wider European network of researchers. EIASM will provide the organisational structure and event management for this first workshop. In the longer term, subject to there being a critical mass of interested participants, the plan could be to develop a European association with an annual conference, specific workshops and doctoral events. Such an association would benefit from being part of the wider management research networks (outside UK and Project Management) that EIASM facilitates.

12. Towards More Engaged Scholarship

Finally, it seems appropriate to return to the core philosophy behind the whole Network programme, that is, the philosophy of linking theory and practice through an organised process of interaction involving academics and practitioners. As already stated, the Network's concept of 'rethinking' has been to research how mainstream project management ideas should be enriched and extended with new concepts and approaches to support practitioners working on 21st century projects. And to do this, the Network's approach has been to organise a structured learning process, to help the Network 'learn' its way to an agenda for future research, and the more immediate implications for practice. Interestingly, the process has been commented on by various Network participants as having strong links to concepts such as the co-production of knowledge, collective sensemaking, participative inquiry, and engaged scholarship. How these terms might be defined and understood is beyond the

scope of this report, but as a point to end on, what is interesting to note is the concept of 'engaged scholarship' in the example below.

Engaged Scholarship

Association of American Law Schools

Annual Meeting

January 5-8, 2005

San Francisco

Theme: Engaged Scholarship

This year's Annual Meeting aims to further recent efforts to strengthen the Association's role as the learned society of the profession. The theme for the Annual Meeting is "engaged scholarship." What does it mean to do scholarship that bridges the "purely academic" and the "practical" ? How can scholarly projects that engage pressing questions of legal practice enhance the empirical breadth and theoretical sophistication of our work ? And how, finally, has (and how may) "engaged scholarship" transform aspects of legal practice and legal institutions more generally ?

Source: www.aals.org

Looking ahead to future research in the management of projects, the same questions might also be applied here:

how can scholarly projects that engage pressing questions relating to the management of projects, enhance the empirical breadth and theoretical sophistication of our work ?

and finally, how may "engaged scholarship" transform aspects of the management of projects in practice ?

Appendix A Extract from the Network Proposal to EPSRC (2003)

Project Management Theory: The Need for New Research

The subject of project management continues to attract criticism and the gap between conventional project management theory and the developing practice is widening. The pattern now emerging in UK research and around the world is that of increasing concern about the relevance and value of conventional project management *theory* and how it relates to the growing *practice* of managing projects across different industry sectors. A summary of these concerns is provided below.

❖ **Conventional project management theory is too narrowly-focused**

A major criticism of conventional project management theory is that it focuses almost exclusively on the 'management of a project' and 'doing the project right' (i.e. to specification, budget and on time) rather than for example, the 'management of project portfolios' and 'programme management' which are more strategically orientated towards 'doing the right projects'. Morris (1994) for example argues that we should broaden the subject to the 'management of projects' rather than keep to the more narrowly defined area of 'project management'. Similar calls for a more strategic perspective can be found in the work of Cooke-Davies (2002), and other areas that are seen as particularly problematic include strategic project (investment) appraisal, the management of multiple performance criteria and associated incentive mechanisms, and the allocation of uncertainty/risk, (eg. Chapman & Ward 2002).

❖ **Growing criticisms of the 'project management bodies of knowledge' (eg. PMBOK®)**

There are also growing criticisms of the US Project Management Institute's Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK®) (PMI, 2000) and the UK Association for Project Management's equivalent body of knowledge (Dixon, 2000). These criticisms range from the practical to the philosophical (see for example, Hodgson, 2002) and the very notion itself of a so-called 'body of knowledge' is being increasingly questioned. In particular, in recent years it has become clear that the techniques in the bodies of knowledge do not explain the behaviour of complex projects, and this is now being understood particularly through the work of the Strathclyde research group (re: Eden, Williams, Ackermann and Howick), and also the work of PA Consulting in the US. In short, explanations here centre around systemic inter-related causal effects, particularly where these establish positive feedback loops, which are often exacerbated by management responses, (see for example, Ackermann et al 1997; Eden et al 2000).

❖ **Growing criticisms of current project management research**

Several leading academics have also expressed serious concerns about the quality of many recent project management publications, highlighting for example weaknesses both in their relevance to practice and in their general understanding of research methodology. Meredith (2002) for example highlights a number of major concerns relating to one of the leading PM journals in the US.

❖ **Growing criticisms of the field's intellectual and philosophical foundations**

At a more fundamental level and more significantly perhaps, there are also growing criticisms of the field's intellectual and philosophical foundations which are rarely made explicit in project management textbooks and most other project management publications. For example, from a systems perspective, conventional project management theory is now seen as essentially 'hard' systems thinking (Checkland, 1981) and there are now increasing calls for new research to enrich project management theory with ideas and approaches from 'soft' systems thinking (see for example, Morris, 2002; Winter, 2002), and system dynamics, (see for example, Ackermann et al 1997; Williams, 2002). Added to this, there are also increasing calls for the identification of new research perspectives and new research topics in project management from other related disciplines such as the more general management literature and the newly emerging field of critical management studies (see for example, Hodgson, 2002). In essence, conventional project management theory remains wedded to the epistemological/ontological foundations of the 1950s/1960s, with its emphasis on machine-like conceptions of organisations and projects, and realist assumptions about 'organisations' and 'projects' as entities existing 'out there' independently of the people involved, (see for example, Packendorff, 1995). This is not to argue that conventional project management theory should now be abandoned, only that there is a need now to develop this field beyond its current foundations. In summary, what this discussion seeks to show is the increasing gap between project management theory and project management practice, and hence the need for a fundamental rethink of this emerging discipline.

Appendix A Network Working Papers

May 2004	Rethinking Project Management – Sensemaking Paper 1: Context and Possible Directions.
September 2004	Rethinking Project Management – Sensemaking Paper 2: Focus Areas and Learning Propositions.
December 2004	Rethinking Project Management - Sensemaking Paper 3: Meeting 3 - Projects across Different Sectors.
January 2005	Rethinking Project Management - A Critical Review of the Areas of Concern - Report from Making Projects Critical 2 Workshop.
March 2005	Rethinking Project Management - Sensemaking Paper 4: Meeting 4 – Projectification and Managing Multiple Projects.
March 2005	Rethinking Project Management – ‘The Project Manager’s Toolkit – Time to Move On?’ - Report from Major Projects Association Seminar.
May 2005	Making Sense So Far: Emerging Directions and Future Research. Interim Report.
July 2005	Rethinking Project Management - Sensemaking Paper 5: Meeting 5: Actuality and Uncertainty.
July 2005	Rethinking Project Management - Report from the Best Practice Showcase 2005.
October 2005	Rethinking Project Management - Sensemaking Paper 6: Meeting 6: The Profession & Practitioner Development.

Appendix C Examples of Critical Insights

Note 1 - not in any order of significance.

Note 2 - these insights represent the collated views of individuals and not the Network as a whole.

Network content – examples of critical insights	Examples from cognitive maps
Bodies of knowledge are based on unrealistic views of how companies and individuals behave.	A body of knowledge (BoK) is in reality a certification baseline. Their mis-selling and influence on language and behaviour.
Gained an accurate understanding of the challenges and realities of contemporary project management.	Actuality of project management practice from presentations.
Professional associations have a limited understanding of the real world.	Tendency of BoKs to become immobile, challenges to commonly accepted axioms and principles.
Growing links are being developed between organisation theory and PM literature.	Put current work in the context of a wider spectrum of study.
Project management remains more of a craft than a science.	Success is a consequence of personal qualities, managing expectations and relations as well as tasks.
It is important to identify the political and cultural contexts, before designing the scope, structure, style, process, and the QA and communications strategies for a project.	Managing relationships and expectations, power and politics of projects, shift from tools and techniques towards socio-behavioural aspects. Use SSM to understand situation.
A key challenge in project management – the drive to accomplish work sometimes takes over even the best practitioner when faced with ambiguity, uncertainty.	Poor understanding of and handling of uncertainties, handling chaos and complexity, future tense trap – fixing requirements before figuring out what we are trying to accomplish.
Projects are everywhere and their importance is increasing.	Projectification, trend for everything to be designated as a project, understanding driving factors.
There is potential to develop a new strand of PM methodology for the not-for-profit and charity sectors.	Not based on traditional cost, quality and time.
The customers or commissioners of projects are often at least as culpable for what goes wrong.	Address appropriate KPIs, community to avoid inadvertently attracting all the blame.
Network process – examples of critical insights	Examples from cognitive maps
Unvarnished reflection on the nature of projects and their experience.	Practitioner stories as a basis for generating discussion, free of self-aggrandisement or corporate promotion.
The value of multiple perspectives from which the field has been approached by academic colleagues.	Collaboration with other academics, preserved the diversity of positions, diversity of research approaches and positions.
Avoidance of a process leading to the opinions of leading colleagues instead of exploring new avenues.	Valuable time spent on the design of the Network process, and contributions of 'younger' colleagues.
Collective and individual ability, skill and goodwill in managing occasional ambiguity, anxiety, conflicts and emotions as they emerged.	Mutual trust, frank reflection, removing sense of isolation, extending the debates in the meetings, adjusting to current state of dialogue.
Gradual percolation and accumulation of ideas that becomes encapsulated in the 'sensemaking' papers.	Sensemaking ethos, synthesis of each session, and the contributions of the principal investigator and coordinator.