Limitations of Project Management

The Project management oil tanker!

- Can suffer from a lack of flexibility within project methodology in changing and adapting processes to suit various stages of the project.

- **Inability to "stick" with the project scope**: Project Management, by definition, is unable to commit to the original project scope due to constant change requests. Project Management acknowledges this with the formal integration of Change Management. This limitation causes a lot of problems, and is the reason why so many projects end up way over budget and many months/years late, sometimes even cancelled or killed.

- **Inability to fully align the project objectives with the business/organisational strategy**: By definition, Project Managers manage projects, not their organization. Although projects are usually initiated by stakeholders/executives with a clear relation and full alignment with the overall corporate strategy, Project Managers are incapable, by themselves, to make sure that their projects are kept aligned with the company’s strategy. In order to solve this limitation in Project Management, Program Management was introduced as a higher layer of managerial control to guarantee and sustain alignment.
• **Inability to manage projects with unspecified budget and/or schedule:** This is probably the biggest limitation in the traditional incarnation of Project Management. Imagine if, thousands of years ago, pyramid building was restricted to a budget and a schedule. Would the pyramids have lasted so long? Project Management imposes a budget and a deadline on any project and thus creates a major problem: All projects finishing on time and on schedule (and they are very rare) have their quality compromised (when was the last time you saw perfection in any project?). Resources are not allowed to give their best, gold plating is considered a bad practice, and resources finishing on time, regardless of the delivered quality, are considered heroes.

• **Dependence on functional management:** Traditional (non-agile) Project Management is clear about the authority of the Project Manager over the resources: he has *none*. It is the functional managers who *own* the resources: they have their loyalty (resources are loyal to their functional managers as they’re the ones who report quarterly on their performance), they have their gratitude (most resources are hired directly by their functional managers), and they have their respect. The dependence on functional management is a major limitation in Project Management, as Project Managers are constantly at the mercy of both the functional managers and the resources (indirectly, for example, an excellent resource resenting the presence of the Project Manager might disobey him, while still being supported and endorsed by his functional manager), and they have to compromise, or “offer something” in return, just to get things done. Note that this limitation is almost negligible in highly projectised organisations.

• **Following an exclusive methodology** Project Management forces the Project Manager to choose and follow a methodology, be it the traditional (waterfall) methodology, or a newer methodology such as Agile. In Project Management, a project can only be managed using one methodology, and, in almost all cases, is not switched from one methodology to the other (usually methodology switching is not per project and is a decision made at the organization level), even when the other methodology is proven to be highly successful for that type of project. Being restricted by an exclusive, non-changeable methodology, either at the project level or the organizational level undermines and limits the potential of the project as well as the resources.