# Gamification of Project Management

Patrick Van Hoeserlande

It is not good practice to ask forgiveness of one's readers at the beginning of an article. Nevertheless, I will do it anyhow. In this article, I use concept development as an example on how we in this HQ could work with projects in an innovative way. Although convinced that what I propose is valid for all kinds of projects, I use concept development as the example because I know that methodology very well. Using other types of projects would lead me towards writing more about possible project structures than about the idea to improve their initial management. The approach that I propose is in itself not new or revolutionary, but its application in a military HQ is certainly innovative.

You, the reader probably not working in the concept development branch, may not know the most recent methodology. I guess a quick introduction will improve your understanding of this article. As shown in the figure below, the methodology consist of 5 + 2 phases. The first two (pre-initiation, and initiation) are important together with their distinct product as output to specific decision point. Combined they form the initiation of a project with a focus on the problem definition after which the long and resource intensive part of the work starts. These phases are most critical in the life cycle of a project because in that period only the 'fittest projects (should) survive'.
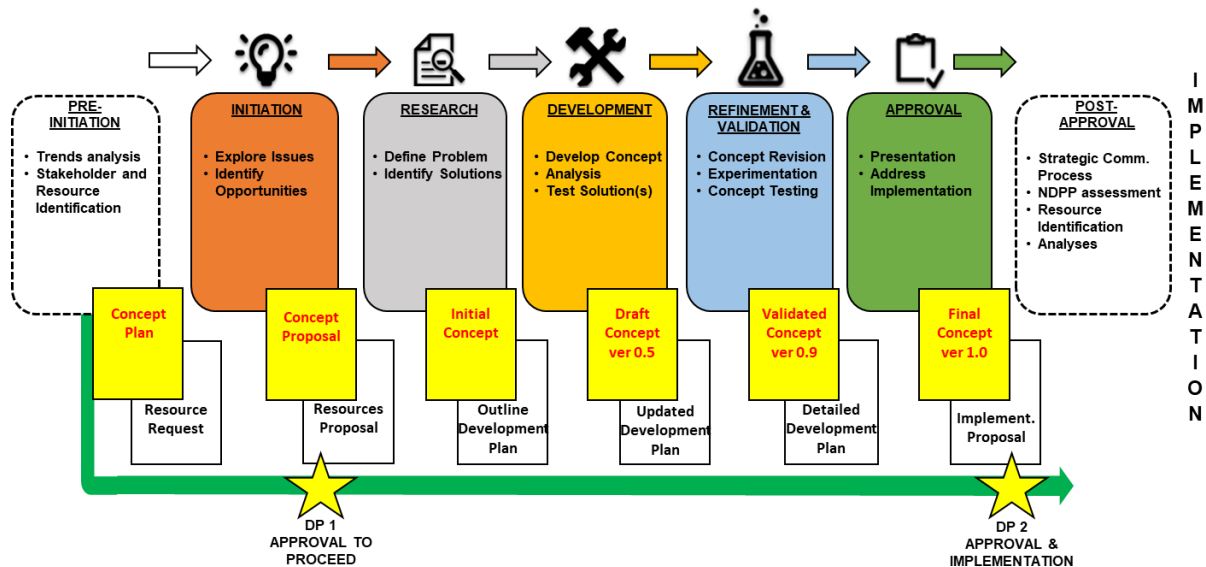
According to Darwin, a life form equipped to thrive in a certain environment needs for a broad pool of possible candidates to be selected from. Unfortunately, in most project environments there is a lack of such a diversified pool. The generation of ideas runs very low and the ideas that are selected out of sparsity are pushed to towards 'success' even if that means getting them through on life support. Luckily, for us, humans, that is not how nature works, but we, as members of an organization, hope that this faulty method will lead to great applications. Does that not sound strange?

If we want to collect a good and big enough pool to fish in, we urgently need another, better approach. There are different methods to generate ideas and most of them have their value, but for an idea to survive the first days, it needs a caretaker: an owner who is ready to fight for its survival. However, caretakers need motivation, incentives. It is not easy to come forward and defend an idea, so a stimulus is needed. Not convinced? When was the last time you proposed a new idea? Right.

Another flaw in our system is the lack of initial resourcing. I do not necessarily mean money, but resources like a project lead – may be different from the caretaker -, a high-level sponsor and some SMEs who can help maturing the idea. Looking for these kind of resources for a fledgling idea is hard because, well, it is not fully developed yet. However, lacking those resources means that even bright ideas will not reach their potential. They will die before they even had a chance. We may like Darwin, but no species survive a hostile environment.

The last critical part before an idea leaves its nest is its selection as an official project. This go/go-no moment is in our current system a decision of a high-level board. Nothing wrong with that as our generals are authorized to use resources in the execution of our mission. Unfortunately, they have to decide on arguments forwarded by a limited number of people. Lacking the initial resources, only ideas that are semi-officially supported in the beginning make a chance to reach the board. Many ideas do not make it out of lack of an initial impetus. People coming up with ideas select these out because the water is just too deep to put them in the pool. Another effect is that ideas, even very bad ones, from persons with access to resources can easily make it to a positive decision. Not only are those 'blue blooded' ideas nurtured, they are also powerfully and with authority defended before the board. Natural selection gives in to genetic manipulation.

Is there really a system that could tackle all those issues in one stroke? I believe there is. We could harvest our collective wisdom to solve the abovementioned issues. I am not a specialist in designing games, although I have experience with successfully creating one, but I am sure some in our HQ could use my suggestions to make one.

Here it is: under the motto 'the market knows best', we should create a HQ-wide game based on a stock market for our projects.

Of course, we would not play with real money but print a kind of SACT-chips. The more chips one owns, the better he or she is at the game of selecting the right projects. Certain amounts of chips could give access to specific rewards, recognition by our leadership … We could have a champion of the month, of the year, of all time. It could be fun.

Additionally, by having an internal discussion forum, a blog with project information, a stock exchange … we would stimulate discussion of ideas and projects. Interdepartmental work would increase and people would start caring about current and future projects.

How could such a game work?

First, every, and I mean every, member should get a fixed number of chips to start with. This is the only time that chips are given away for free; from then on, they have to be earned.

There are different ways to earn chips. The first one is to introduce a project proposal or idea. This introduction to the stock market must be accompanied with a minimum of information about the idea (5Ws), the team necessary to develop further (lead, sponsor and number of SMEs) and the deadline to get the project approved by the board (in case of a concept that is the Campaign Steering Board). Based on this information the 10 'richest' traders in the HQ independently decide on the initial stock value of the idea (these traders get chips for their effort). Only if an idea does not pass a (low) threshold, it is stopped and the owner is not paid.

Within a week, an idea should find its way to the market. From then on, people can express their desire to buy or to sell shares in the project. Once every week, the market closes and shares exchanged. We will need a software tool to make this happen. At the beginning of the following week, everybody knows the value of his or her portfolio as well as the value of the shares of every project.

On a daily basis, people can earn money by filling posts in the project teams. A project with a lead, a sponsor and the requested SMEs will normally have a greater market value than one missing those resources. The owner of the project is the one deciding on 'hiring' team members. Moreover, of course, all is completely transparent to everybody in the HQ.

The big chips can be earned on two occasions, the two decision moments. The first is when the Concept Request is approved by the branch head Concept Development (or a similar position for other projects). When this document is approved, the project gets a

limited budget to push it towards Decision Point 1 and the team members and shareholders get a dividend in relation to the market value of the project. Passing this test will greatly improve the value of the project at the next stock exchange calculation. Failing will probably influence negatively its value. Of course, everybody, thus also those who are not a team member, is invited to help turning a project into a success.

When a project is approved (this may include the decision that it is a valuable project but of a low priority) by the CSB at DP1, it enters the formal staffing process. The shares of the project will be taken from the stock market, the members paid and the shareholders get their share paid in full, plus dividend. Of course all that with a bonus for those that have invested in the project.

There are a few challenges in designing this game. What will the stock exchange software look like? What will be the number of chips earned when introducing an idea? Being a member of a project team? The bonus/dividend for passing a decision moment? These rules of the game may change over time, but not too much as not to change the nature of game.

Unfortunately, I lack the expertise and the experience to design and implement this game. I hope that somebody steps forward to turn this idea into reality. Maybe he or she will earn the first chips that way.