

Google



Simple is better

Why sophisticated Project Management methodologies don't work.



PMI Zurich Conference 2019

Dawid Piekarski

TL;DR

My thoughts on how and why projects are getting more complex, and how to handle it with minimalism, and simple tools.

Agenda

1. Metcalfe's law
2. Sophistication bias
3. Network congestion
4. Overcome complexity
5. Tools
6. Q&A

Metcalfe's law

Number of unique possible connections c with n nodes:

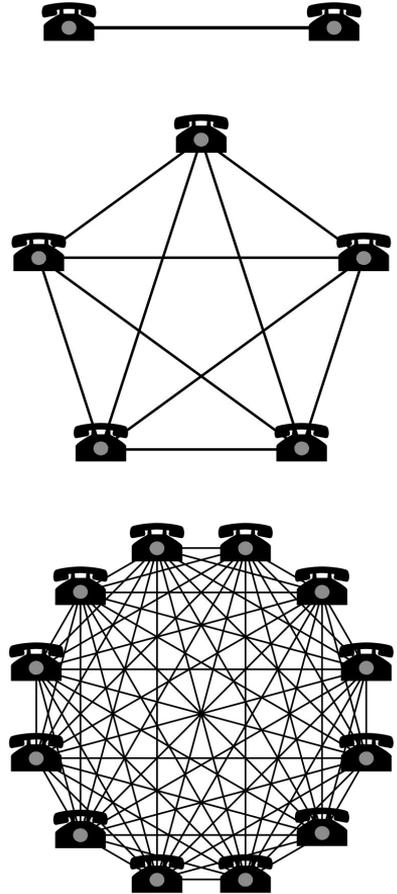
$$c = n(n-1)/2$$

For teams of size n , this translates to c possible connections:

$n=5$ $c=10$

$n=20$ $c=190$

$n=100$ $c=4950$... possible interactions



Metcalfe's law

It affects projects that are:

- Big
- Innovative
- Agile managed
- With non-binary deliverables
- Flat organization structure

Impact:

- Higher probability of an error
- Communication chaos
- Late issue detection
- Lower productivity
- Scope creep
- Low quality



Metcalfe's law - solution?

Common solutions:

- Engage more Program Managers
- Engage several Project Managers
- Introduce new complex management tools
- Outsourcing
- Build MVP*
- Allocate more resources (e.g., money) to the problem
- Cancel project - buy what's on the market



*minimum viable product



Sophistication bias

Inclination that complex, and sophisticated systems are better by their design, regardless of the outcome.



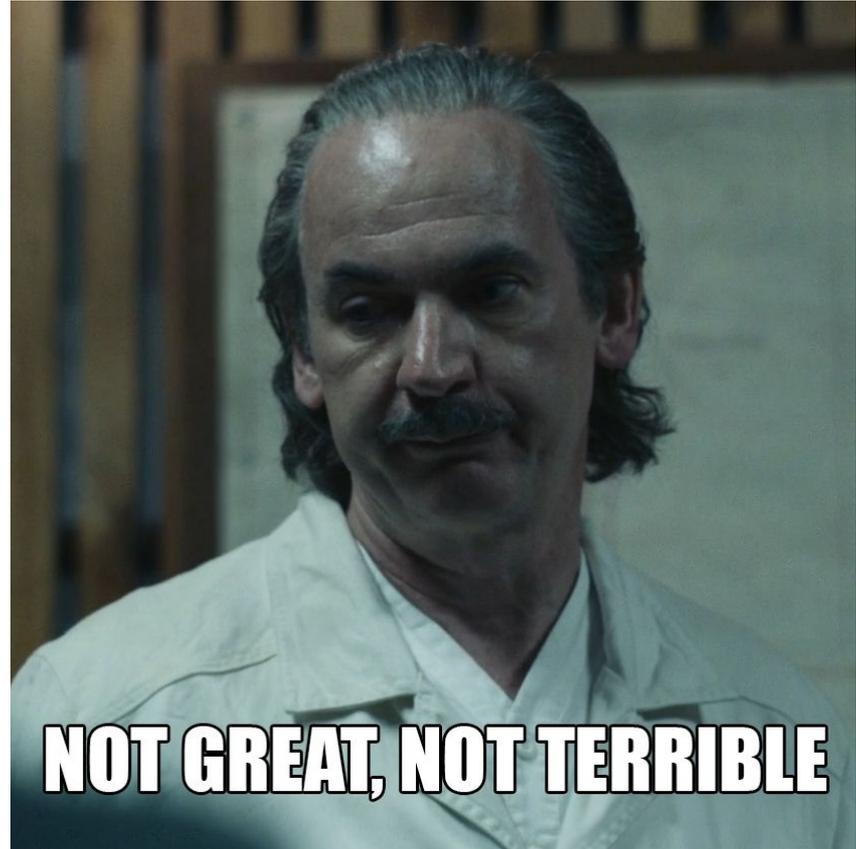
Sophistication bias

Results in:

- Project Managers are recognized for using complex tools, not results
- Constant attempt to introduce tools that will “fix it all”
- Task-oriented leadership
- Increased bureaucracy
- Incremental obstruction



Is that good ?



Network congestion

Network congestion - definition

Network congestion: in data networking and queueing theory is the reduced quality of service that occurs when a network node or link is carrying more data than it can handle *



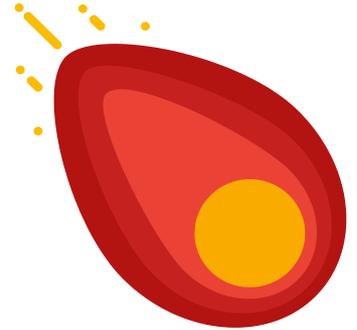
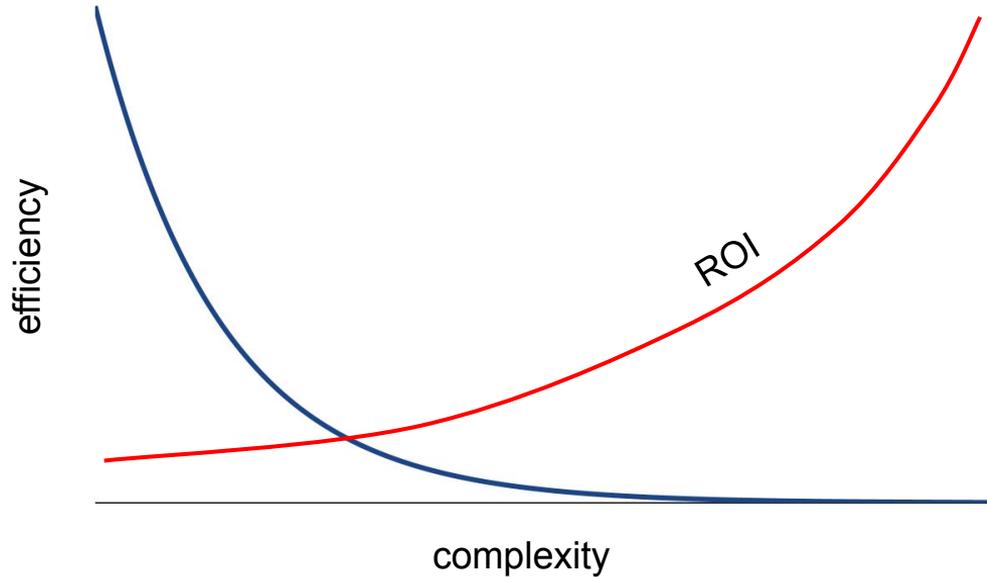
* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Network_congestion

Network congestion - implication

- spam
- low response rate
- long meetings
- missing agendas
- overhead increase
- burnout
- cost inflation

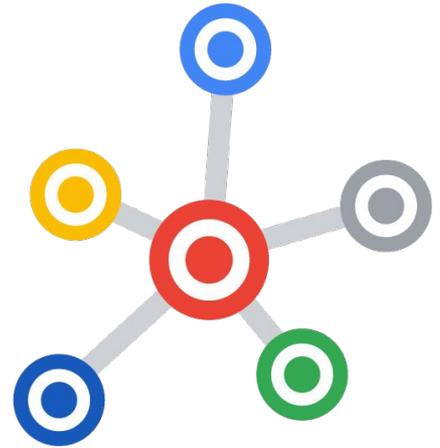


Network congestion - efficiency vs complexity



Network congestion - problems to overcome

1. Data overload
2. Focus management (resources “throughput”)
3. Entry cost to participate in project (onboarding)
4. Management cost (+efficiency)



Overcome complexity

Overcome complexity - data overload

Symptoms:

- Spam
- Multi-threaded emails
- Long list of people in CC
- Number of emails in your inbox

Improvements:

- Deny FYI emails
- Put TL/DR
- Online Dashboard
- Single data source (embed those instead of coping it)
- Create documentation repository
- Make whole project documentation online
- Filter your email (CC filter, FYI, Community filters)



Overcome complexity - focus

Symptoms:

- Long meetings
- Long response time
- Number of ignored emails
- Feature request response time

Improvements:

- Deny FYI emails (awareness is overrated)
- Use TL/DR for communication
- Online Dashboard, and TO DO list
- Meetings for complex topics: no emails
- Clear action triggers and ownership
- Minimize meeting timing (30 min instead of 1h)
- Limited meeting audience



Overcome complexity - entry cost

Symptoms:

- Long onboarding timing
- High rotation within the team
- FAQ directed to: ALL

Improvements:

- Onboarding owner
- Online FAQ section
- Documentation repository
- Onboarding maintenance process



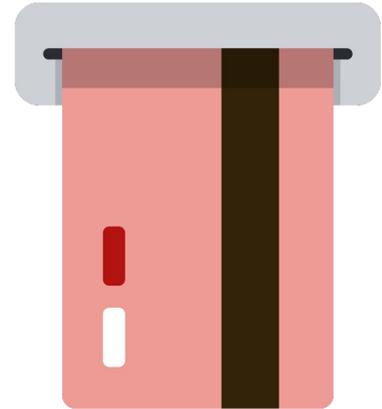
Overcome complexity - management cost

Symptoms:

- Multiple managers of various forms (test manager, resources manager, program managers)
- Long, big meetings with random participation
- Multiple reports for various audiences
- Multiple management tools

Improvements:

- Clear result ownership (one owner)
- Isolate teams that don't interact
- Single source of truth (dashboard)
- Focused meetings with limited audience
- Limit number of managers (<10% for the team)

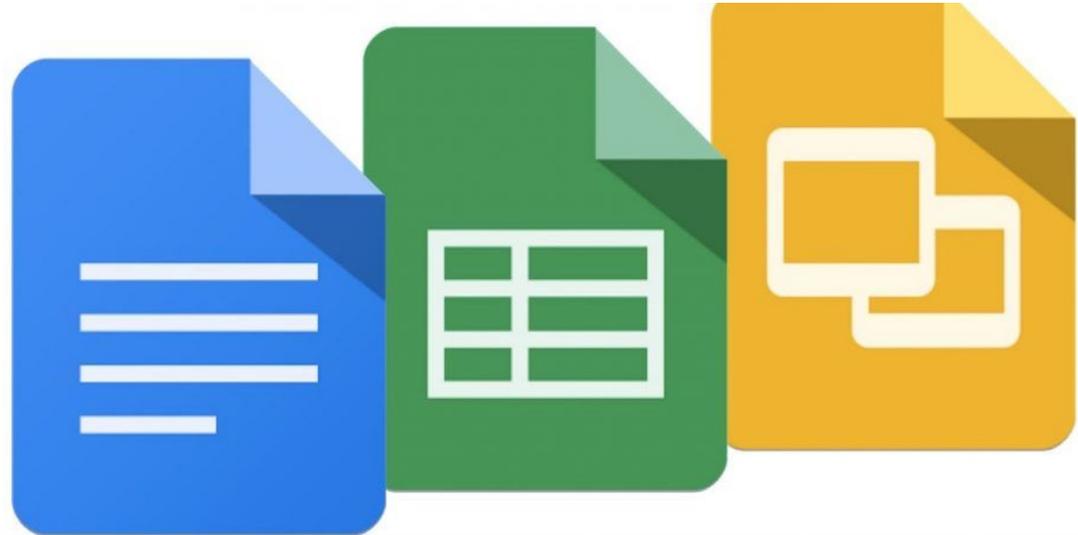


Tools

Basic spreadsheet

Basic documentation that needs to be:

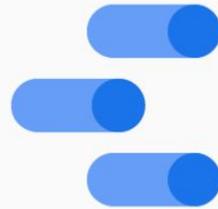
- In cloud / online
- Can be embedded in email system that is used
- Allow data export
- Accessible for whole team
- Familiar
- Reliable (backup, restore etc).



Aggregation and presentation

Tools that allow:

- Data aggregation
- Live reporting
- KPI dashboard
- Quality reporting



Data Studio

Org Project Management

Required functionality

- Gantt chart or
- Agile dashboard
- Dependency Management
- OOO calendar integration
- Mail integration
- Resources allocation
- Portfolio planning



Summary

Make it simple, make it better

Limit the data

Only fraction of data is relevant:

- Don't reproduce it
- Single source
- Accessable
- Useful

Manage focus

It's a key resource:

- Let people use it for work
- Make it result-oriented
- Bad habits kill organizations

Easy to use

Project member is a customer.

- Using tool needs to benefit the user
- Inaccessible tools will not be used.
- Reduce data maintenance effort

Let it be efficient

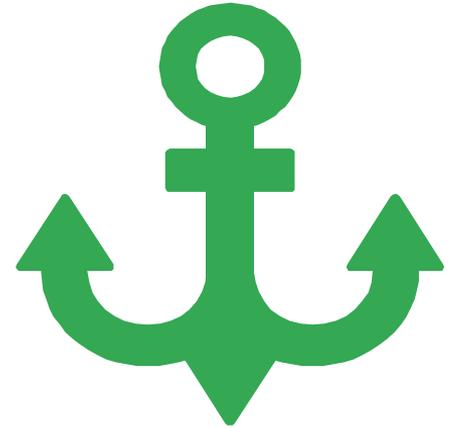
Time is money:

- Focus on high ROI items
- Make results speak for themselves
- Retain best team members

Q&A

Provocative questions:

1. Would you use Spreadsheet only?
2. How many managers are needed for a project with 100 people?
3. Do you use the full functionality of your current project management tool?
4. Will AI take over Project Management?
5. Start-up mentality in Project Management - good/bad?



Thank you

