Gestão e Desenvolvimento em Revista
V. 5, N. 2, jul-dez/2019, p. 3-15.
ISSN online: 2446-8738
Artigo recebido em: 20/07/2019
Artigo aprovado em: 08/12/2019

MEASURING AND IMPROVING PROJECT MANAGEMENT GOVERNANCE: A CASE STUDY IN A BRAZILIAN PUBLIC COMPANY

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Abstract

In a recent scenario of corporate breakdown, fiscal scandals and lack of integrity of multinationals, the governance theme has been receiving great repercussion and prominence. Thus, stakeholders have increasingly assumed the role of charging for transparency and corporate performance. A great ally to achieve its strategic objectives has been governance in project management, still incipient and with improvements to be achieved. Thus, this paper proposed to present a model for analysis, measurement and continuous improvement in this subject. Through a case study at a government inspection company, issues were raised under four project perspectives (portfolio management, project sponsorship, project management capability and disclosure and reporting), drawing a real profile of the company and creating an action plan to develop its governance in projects. The relevance of this study was justified by the use of an easily applicable tool, adaptable to a large number of business sectors.

Keywords: Governance. Public Governance. Project Governance. Project Management.

Resumo

Em um cenário recente de crise, escândalos fiscais e falta de integridade em multinacionais, o tema governança vem recebendo grande repercussão e destaque. Assim, as partes interessadas assumem cada vez mais o papel de cobrar pela transparência e pelo desempenho corporativo. Um grande aliado para atingir os objetivos estratégicos tem sido a governança no gerenciamento de projetos, ainda incipiente e com melhorias a serem alcançadas. Assim, este artigo propôs apresentar um modelo para análise, mensuração e melhoria contínua neste assunto. Por meio de um estudo de caso em uma empresa fiscal do governo, foram levantadas questões sob quatro perspectivas do projeto (gestão de portfólio, patrocinador, capacidade de gerenciamento de projetos e divulgação e relatórios), traçando um perfil real da empresa e criando um plano de ação para desenvolver sua governança em projetos. A relevância deste estudo foi justificada pelo uso de uma ferramenta de fácil aplicação, adaptável a um grande número de setores empresariais.

Palavras-chave: Governança. Governança Pública. Governança de Projetos. Gestão de Projetos.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Due to numerous failures in institutions, stakeholders tend to increasingly require integrity and strategic alignment. And because of the critical nature of this subject, governance issues have become increasingly popular. However, when it came to projects, they were seen by the tactical field and without strategic appeal. In addition, the visibility brought worried senior managers on how to hide certain slips (CRAWFORD; COOKE-DAVIES, 2009).

However, with the Sarbanes Oxley Act and the weight given to directors by their actions, as responsible for the direction taken by the company, changed the way they manage projects, making it more liable, transparent and in line with laws and regulations (CRAWFORD; COOKE-DAVIES, 2009).

Given its importance, this article aims to create a model for analyzing, measuring and improving governance in projects as a tool for continuous improvement. For that, the case study was applied to a public company that remained anonymous for security reasons. In which questions were asked to the board of directors, according to four main areas: portfolio management, project sponsorship, project management capability and disclosure and reporting.

From the data collected, it was possible to create a plan of action to correct possible failures in the institution. The relevance of the model was guaranteed by the easy applicability and possibility of use in any sector, be it public, private or non-profit organization.

2 THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Berle and Means (1932), one of the pioneering scholars in the field, cited that was the government role to regulate private companies. And two years after, in 1934, the United States Securities and Exchange Commission was created and still is in charge of protecting investors and the market (TCU, 2013).

The Brazilian General Accounting Office, the TCU, tells that governance as is defined nowadays, was conceived only three decades ago, initially in private companies. Also, it is associated to the period when institutions started to be directed by third parties: those who were not the capital owners, but had the authority ceded to manage. Also, in many cases, it leaded to an episode where each part tried to maximize his own gain and consequently created a conflict of interests. Based on that, the governance structure has been developed since then (TCU, 2013).

In the 90's, years which were marked by financial crisis, the bank of England created a best governance practices guide, that resulted in the Cadbury Report. Also, in 1992, the Committee of Sponsoring Organizations of the Treadway Commission – COSO has published its Internal Control Integrated Framework. Followed in 2002, by the creation of the European Corporate Government Institute – ECGI and the Sarbanes-Oxley law in the US motivated by fraudulent financial statements generated by auditing firms. Finally, in 2004, COSO published the Enterprise Risk Management – ERM framework (TCU, 2013).

In the present days, by the increased interest, many institutions are encouraged to promote governance. It is the case of the G8 developed countries group, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2004; ECGI, 2013).

Nationally, the consultancies McKinsey & Company and Korn/Ferry

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International (2001) published the Brazilian governance framework. Still in the same year, the 10,303/2001 law helped reduce investor risk (BRAZIL, 2001). In the next years, other important institutions as the Securities and Exchange Commission – CVM and the Brazilian Institute of Corporate Governance – IBGC published important national codes and recommendations of governance (TCU, 2013).

COSO (2007) defines governance as the environment where not only the objectives are stablished, but where they are managed, monitored and achieved. The PMI – Project Management Institute (2009) affirms that the governance has the essence of management but on a higher level and for Miller and Floricel (2000), the reason for its ascension is due to the lack of coordination either by firms or by the state.

The term governance is widely used due to the great variety of contexts where it can be applied, such as: corporate governance, IT governance, environmental governance, NGO governance, sustainable governance etc. However, they are only specifications, focusing on one type of the subject (GISSELQUIST, 2012).

2.1 PUBLIC GOVERNANCE

Particularly, the public governance is defined as a system made to guarantee public policies and to provide services to the population. And for that, it is necessary to direct, evaluate and monitor the management by a combination of strategy, leadership and control tools. Also, by having a good governance it will be possible to optimize the use of resources, accelerate constructions and enhance the service quality to society e.g. hospitals, schools, research and environment. All this, without having to face structural reforms as the pension, labor, political and tax ones (TCU, 2013).

The International Federation of Accountants – IFAC (2001) say that the basic principles for public governance are: accountability (or openness), transparency and integrity. The Australian National Audit Office – ANAO (2014) reaffirm that, adding two other fronts: the effective collaboration and performance orientation as can be seen in Picture 1.

Picture 1 – Key focus areas of good governance

Source: ANAO (2014)

The first area (openness, transparency and integrity) is responsible to give confidence to the stakeholders by trustful and well recorded information and also by legal and policy requirements fulfillment. While the second area (effective collaboration) refers to engage the stakeholders sharing risks and accountabilities. And finally, the third area (performance orientation) is about efficiency (better use of resources) and effectiveness (processes resulting in positive outcomes) (ANAO, 2014).

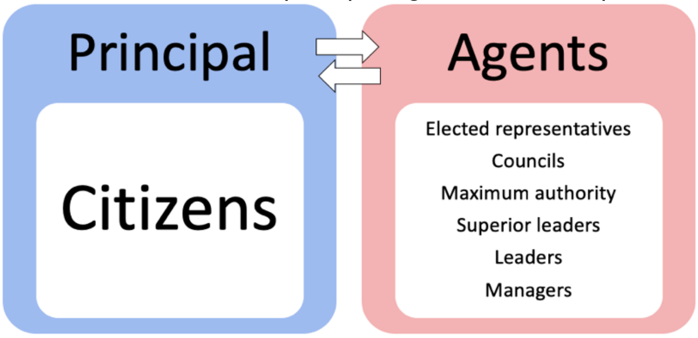
Also, public governance presents four different perspectives: by society and the State; federal entities, the union powers and public policies; institutions and finally, intra-organizational activities. The first is responsible for the public and private agent regulations guided by the constitution and for the state structure and control; the second relates to public policies and the communication between different government sectors; the third guarantees that every entity complies with its own role and lastly, the fourth has the function of improving activities and mitigating the risk of public or private entities (TCU, 2014).

In terms of Brazil, the Federal Constitution cedes to the population the role to choose their representatives and also, was defined their rights and fundamental guarantees (BRAZIL, 1988). In addition, for each union power (executive, legislative and judicial) it defines its attributions; responsibilities; check and balance the system based on American constitutional doctrine and internal and external control structures. And in addition to this artifact, others of great importance were elaborated (TCU, 2013):

a) The Code of Professional Ethics of the Civil Public Servant of The Federal Executive Power (Decree 1,171 of June 22, 1994) and the Fiscal Responsibility Law (law 101 of may 4, 2000): documents that deal with leadership behavior and ethics and moral aspects (BRAZIL, 1994; BRAZIL, 2000);
b) The National Program of Public Management and Debureaucratization (GesPública): whose fundamentals are based on the constitution of 1988 and in modern management excellence (BRAZIL, 2014);
c) The law 12,813 of May 16 of 2013: discusses about conflict of interest in executive power (BRAZIL, 2013) and
d) The law 12,527 of November 18 of 2011: it is the information access law and it also helps monitor and control administrative acts and public agents conduct (BRAZIL, 2011).

As in democracy the power emanates from the people, and as they elect their representatives to manage the assets and public resources, the public governance basic structure is then settled, as can be seen on Picture 2. It refers to the relationship between society – named as “principal” as it has the social power and contains notions of purpose and value generation – and the agents – public authorities legally empowered to represent the people (TCU, 2013).

Picture 2 – Basic principal-agents relationship.



Source: Adapted from TCU (2013).

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2.2 PROJECT MANAGEMENT GOVERNANCE

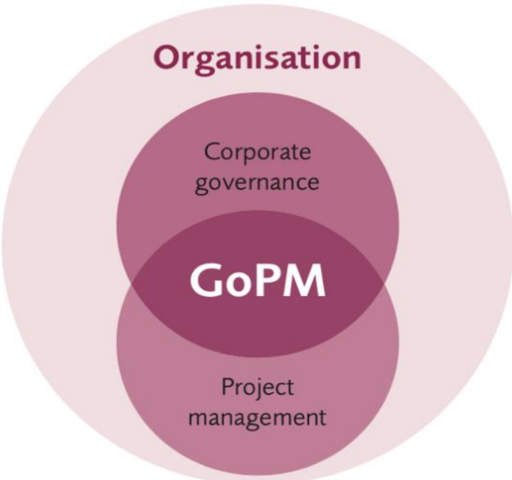
With the project management emergence, some guides were created e.g. PMBoK® – Project Management Body of Knowledge and IPMA® – International Project Management Association. After that, the second generation was marked by the maturity models, which was started by the Capability Maturity Model Integration – CMMI® in IT area (BERNARDO, 2010).

Thus, it opened way for the Project Management Institute – PMI® to create the Organizational Project Management Maturity Model – OPM3® (PMI, 2013) and to many others standards. In this period, many consultancies began to assist companies with their maturity models. In most cases five maturity levels were used, varying only by content (BERNARDO, 2010).

Caused by the progress in project management, many aspects have changed, for instance, the priority nowadays is not concerned only about maximize production. Aspects like multiple markets, company's image, sustainability and social commitment gained great notoriety. Therefore, the way to insert those worries in projects, but also in programmes and portfolios, is by having a governance (BERNARDO, 2010).

The project management takes into account processes, policies, roles and a system value of the company (MULLER, 2009). By Picture 3 it is possible to see this association resulting in the Governance of Project Management (GoPM).

Picture 3 – Governance of project management



Source: APM (2011)

The United Kingdom Association for Project Management – APM (2011) says that:

> Effective governance of project management ensures that (…) project portfolio is aligned to the organization's objectives, is delivered efficiently and is sustainable. (…) Governance of project management concerns those areas of corporate governance that are specifically related to project activities (APM, 2011, p. 7).

Turner (2008) declares that three levels of project management governance are well defined:

a) The first is at the board level and it is an extension of their personal interests in company's projects;

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b) At the second level, the organization structure is assembled to guarantee efficiency and success to the projects selected and
c) At the third level, those projects are placed and managed individually.

The first level ensure sponsorship and connects senior executives to the project management (APM, 2011). The second is responsible for the company's resources allocations to the projects. And lastly, the third level comprises the amount of individual project decisions, based on principles, processes and structures (BERNARDO, 2010).

APM (2011) groups project management governance in four components:
a) Portfolio direction;
b) Project sponsorship;
c) Project management effectiveness / efficiency and
d) Disclosure and reporting.

Those are responsible for external and internal project team allocation, information provision for the stakeholders and to guarantee approvals, guidance, problem solution for each project (BERNARDO, 2010).

According to the author, the portfolio direction allows projects to be conducted in accordance with company's goals and limitations. Whilst project sponsorship is the authority needed to conduct and the way information is transmitted. Now project management effectiveness and efficiency gather skills and capabilities of the own and outsourced team to reach project goals. And finally, Disclosure and reporting provide an effective management by information on the right time, trustful and significant to support the decision process (APM, 2011).

3 METHODS AND RESULTS

Based on APM (2011) key questions, which are divided by those four mentioned core components (portfolio direction, project sponsorship, project management capability and disclosure and reporting), a case study was applied on a Brazilian public company, responsible for government oversight, which had to remain anonymous for security reasons.

The main goal was to measure the level of governance in project management by the key questions, and in a second moment, by the responses given by the board in common agreement, generate targeted action plans. Thus, it is expected to maintain a virtuous circle of continuous improvement governance in project management, as can be seen represented by Picture 4.

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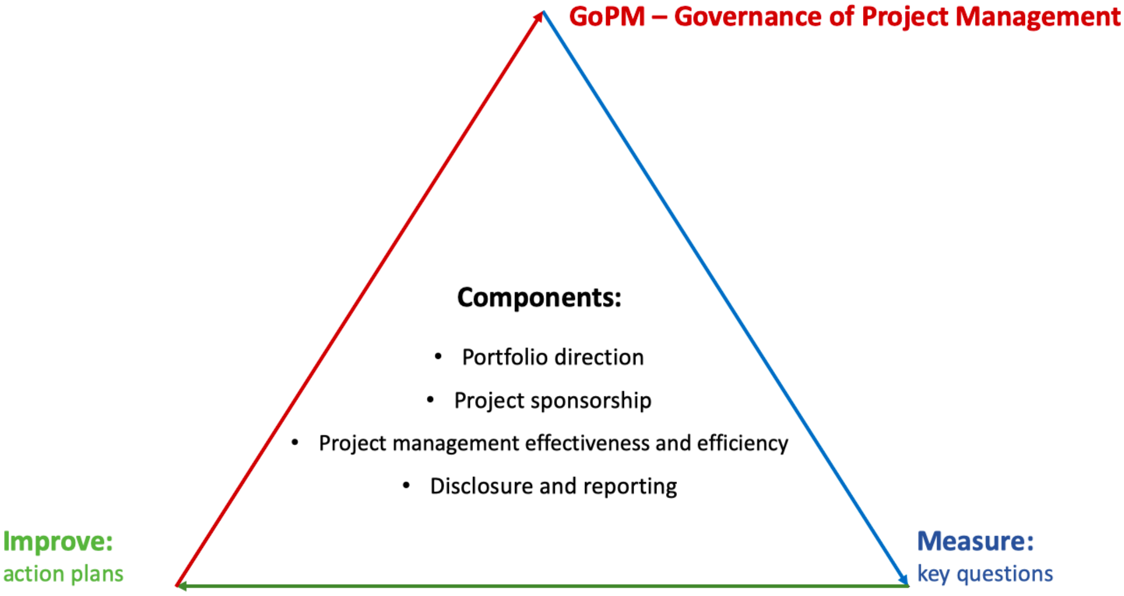
Picture 4 – Continuous improvement in project governance



Source: author.

According to APM (2011), the key questions were associated with two other important documents: the UK Corporate Governance Code of 2010 and the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002 and can be used regardless of the type of institution. Also, by the improvement, it is said to be possible to evade absence of strategic alignment, high management and leadership, stakeholder commitment, project and risk expertise, supply approach, short-term project evaluation and assignment cascading to lower levels.

By the portfolio direction (PD) component, the following ten questions and answers were obtained (Table 1):

Table 1 – Portfolio direction key questions.

PD1	Is the organization's project portfolio aligned with its key business and organizational objectives, such as those of profitability, customer service, reputation, attitude to risk, corporate responsibility, sustainability and growth?	Yes
PD2	Are the organization's financial controls, financial planning and expenditure review processes applied to both individual projects, and to the portfolio as a whole?	Yes
PD3	Is the project portfolio prioritized, refreshed, maintained and pruned in such a way that the mix of projects continues to support strategy and take account of external factors?	No
PD4	Does the organization discriminate effectively between activities that should be managed as projects and other activities that should be managed as non-project operations?	Yes
PD5	Does the organization assess and address the risks associated with the project portfolio, including the risk of corporate failure?	No
PD6	Is the project portfolio consistent with the organization's capacity?	Yes
PD7	Does the organization's engagement with project suppliers encourage a sustainable portfolio by ensuring their early involvement and by a shared understanding of the risks and rewards with due protection of commercial confidentiality?	Yes
PD8	Does the organization's engagement with its customers encourage a sustainable portfolio?	Yes
PD9	Does the organization's engagement with the sources of finance for its projects encourage a sustainable portfolio?	Yes
PD10	Has the organization assured itself that the impact of implementing its project portfolio is acceptable to its ongoing operations?	Yes

Source: author.

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By project sponsorship (PS) perspective, thirteen questions were made, them and its responses are in following Table 2.

Table 2 – Project sponsorship key questions.

PS1	Do all projects have competent sponsors at all times?	Yes
PS2	Do sponsors devote enough time to their projects?	No
PS3	Do sponsors continue in their roles for periods of time sufficient to ensure accountability?	Yes
PS4	Do project sponsors engage regularly with project managers and are they sufficiently aware of the project status?	No
PS5	Do project sponsors provide clear and timely directions and decisions?	Yes
PS6	Do project sponsors have sufficient influence with which to ensure that project managers have adequate resources with the right skills to deliver projects?	Yes
PS7	Are projects closed at the appropriate time and outcomes tested against their business cases?	Yes
PS8	Is independent advice used for appraisal of projects?	Yes
PS9	Are sponsors accountable for and do they own and maintain the business case; is accountability identified for key project documents?	Yes
PS10	Are sponsors accountable for the realization of benefits?	Yes
PS11	Do sponsors adequately represent the project throughout the organization?	Yes
PS12	Are the interests of key project stakeholders, including suppliers, regulators and providers of finance, aligned with project success?	Yes
PS13	Is project learning from experience recorded and shared?	Yes

Source: author.

Regarding project management effectiveness and efficiency (PM), nine questions were evaluated, as in Table 3.

Table 3 – Project management capability key questions.

PM1	Do all projects have clearly defined outcomes with clear critical success criteria that are tracked to inform decision-making?	Yes
PM2	Is the board assured that the organization’s project management processes incorporate review points, are subject to continual improvement and maturity and that project management tools are appropriate for the projects that it sponsors?	Yes
PM3	Is the board assured that the people responsible for project delivery, especially the project managers, are clearly mandated, sufficiently competent, and have the capacity to achieve satisfactory project outcomes?	Yes
PM4	Are project managers encouraged to identify and exploit opportunities for improving project outcomes?	Yes
PM5	Are key roles and responsibilities for governance of project management clear and in place?	Yes
PM6	Are service departments and suppliers able and willing to provide key resources tailored to the varying needs of different projects and to provide an efficient and responsive service?	No
PM7	Is the management of issues, changes, risks and opportunities integrated into the decision-making process and in line with adopted policies?	No
PM8	Is authority delegated to the right levels, balancing efficiency and control?	Yes
PM9	Are project contingencies and other risk responses estimated and controlled in accordance with delegated powers?	Yes

Source: author.

About the subject disclosure and reporting (DR) subject, the following twelve questions were answered, according to Table 4.

Table 4 – Disclosure and reporting key questions.

DR1	Does the board receive timely, relevant and reliable project forecasts, including those produced for the business case at project authorization points?	No
DR2	Does the board receive timely, relevant and reliable information, which compares progress against objectives?	Yes
DR3	Does the board have sufficient information on significant project-related risks and their management?	Yes
DR4	Are there threshold criteria that are used to escalate significant issues, risks and opportunities through the organization to the board?	Yes
DR5	Does the organization use measures for both key success drivers and key success indicators?	Yes
DR6	Is the organization able to distinguish between project forecasts based on targets, commitments and expected outcomes?	No
DR7	Does the board seek independent verification of reported project and portfolio information as appropriate?	Yes
DR8	Does the board reflect the project portfolio status in communications with key stakeholders?	Yes
DR9	Does the business culture encourage open and honest reporting?	Yes
DR10	Where responsibility for disclosure and reporting is delegated or shared, does the board ensure that the quality of information that it receives is not compromised?	Yes
DR11	Is a policy supportive of whistleblowers effective in the management of projects?	Yes
DR12	Do project processes reduce reporting requirements to the minimum necessary?	Yes

Source: author.

After measuring by the key questions regarding four perspectives and collecting the results, action plans were made in order to enhance the project management governance. The compilation of each question that was not fulfilled and its respective action plan can be verified in Table 5 next.

Table 5 – Action plans.

PD3	Establish a PMO (Project Management Office) responsible for portfolio as a unit.
PD5	Conduct integrated risk management of the portfolio taking into account the impact generated between projects.
PS2	Establish a biweekly project follow-up meeting with sponsors.
PS4	
PM6	Inclusion of area managers in kick-off, milestone and closing project meetings; summary reports and include project tasks in the variable remuneration of the areas.
PM7	Review obsolete policies and integrate it to be referenced and used in projects.
DR1	Unburden and decentralize the report function of the project manager, delegating functions to the project and area coordinators in order fulfill deadlines and disclose information in the institution.
DR9	

Source: author.

4. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

4.1 REVIEW AND COMMENTS

The article aimed to expose and discuss governance in public companies, but specially that used in project management. The challenge was then to propose a model capable to analyze, measure and improve it.

Therefore, a case study was conducted in a Brazilian public institution responsible for government oversight and which had to maintain anonymous for security reasons. A set of key questions were applied based on APM directing guide for project governance. They were divided into four core components or subjects: portfolio direction (PD), project sponsorship (PS), project management capability

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(PM), disclosure and reporting (DR). And by the answers provided by the board of director in common agreement, it was possible to verify the main gaps by each group.

In portfolio direction field, the limitations took place in PD3 – about portfolio prioritization and management as a set of projects supporting strategy – and PD5 – related to risk assessment and addressing. Project were executed and reported as units without interaction, resource sharing and joint effects between them (PD3). Also, this behavior was continued regarding risks, being evaluated and managed individually (PD5).

Thus, as action plans, it was recommended the PMO creation, responsible for the integrated conduction of the portfolio (PD3). Also, as part of the job, the management of shared and interconnected risks between the various projects (PD5).

Regarding project sponsorship, the difficulties were placed in PS2 – about the time spent by sponsors to their projects – and PS4 – on the regular link between sponsor and project manager, being the first one aware of the project progress. The lack of regular communication and feedbacks hinder the information exchange between project and sponsor. In this way, it was suggested biweekly follow-up meetings between project managers and sponsors.

By project management capacity perspective, two obstacles were noted: PM6 – which deals with the cooperation of departments and suppliers in meeting the project needs – and PM7 – which refers to management based on decision-making and guided by institution's policies. The great issue was to engage area managers to participate in the projects, since they did not have the sense of belonging and were remunerated for the procedural activities. Adjunct, there were incompatibility between plastered documents and corporate policies without identity with the way projects are managed.

As a way of acting, it was indicated for area managers to participate in the key meetings (kick-off, milestone and closing) and to receive summary project reports, so they could feel themselves as part of the project. In addition, they would receive variable remuneration for project tasks (PM6). Also, policies would be reviewed in accordance with the company condition and its context, providing advances in project governance (PM7).

Regarding disclosure and reporting, gaps were found in DR1 – related to the project forecasts received timely by the board – and DR9 – which concerns a project culture with open and transparent information. The respective obstacles were an agglomeration of tasks in the figure of the project manager, culminating in constant delays to send information to the board of directors (DR1). Also, that scenario contributes to the bottleneck of information (DR9).

Thus, the proposed mediation for both (DR1 and DR9) was to reduce the burden of the project manager and to decentralize its reporting task to the project coordinators. With that, it is expected to have the forecasts deadlines accomplished and information disseminated in the institution.

In this manner, as an interventionist measure, the set of action plans were proposed to maintain a virtuous cycle of improvement to the project management governance. And because of the global reach of all four components, improvement is expected to impact across the institution, translating its strategic vision. Given the general nature of the model, it is encouraged its use in any type of institution, regardless of which sector it belongs to (public, private or non-profit institutions).

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4.2 RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE WORKS

The model presented in this article was limited by the stage between measuring the level of governance in projects and their improvement strategies. However, post-interventional analysis and possible feedback are encouraged to be made. In addition, despite the generalist model, the work was limited to be used on the public sector. Therefore, its application and possible comparison between sectors are recommended in order to highlight possible nuances.

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Gestão e Desenvolvimento em Revista
V. 5, N. 2, jul-dez/2019, p. 3-15.
ISSN online: 2446-8738
Artigo recebido em: 20/07/2019
Artigo aprovado em: 08/12/2019

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