

concept

DECISION MAKERS, DOERS AND ADVISORS
– JOINING FORCES TO ENHANCE UTILITY OF INVESTMENTS

Concept Symposium 2010
Oscarsborg, Norway
16 – 17 September 2010

Symposium web-site: <http://www.conceptsymposium.no/>
Concept Research Programme: <http://www.concept.ntnu.no/english/>

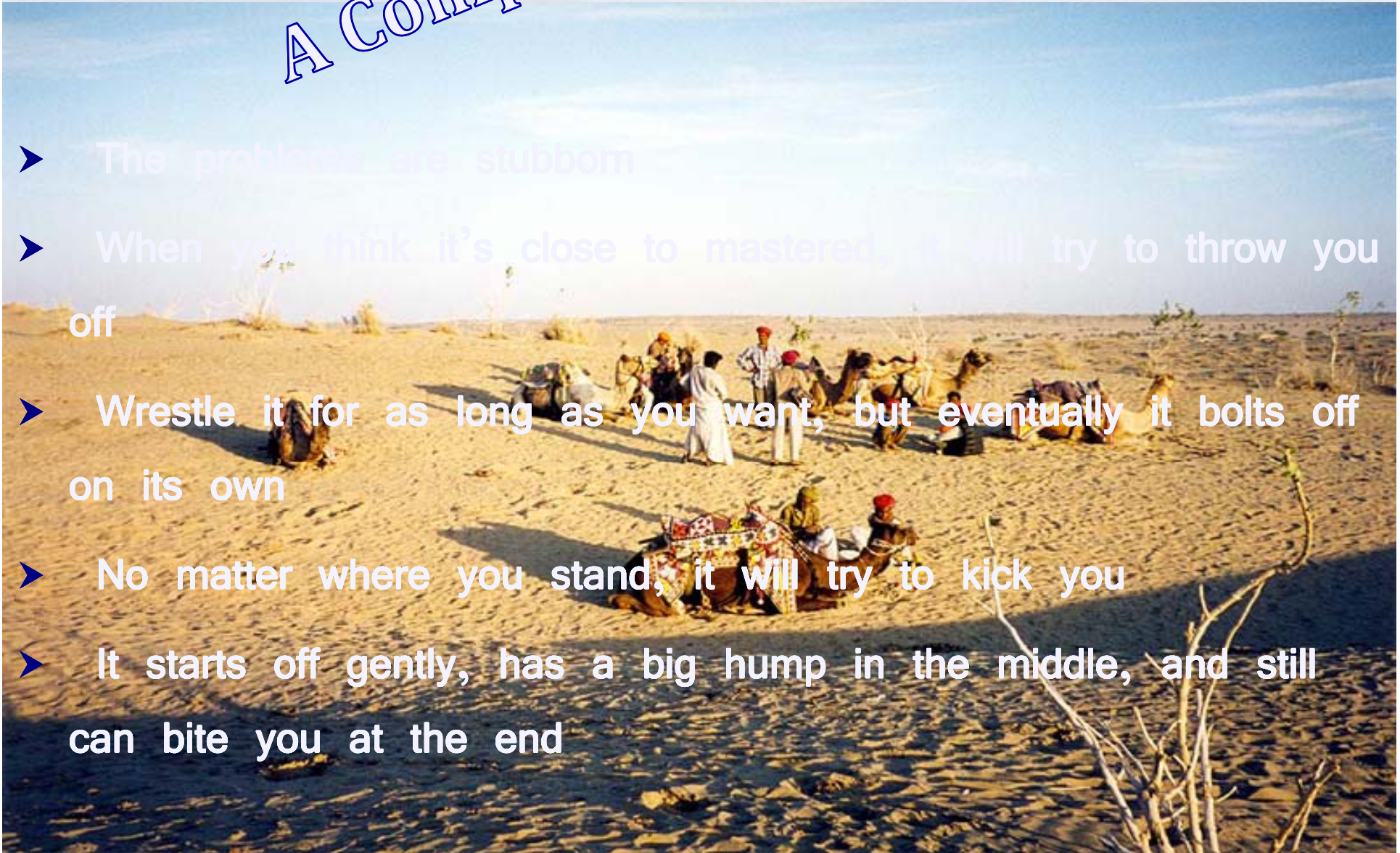
Organizational Value

Rethinking Project Management Practice

Janice Thomas, PhD
Athabasca University

Why Is *A Complex Project* Like A Camel?

- The problems are stubborn
- When you think it's close to mastered, it will try to throw you off
- Wrestle it for as long as you want, but eventually it bolts off on its own
- No matter where you stand, it will try to kick you
- It starts off gently, has a big hump in the middle, and still can bite you at the end



Topics

- Quest for Value – A Research Project
- Findings
- Two Profoundly Easy/Hard Truths
 - Value and practice is contextual
 - CASE method doesn't work
- Implications for Discussion

A Truly Complex Project

THE QUEST

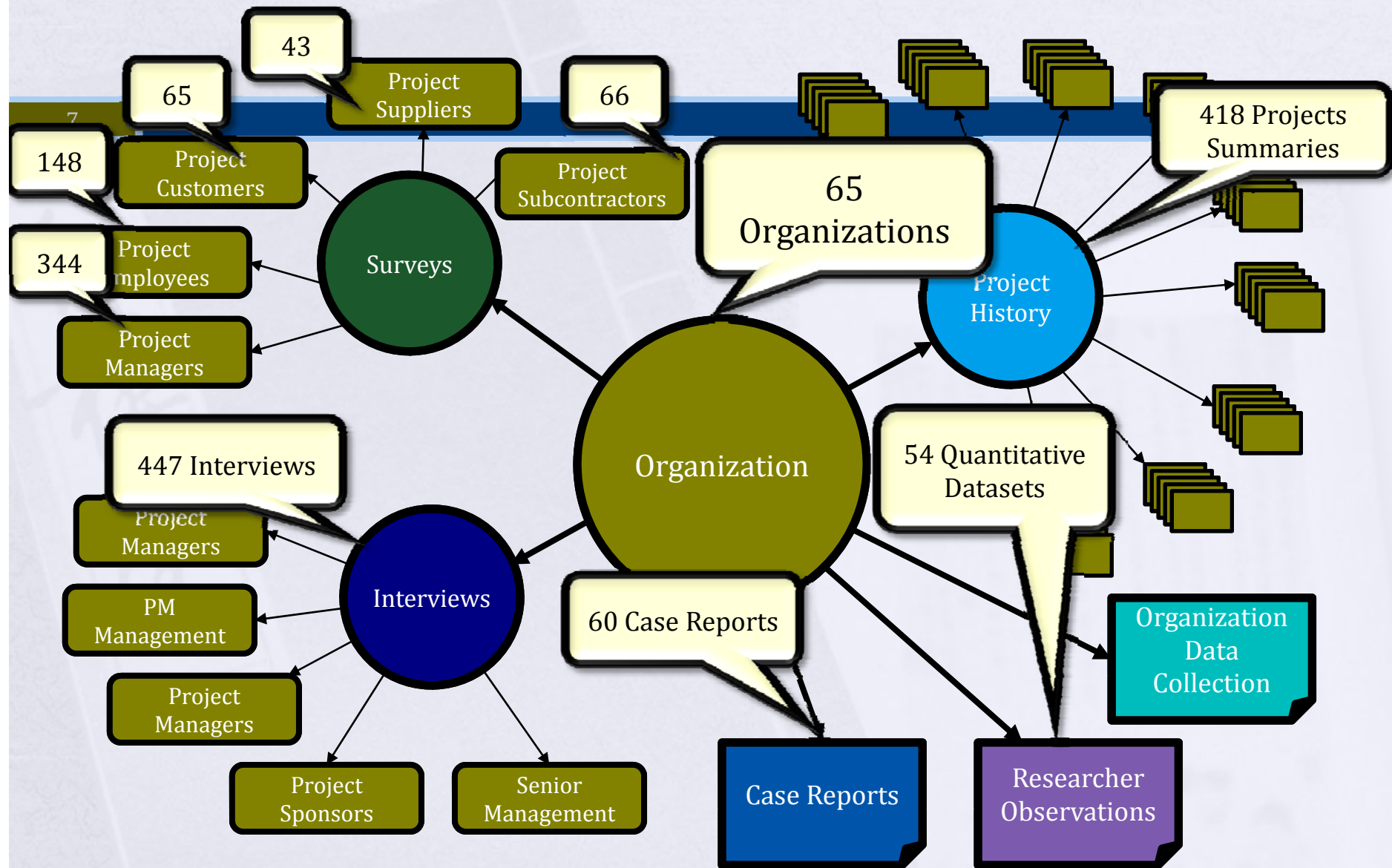
The Quest

- Millions spent on improving project management practise annually all over the world
- Project Management
 - All of the tools, processes, structures, resources needed to support managing projects in organizations
- Supported by:
 - Professional Associations
 - Professional standards based on “best practise”
 - Training, certification, global consulting, PMMMs and publishing
 - Exponential growth since 1990
- What value do organizations receive for their investment in Project Management?

The Research Project

- 48 academics, 18 teams, 14 countries over 3+ years
- Multi method, in-depth case studies
- 65 quasi experiments examining implementation of the “same” organizational innovation
- Data collected includes:
 - Interviews – 5 different informants
 - Surveys – 5 different informants
 - Project histories
 - Researcher case stories
 - Organizational demographics
- Exploratory quantitative and qualitative analysis used to derive configurations

...And A Great Deal Of Data...



Two Profoundly Easy Hard Truths

FINDINGS

Value and Practice is Contextual

- There is no one right way to practice PM
(Scandinavian School, 1994, Shenhar et al, 1996)
- Yet, PM continues to be reified, talked about, and taught as if it exists independent of organizational practices
- This research clearly shows how individual organizational and contextual characteristics influence the practices, decisions and tools used to effectively manage projects in organizations

Context and Implementation

Context Dimension	Full PM/ Delivery PMO	LT Training/ PM Authority	Cost Managem ent/ Control	External Off-The- Shelf Training	Trained Experts/Met hodology PMO
Construction in developing economies			−.371(**)	−.302(*)	−.337(**)
Innovative, conflict- avoiding PD					
Customer-focused Product Dev	.540(**)				
Positive PM in government		.272(*)	−.265(*)		
PM experience in government	.323(*)			.380(**)	
Organizational change	−.260(*)				−.278(*)

Customer Satisfaction

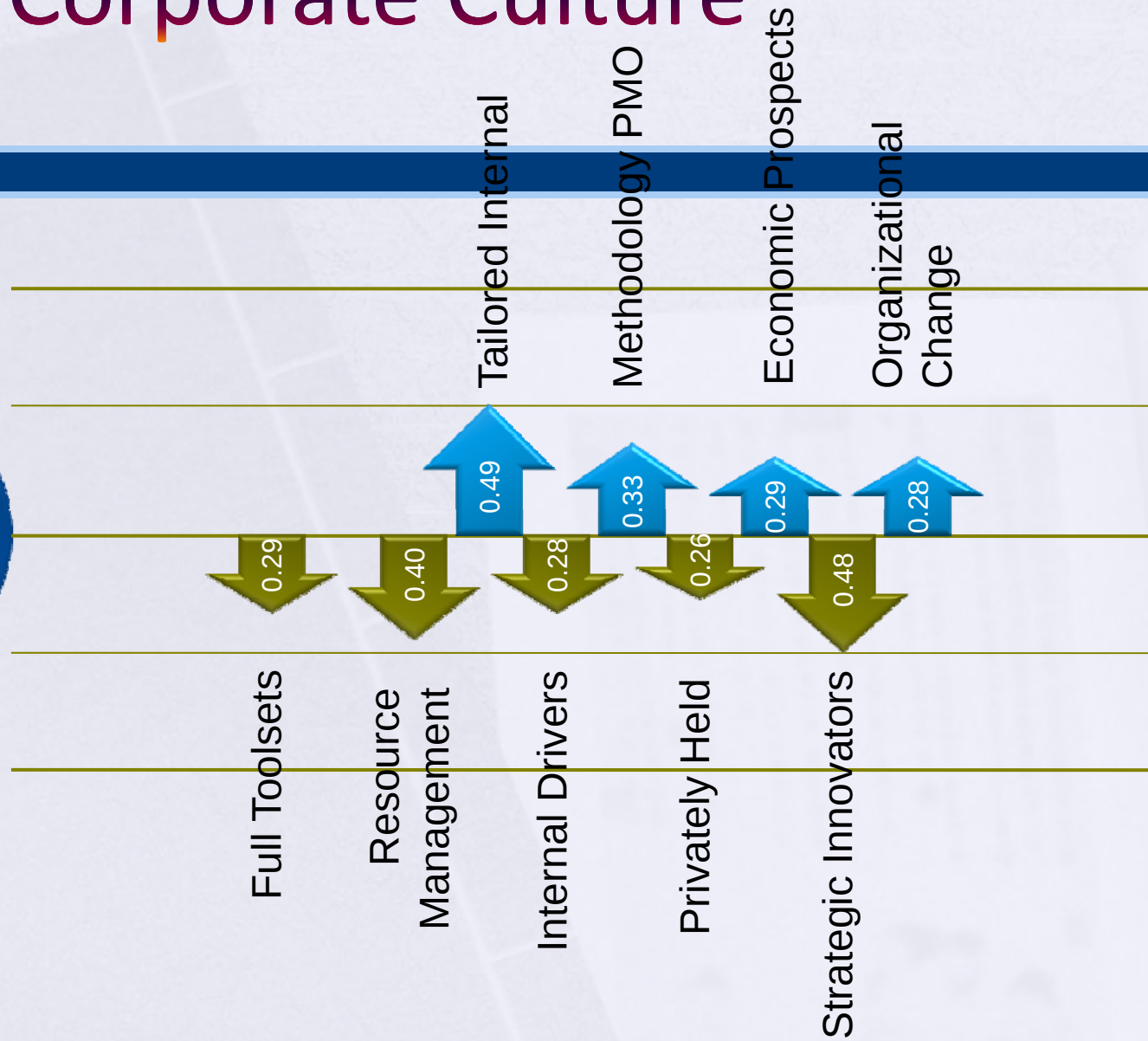
11



Cost Management

Corporate Culture

12



So What?

- Value Arises From Appropriate Implementations for Context
 - Configurations or archetypes clearly present
 - Different values depend upon very different contextual and implementation factors
 - Strongly supportive of need for a systems approach to fit
- Evidence of Equifinality
- Process of Innovation Drives Large Proportion of the Benefits
- A Common Meta approach to Implementing the PM Unchanging over 20+ years

PM as an Organizational Innovation

- Episodic, Complex, Dynamic, Simultaneous
- Rhetoric implies monolithic conception, adoption and application (Wolfe, 1994)
- What is implemented and why is often different than reality (Zbaracki, 1998)
- Most innovations are modified before, during or after implementation (Rogers, 1995)
- Little research to date on
 - the degree and type of changes to a particular innovation and
 - how the characteristics of the innovation, the organization and the external context influences these changes (Maman, 2009)

Typical Adoption of PM Journey

15



Process	Crisis Reaction	Institutionalization Fads and Fashion Maturity Models	Learning	Knowledge Management
Players	Champion	Consultants & Associations	Managers & HR, OD	Professionals

Insights

- In the case of PM, we don't see much adaptation before implementation
 - 1st derivative of innovation is standards based
 - 2nd is experimentation and learning driven
 - 3rd is expert and experience driven
- As innovations progress, configurations based on industry and strategic drivers evolve
- Organizations outgrow the expertise of the professional associations / maturity models
- No one organizational change theory seems to explain the lifecycle of the innovation

The CASE Method Doesn't work

- Organizational project management capabilities do not, and cannot, arise solely from adopting “best practices” proven in other contexts
- Organizational project management delivers value when this capability emerges from the confluence of:
 - individual capacities,
 - internal and external knowledge development, and
 - organizational needs

What does?

- CONCEPT program
 - Evolving, research, knowledge based voyage of discovery
 - Investment in understanding both needs and practices
 - Developing a “fit” between PM and organizational needs

Now what?

IMPLICATIONS

Implications For Practice

- Maturity Models and `Best Practice` Need to Account For Context
- A Systems Approach Leads To Recommendations Based Upon Contextual Contingencies
- Re-Consider Degree To Which Consistency Of Practices Is a Focus
- Recognize Both Micro- and Macro-Level Specifications
- Recognize That Fit Is Dynamic, Constantly Changing, and Unique
 - And practices will need to adapt accordingly

Implications for Training

- Needs to Incorporate:
 - Sophisticated understanding of org theory
 - strategy, organization change, organizational behavior, power politics, team dynamics, complex adaptive systems
 - psychology and special ed
 - Recognition that the standards and textbook materials are not recipes or rules or auditable standards
 - Learning from practice as well as theory
 - Developing ability to take action under uncertainty to achieve objectives
 - Professional, ethical standards for project decisions

Implications for Research

- Tear down the `conspiracy of optimism` cloaking much PM research
- Eliminate the journalistic reporting of what is to focus on understanding why it is
- Develop evidence to support project managers and others in `talking truth to power`

Comments/Questions?

Janice Thomas
Professor, Project Management
Athabasca University
JaniceT@Athabascau.ca
403-949-4965