

The “5 Project Management Lifecycle (PMLC) elements” model of 5-PATHS™ methodology

5-PATHS™ approach differentiates Project Management Lifecycle (PMLC) vs. Project Lifecycle (PLC) as terms used commonly in project management methodologies. (We presume the reader is aware of the general term “lifecycle”)

The **PMLC** refers to the **delivery of the Project** itself from management point of view.

On the contrary the **PLC** refers to the **delivery of the expected Project Results** from delivery point of view utilizing Project Management elements, stages, processes and tools. Project lifecycles may vary from the nature of the project. On the other hand a typical PLC – focusing on the delivery of the project results - usually has five well-known phases, namely: preparation, design, realization, final preparation and go-live with support.

Our project experiences show that it is very common that the elements & stages of PMLC and phases of PLC (and even the real GDPM Milestones) are often confused or **interlaced**.

The methodology also distinguishes states/elements vs. phases/stages.

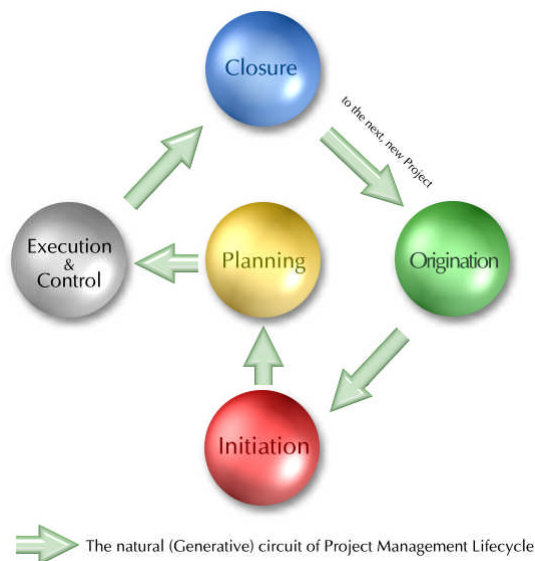


Figure 1 shows the “Generative circuit”, the only right & natural order of Project Management Lifecycle (PMLC) elements according to our methodology.

Later on, Figure 2, 3 & 4 will point out the deep and complex interrelationships of the “5 PMLC elements”.

These figures will depict the so-called **restrictive circuits** of Project Management Lifecycle indicating the pitfalls if we do not follow the natural way of “Generative circuit” as well as handling and controlling the PMLC elements improperly.

Figure1: Project Management Lifecycle according to 5-PATHS™

The “5 PMLC elements” model depicts the following association of ideas

1. **Project Origination element** is associated with ideas such as **generating** new thoughts, start/restart, origin/conception
2. **Project Initiation element** is associated with ideas such as **brainstorming**, creativity, discussions, encountering initiatives & suggestions
3. **Project Planning element** is associated with ideas such as the **CENTER of changes, normalizing** thoughts and activities, balancing & harmonizing plans, transforming or transitioning (e.g.: new thoughts to initiatives, argued ideas to real plans, plans to executions, gained knowledge to new ideas)
4. **Project Execution & control element** is associated with ideas such as actions, **performing**, structures, tools & technologies, controlling, monitoring and checking the execution
5. **Project Closure element** is associated with ideas such as **ending/closing**, summarizing, evaluation, **beginning of something new**

According to our model the Project Management is balanced when the **Origination, Initiation, Planning, Execution & control** and **Closure** elements are applied & controlled appropriately and they follow each other in this natural order as shown in *Figure 1*. This approach is a prerequisite & first step towards a balanced Project Management and towards a successful Project.

Please note that the entire 5-PATHS™ methodology as well as its “5 PMLC elements” model follows the well-known “**Do It Right First Time**” slogan (e.g. see in *TQM, Six Sigma*) and indeed the ways to do it. It is very important especially as the Project Management has its major enemy: the uncertainty. If we abandon the natural way we just simple increase the uncertainty.

What are the deeper ideas behind all of this?

“5 PMLC elements” model of 5-PATHS™ methodology depicts a unidirectional relationships among the five Project Management elements mentioned before, utilizing the traditional “**Five Elements theory**”. The most western Change, Project, Quality & Knowledge Management methods use other approaches supposing only one (or maximum two) directional relationship of components with four or even less cyclical phases. These approaches skip or disregard stages and vital components of natural lifecycles can be easily observed in our constantly changing world.

Please note that there are very similar approaches to 5-PATHS™ “5 elements PMLC” model such as “NYS Project Management” model and (revised) Group Dynamics model.

The importance of **Five Elements theory** in Project Management

The ancient **Five Elements theory** comprises a dynamic system that describes natural, cyclical movements within time and space. This approach enables a practitioner to think and act more efficiently. The theory describes the five observable qualities, elements, states or transition stages of the CHANGE with their complex interrelationships. It represents 5 different qualities of natural phenomena rather than 5 fixed substances. The five universal, interconnecting elements / qualities of change - in the order of natural lifecycle from beginnings to completions - are the following:

1. **Wood** element (green) – originating, **generating**, forming & ascending qualities of changes
2. **Fire** element (red) – growing, **developing**, expanding & culminating qualities of changes
3. **Earth** element (yellow) – receptive, central, stabilizing, **harmonizing** & transitioning qualities
4. **Metal** element (gray-white) – structural, diminishing, **realizing** & releasing qualities of changes
5. **Water** element (blue-black) – descending, **finishing** and gathering qualities of changes

All the five states/elements/QUALITY of the CHANGE are ESSENTIAL, but none of them should be under- or overemphasized. There is another important thing: nothing is constant but the Change itself. The ancient Eastern approaches including “Five Elements theory” announce that all things are cycling and changing... and the CHANGE itself is in balance when all the five elements interact in harmony.

Please note that usually we are not talking about real materials in relation to Five Elements. The names are rather symbolic, the metaphorical representations of the way the changing energy / quality behaves. The ancient Eastern approaches (content of the Book of Changes /I-Ching/, Yin-Yang, Five elements) can describe all phenomena of our changing world, however we only introduce the parts of this comprehensive approach (Five Elements theory) at the level of Project Management Lifecycle.

“Generative circuit” of Project Management Lifecycle (PMLC)

As described previously, “Generative circuit” of PMLC (see *Figure 1*) depicts the natural order of ALL types of lifecycles including Project Management Lifecycle.

According to **Five Elements theory** the “Generative circuit” of lifecycles flows in the right, natural way & direction where each element creates, originates or feeds the subsequent element (or quality) as described below, with their metaphorical examples:

1. Wood creates, feeds Fire element (i.e.: wood fuels fire)
2. Fire creates Earth element (i.e.: volcanic soils for grape-yards, creation of the Earth globe)
3. Earth creates Metal element (i.e.: metal ore is purified)
4. Metal creates Water element (i.e.: metal creates water in the form of condensation)
5. Water creates, feeds Wood element (i.e.: moisture/water is vital for organic life)

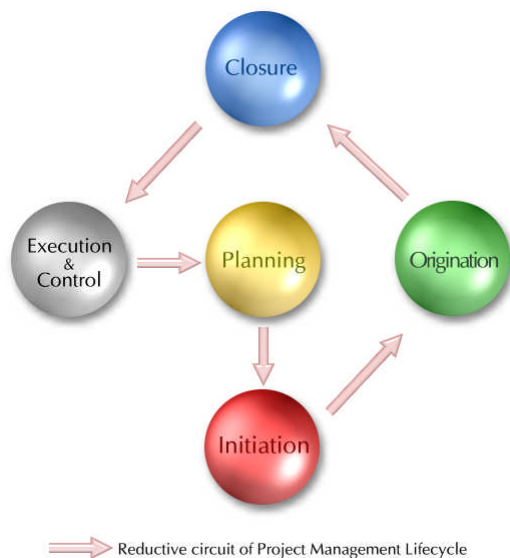
And now let us look at the potential pitfalls... What happens if we ignore the natural way & elements of changes? What if we walk into the so-called “restrictive directions”, or skip the vital elements, by any chance we under- or overemphasize PMLC elements?

“Reductive circuit” of Project Management Lifecycle (PMLC)

The “Reductive circuit” of lifecycles flows back in the opposite direction of “Generative circuit” and a given state/element reduces or weakens the strength or energy of the preceding element (or quality) as described below:

1. Wood reduces the Water element (i.e.: absorbs water)
2. Water weakens the Metal element (i.e.: rusts)
3. Metal excavates & reshapes the Earth element (i.e.: reshapes the soils)
4. Earth suppresses the Fire element (i.e.: reduces it to glow)
5. Fires reduces the Wood element (i.e.: reduces to charcoal)

Figure 2 shows the “Reductive circuit”. At the first glance this circuit of the PMLC seems to be not happening at all and it is nonsense...



Unfortunately this is not true. Project management experiences show that the part of this circuit happens more than we could imagine. Probably the Project Management has been started in the right manner (or not), however one or more elements of the “Generative circuit” were skipped or handled inappropriately during the PMLC. In this case projects usually choose the so-called “fire-fighting” method: we must get back to urgently MODIFY our current PROJECT PLAN instead of appropriately ORIGINATING OTHER NEW PROJECT. This is a typical defect handling method, which could birth more new defects if the root causes have not been found – remember: “Do It Right First Time”.

(Please note that the plan might be changed but the budget, timeframe and resources are still the same. In order to modify all of these we should get back to the Project Origination state to modify & sign-off our new Business Case of the same project). Consequently, with this action from the Execution state we have already walked into the reductive way of PMLC.

Figure 2: Reductive circuit of PMLC

It is also obvious that in some cases we are not able to originate a new project usually due to time, budget, resource & constraints. However this desultory approach also can result budget, time and resource issues and never-ending, unsuccessful projects (Catch-22). Why? We just simple disregarded the natural law...

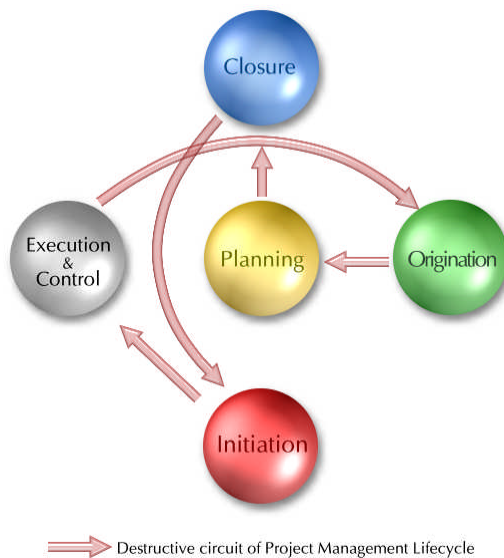
On the other hand the figure above may have another interpretation. In accordance with **Five Elements theory** it is actually an “**overacting-control cycle**” when one element is overacting the next one in the “Generative circuit”, therefore the “overacting” element should be reduced, controlled by the other (i.e.: if **Project Initiation** is overemphasized then **Project Planning** element should control it theoretically).

“Destructive circuit” of Project Management Lifecycle (PMLC)

The “Destructive circuit” of lifecycles is described below:

1. Wood consumes Earth element (i.e.: eats up the soil)
2. Earth dams up Water element (i.e.: continents, water-beds, dams)
3. Water puts out Fire element (i.e.: fire-fighting with water)
4. Fire melts Metal element (i.e.: smelter-fluxing)
5. Metal cuts Wood element (i.e.: axe splits the wood)

Figure 3 below shows the “Destructive circuit” of PMLC. It is very clear from this figure where the Project Management pitfalls can be...



For example if we skip the Initiation (Fire element) step before Planning (Earth element) and jump directly from **Origination** (Wood element) to **Planning** it practically means that we **have started the “Destructive circuit” of PMLC**. Therefore, we are trying to plan without preparing or initiating ourselves for the expected change. Consequently, we ignore the first important iteration cycle and its components: the brainstorming sessions, the conflicting interests and opinions, the initial ideas, raised issues, the key results and result paths (etc.) all coming from a group-work.

With a metaphorical example: we do not utilize the force of the FIRE element, which has creativity and enlightens the right way... With the Five Elements metaphor, Wood element consumes the Earth element before Fire element could enrich or fatten it).

Figure 3: Destructive circuit of PMLC

This general idea could be followed when we skip from Initiation to Execution & Control. Before we suitably planned the activities and responsibilities, the proper schedule, etc. we have already in the middle of the execution. This usually results haste, embarrassment and combustion. We simply unable to produce anything because jumped to a burning caldron. Metaphorically, Fire element smelts the Metal element...

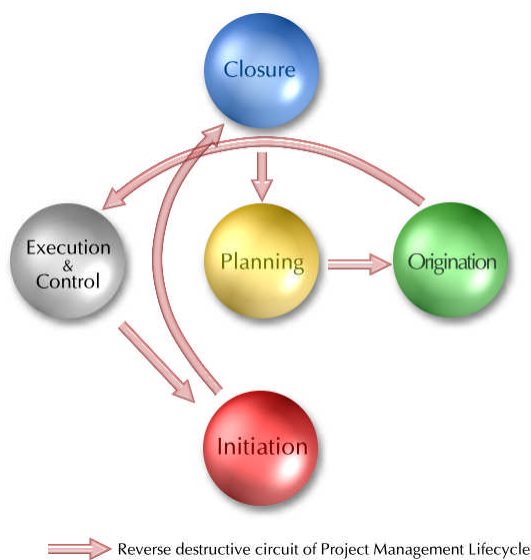
Another example is when we jump from Execution & Control to Origination. We have a lot of new ideas when we are performing the actions... We typically propose a lot of MISSED FUNCTIONS or an even better solution to be implemented in the current project... in general there is no problem with this attitude because this is nature of the Human thinking (we are experimental beings)... On the other hand from the Project Management point of view this approach split up all real new ideas for a new change (Metaphorically Metal element splits up the Wood element). It is very common in every project. Instead of closing the planned project properly **we want to put everything in the same project**. But we always forget something: we have human resource, material resource, time-frame, budget, legal, technical and other constraints as well as huge risks when we want to walk into this unnatural way.

“Reverse destructive circuit” of Project Management Lifecycle (PMLC)

The “Reverse destructive circuit” of lifecycles (or quality) shows the relationship between two elements in the opposite direction of the “Destructive circuit” as described below:

1. Wood fractures Metal element (i.e.: too strong wood even may break the blunt axe)
2. Metal restricts Fire element (i.e.: a very thick metal disperses the heat of fire)
3. Fire vaporizes Water element (i.e.: fire boils away the water in a can)
4. Water softens Earth element (i.e.: soil became mud and mire – too much rain, floods)
5. Earth decompose Wood element (i.e.: wood rots in wet soil)

Figure 4 below shows the third restrictive cycle, the “Reverse destructive circuit” of PMLC. Studying this cycle we can find another common pitfall in our Project Management.



For example if we skip the **Initiation** and **Planning** elements and their transitions stages, leaping from **Origination** to **Execution** we try to apply our new ideas and thoughts in production. In this case we just simply forgot to discuss and accept initiatives, and jumped to execution without planning the Project appropriately. (With the Five Elements metaphor: Wood element fractures Metal element)

With this action we started something where everything is confused... we started the “Reverse destructive circuit” of PMLC.

Please note that this wrong behavior is very common in a lot of Projects: let us begin the execution as soon as possible! (Due to time-constraints or the lack of S.M.A.R.T. goals - for example...) Later on, anyhow we can get back to try correcting defects and solving issues... This is the way as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: “Reverse destructive circuit” of PMLC

On the other hand the figure above may have another interpretation (as we have seen at the “Reductive circuit”). In accordance with **Five Elements theory** it is actually a “**counteracting-control cycle**” where the elements counteract the effects of the destructive elements / forces. (With a metaphor: we try to split up a hardwood with a blunt axe, the structure of the metal is very weak, therefore the axe-head to be broken into parts. Although we think the axe is stronger than the wood...)

Consequently, we can state that in accordance with the **Five Elements theory** the three restrictive cycles keep the balance in a CHANGE or TRANSFORMATION process if one or more element of the “Generative circuit” is overemphasized or over-functioning. Therefore, the generative and restrictive qualities of the five elements should check or control each other.

In other words, taking one more example from the “Reductive circuit” of PMLC: The **Project Initiation** (Fire element) is overemphasized (i.e.: spending too much time with meaningless discussions and debates, trying to clarify non-existent / not-real issues, making personal power wars and ignoring joint goals, etc.) the Project Management itself must be controlled somehow, in a natural way. In this case the **Project Planning** will reduce the state of “too much ado about nothing” (see “Reductive circuit”) as it will enforce **Project Initiation** to be finished as soon as possible.

As a result we can observe the following phenomena in compliance with **Five Elements theory**. If a Project Management element and its transition process (to the next proper PMLC element) is not suitably applied or handled, a natural counterforce may weaken, decrease, restrict the related Project Management element or the whole lifecycle, according to one of the three restrictive circuits...

In short, if we act in accordance with the instructions listed below we may have a balanced Project Management and a successful Project. Therefore, let us try to follow the natural way:

1. always start with Project Origination element and its transition processes properly
2. avoid skipping any element or transition phase/stage of “Generative circuit”
3. prevent going to the opposite direction of “Generative circuit” of Project Management Lifecycle
4. stay away from underemphasizing a Project Management element or its transition processes
5. keep away from overemphasizing a Project Management element or its transition processes

Please note that there are other interesting interpretations of the three non-generative circuits such as Tom Graves' standpoint (see “Five elements to model workplace dynamics” – 2002). Nevertheless, it can be stated that interpretations related to **Five Elements theory** point out the Project Management pitfalls and lead to the same conclusion: only the properly applied and controlled, “Generative circuit” of PMLC is the right and productive way as we can observe it in the nature. Subsequently, the controlling functions are “organically” built in this “natural system”.

Please also note that the **Five Elements theory** is not an inconceivable hypothesis. Although it seems to be a hypothetical approach and represents 5 different qualities of natural phenomena rather than 5 fixed substances, the metaphorical examples can be found also in the real (material) life by observing the physical interrelationships of the substances/materials.

Draft version (V0.53) of “5 PMLC elements” model
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