

Project Management Capability and Maturity

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Abstract: Stephen Harrison answers questions posed to him regarding how to establish and mature project management capability within an organisation.

1) What project management methodology is suitable for today's global economy?

Any methodology that supports the organisation to the level and proficiency required for the project managers to be effective in their environment is suitable. Different methodologies suit different organisations. Many of the large IT companies (IBM, NCR, and others) have developed their own methodologies. These tend to be comprehensive, provide detailed guidelines, processes and templates for projects they engage in, and the detail and formality is fitting for the nature of the projects they manage. However, for an organisation beginning to adopt formal project management such a comprehensive approach can be overwhelming and even detrimental to the organisation.

A methodology on its own, any methodology, will fail without such support as training, coaching and mentoring by experienced practitioners, management's commitment to longer term outcomes rather than short-term gains, recognition of the learning curve required for developing project managers, and making adoption of the methodology an assessed performance indicator.

2) What is the significance of organizational change management in enhancing project management effectiveness?

Organisational change management relies on project management to implement change initiatives. Those initiatives may be directed at creating any change within the organisation, including the enhancement of project management capability and effectiveness.

If specifically examining what change management is required to enhance organisational project management effectiveness a wide variety of options are available. Examples include implementing:

- a simple methodology with focus on specific key actions that must be performed on all projects
- a rigorous methodology
- portfolio management to tie projects to strategic objectives
- Program offices at project and/or enterprise level which may perform a variety of possible functions

Such change initiatives generally include business process changes, training and support of staff engaged in affected areas, and changes in technology. A clearly articulated vision of the desired end state and a genuine commitment from senior management is required for success.

3) What are the strategies that facilitate successful change management?

Successful change management strategies involve clearly defining the final state and objectives of the change, engaging the staff, recognising them as valued and contributing stakeholders, and providing clear, committed leadership across the organisation, but most especially from the top.

Many organisations attempt to fix the immediate and obvious issues, but fail to study and understand the true problems. Consequently they make short-term fixes, often with negative long-term consequences, and unrelated to organisational vision and strategy. They may also underestimate the level of tension, fear and resistance among their staff that change initiatives generate. Successful change management approaches address these situations.

Facilitating successful change management initiatives require:

- **Recognising** a need for real and lasting organisational change
- **Engaging** the support and involvement of key stakeholders
- **Crafting** the vision and the strategic and operational plans
- **Implementing** the changes in an effective, deliberate manner
- **Assessing** the results to ensure that desired outcomes have been accomplished, taking corrective action as required

4) How can an organization achieve the highest level of project management maturity?

First it must answer the question, “Why is achieving the highest level of project management maturity important to us?” If sufficient leverage can be developed for full executive commitment, success is more likely. Developing project management maturity within the organisation, especially if the highest levels are being considered, takes several years, much resource and serious commitment. Maturing project management in the organisation requires small, bite-sized steps, each step providing value to the organisation.

Engaging external consultants to conduct reviews of key projects and of project management practices across the organisation can provide an objective assessment of the current strengths and weaknesses, and help identify where specific attention and focus is required. Ideally the reviews will highlight what the short-, medium-, and long-term priorities ought to be.

Elements required to successfully mature project management within your organisation include:

- Commitment, commitment, commitment!
- Formalising project management processes
- Training and developing staff (project managers, team members, and senior executives)
- Creating a learning organisation where failure is permitted but lessons are recognised, codified, disseminated and utilised throughout the organisation
- Assessing performance against defined standards and competencies
- Recognising and rewarding the desired behaviours
- Providing the tools necessary to support the project activities
- Adopting a continuous improvement culture

5) What role do you envisage for the future project manager in improving a company's bottom line?

The project manager employs scarce resources to deliver important outcomes for the organisation. Often working across functional groups, the opportunity to create synergy and operational efficiency is increased, with potential for improving the company's bottom line. Competent project managers are able to work in a dynamic, fast-changing environment, and create results the organisation requires. They are a link between strategy and operational reality. They can assist in materialising corporate vision.

However, they are not the whole solution. Their success is dependent on the organisation. Without a culture that develops and matures project management as a discipline the project manager is often competing against the organisation for the resource and other support required, success therefore being far from certain.

6) *How can organizations assess training needs of their project managers?*

Start with the end in mind. What project management skills and proficiency do you wish to develop and maintain within your organisation? Is project management a core competency you need and to what extent? What specific competencies are required for your project managers to succeed in their role in your organisation? Project management standards, benchmarks against other organisations, and surveying your project managers regarding their needs can assist this process.

Secondly, assess the current levels of skill, experience and training among your project managers against the target skill levels. Then define and implement a training program that bridges the gap.

Project management is not a discipline that can be mastered on a one or two day training course. Training requirements are extensive, and the post-course learning curve is steep. It is essential that PMs receive an overview initially, and are then trained at a deeper level in core subjects. On-the-job support from mentors and coaches, peer-group discussion groups are some ways to assist training and development process. Establishing a developmental target such as sitting and passing a formal project management credential such as the Project Management Institute's Project Management Professional (PMP™) can provide a realistic and beneficial goal for project managers to work towards.

Linking performance measures to the required key behaviours will help strengthen the uptake and application of project management training.

7) *What are the challenges that project managers are likely to face in future? Can you share your views on how they should equip themselves to cope with and overcome these challenges?*

Change, more change and increasingly rapid and dynamic change! The pace and extent of change affecting organisations is dramatically increasing. Project managers are primary agents for organisations keeping pace with, responding to, or harnessing changes in technology, market and economic conditions, competition etc.

Globalisation is a significant factor that affects projects and project managers. Increasingly organisations manage projects across international borders, and must cope with different cultures, and with diverse legal, financial and employment systems. They must balance the need for flexibility and creating diverse product ranges against cost reduction through standardised, optimised production systems. All these make the domain of the project manager more complex, dynamic and exciting.

Training, mentoring and coaching, and a solid project management framework within the organisation will support and assist project managers to deal with and respond to the challenges that they face now and will face in the future.

At the individual level, project managers need to take responsibility for developing their own skills and capabilities. They need to focus on both hard skills (E.g. scheduling, budgeting, managing risk) and soft skills (E.g. communicating, interpersonal skills, leadership, and developing emotional intelligence). Ideally their organisation will assist, but to develop as a capable and professional project manager, they must take responsibility for their own career.