

# Delivering Change

*Why project management consultants should transform how they think about their role.*

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These are strange times in the world of project management!

On the one hand the profession continues to grow rapidly all over the world, and organizations continue to structure more of their work as projects. University courses in project management are on the increase, particularly post-graduate qualifications. The UK Government is exerting great pressure to persuade both departments and non-government organizations to increase their project management capability.

And yet, on the other hand, seriously successful project management departments are being downsized, outsourced, broken up or dispersed into business units. The communications gulf between the Boardroom and the project management community remains as wide as ever – and as difficult to bridge.

As far as many chief executives are concerned, project management occupies a similar position in the organization to that of book-keeping or engineering – something that has to be done, but done somewhere ‘down there’ in the organization’s ‘engine room’.

It isn’t much better where senior line managers are concerned. From their point of view, project management too easily descends into a value-destroying bureaucracy. Why

can’t project managers just get on and do it, without all the fuss and the forms?

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These may be caricatures of widely-encountered beliefs and attitudes, but each of them fails to appreciate three fundamental realities: 1 Firstly, projects – discrete, novel, temporary undertakings designed to achieve beneficial change – are the essential means by which strategy and change are delivered.

2 Secondly, the management of projects is a ‘whole organization’ activity – not something simply undertaken by project managers, whether of the accidental or ‘professional’ kind.

3 Thirdly, the management of projects requires completely different capabilities, skills, systems, processes and practices from the management of ongoing operations – of ‘business as usual’, as it were.

It could well be, of course, that we – the project management ‘profession’ – have contributed to these misunderstandings by developing our own language. Try talking about project scope, or work breakdown structure to a research scientist! Our literature (Bodies of Knowledge) and the like; our professional associations; and all the other paraphernalia have all the elements of an ancient mystery religion into which people have to be initiated.

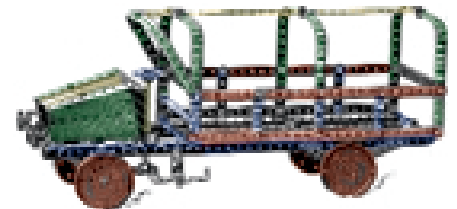
Perhaps we should stop talking about project management, or even the management of projects, and start to talk about ‘the capacity to deliver beneficial change’. After all, this is something that cuts across the whole of every organization. Every department of every organization is in the business of improving its results. And that cannot be done without delivering change. Not just new or improved products, services or infrastructure, but the total package of change necessary to thrive during turbulent times.

And at the highest level, in the post-

Turnbull world, every Board of every organization is charged with managing the risks faced by the enterprise. How can this be done without delivering beneficial change?

## Lessons from the swimming pool

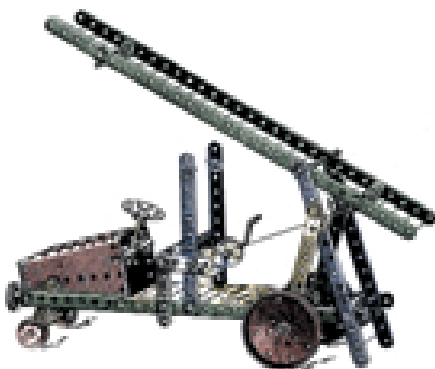
More years ago than I care to remember, my life revolved around competitive swimming. From when I was about eleven years old until I reached the ripe old age of twenty, swimming 200 m breaststroke faster than my competitors was an obsession. I would get up at the crack of dawn in order to help clean out the local swimming pool (in Leamington Spa) so as to have an hour’s session in an



empty pool before going to school. I spent hours every single day in training of some kind or other.

As I matured, improved, and enjoyed some modest success in the Nationals, I was selected with a squad of other young hopefuls to come under the auspices of the national swimming association and be set apart for special training at Loughborough college. Both our technique and our training programmes were dismantled and re-assembled under the eyes of the national coaching staff, and we were required to keep daily log books of our training results, and submit them every three months or so to our nominated swimming coach for review.

At that time in the late 1950s, of course, sport was nothing like so highly developed as it is today. But even so, alongside our swimming technique and training routine, we recognized the importance of fitness. In those

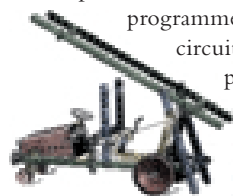


| Capability For Success.   | Accountable People.   | Typical success measures.   | Critical success factors.   |
|---|---|---|---|
| Project management capability leads to project management success.<br>"Was the project done right?"                             | * Project manager.<br><br>* Project team.   | * Time<br>* Cost<br>* Quality<br>* Technical performance<br>* Scope<br>* Safety   | 1 Clear and doable project goals.<br>2 Well-selected, capable and effective project team.<br>3 Adequate resourcing.<br>4 Clarity about technical performance requirement.<br>5 Effective planning and control.<br>6 Good risk management. |
| Project sponsor capability leads to Project success.<br>"Was the right project done?"   | * Project sponsor.<br>* "Client", "owner" or "operator" (recipient of benefits)   | * Benefits realized.<br>* Stakeholder satisfaction.   | 1 Clear and doable project goals.<br>2 Stakeholder commitment and attitude.<br>3 Effective benefits management and realization processes.<br>4 Appropriate project strategy.  |
| Organizational project capability leads to Consistent project success.<br>"Are the right projects done right, time after time?" | * Shareholders (or equivalent)<br>* Top managers.<br>* Directors of project management.<br>* Business unit managers.<br>* Portfolio managers. | * Overall success of all projects undertaken.<br>* Overall level of project management success.<br>* Productivity of key corporate resources.<br>* Effectiveness in implementing business strategy. | 1 Continuous improvement of business, project and support processes.<br>2 Efficient and effective portfolio, programme and resource management processes.<br>3 Comprehensive and focused suite of metrics covering all three levels.      |

days, it wasn't easy to find a well-equipped gymnasium where an athlete could work to develop strength and fitness. Not far from where I lived was an old converted warehouse that was home to a stable of professional and semi-professional boxers, of whom the most well known were the three Turpin brothers: Randolph, Dick and Jackie. The gym was well equipped with weights and apparatus, as well as the rings and punch bags necessary for the pugilists.

The person who ran the gym was a remarkable man called Arthur Batty who had, for some reason, lost his boxing trainer's license, but who nevertheless provided the fitness training facilities and supported the boxers' licensed trainers. I can still see Arthur in my mind's eye; short, lightly built, and with pebble glasses that seemed to me to be nearly an inch thick. It was to Arthur that I turned for the task of building up my own fitness, and he developed the programme that I needed to develop the specific fitness, strength and speed of response necessary for my chosen sport and discipline.

Arthur would keep an eye on my progress through his gym, and in the light of what he saw and the results I was obtaining in the pool, he would modify the particular programme of weight- and circuit training that he prescribed for me.



What was interesting about the whole situation was that in the same

gym, there were athletes of many different sports and disciplines: boxers, swimmers, runners, and soccer players. All recognising that fitness mattered to us, and all working together to build up and improve our own capability.

### The capability to deliver

What I am suggesting is that delivery capability is to organizations what fitness is to an athlete. Just as fitness is a means to an athlete of achieving her or his own specific goals, regardless of whether they involve swimming, running, boxing, rugby or whatever, so delivery capability is a means to any organization of accomplishing its own strategic objectives. And just as no athlete reaches the top of her or his profession without being fit, so no organization reaches its peak performance without being capable of delivering change.

No organization can thrive in today's climate without successfully delivering projects of different kinds:

- Projects to improve the performance of current activities;
- Projects to introduce new technology, new processes, new ways of working;
- Projects to develop new business, new products, new markets;
- Projects to build new infrastructure, new physical assets;

Of course, these may be combined into hybrid programmes of change. The point that I am making is that every organization needs a portfolio of change that embraces both

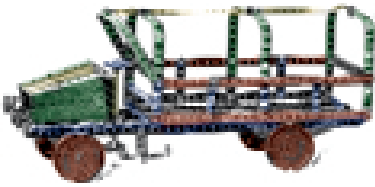
improvements to 'business as usual' and also activities to move into new areas.

And this is where the point that I was making at the start of this article comes in. By talking about 'project management' we define the scope of our interest far too narrowly. On closer inspection, 'delivery capability' turns out to comprise three different capabilities:

- The capability to manage each project to time, cost, quality, scope, safety, technical performance etc. We could call it 'Project Management Capability'.
- The capability to make sure that the product produced by each project is what the organisation needs, that it delivers the benefits that are promised from it, that the product is operated as designed etc. This one we could call 'Project Sponsorship Capability'.
- The capability to make sure that the project portfolio is the right one to implement the organisation's strategy, that scarce resources are used productively. This perhaps is the 'Organizational Project Capability'.

As the table below shows, each of these three different capabilities involves conversations with different groups of accountable people, delivers different kinds of results, and possesses different critical success factors.

There isn't the space in this article to elaborate on each cell in the table and I have in any case written about it elsewhere. The table, however, encapsulates the results of three decades of quantitative and qualitative research into project management success and suggests just how each of the capabilities can



be assessed in terms of the results that they produce. It forms the basis for dialogue with people at all levels in an organization about their role in delivering beneficial change, and so opens the way for a discussion about the most appropriate role for a project management consultant.

### The project management consultant

The sub-heading of this article is, 'Why project management consultants should transform how they think about their role.' Specifically, I am suggesting that three changes would be beneficial:

1 That the scope of our interest should change from 'project management' to 'delivery capability'. This moves the conversation out of the project management community and locates it firmly where it belongs, in the Boardroom and throughout the organization.

2 That we should assess delivery capability in terms of the specific results that it accomplishes – the particular success that results from each of the three components of delivery capability. This releases us from

being judged on whether we carried out our assignment according to plan, and allows the true value of the assignment to be assessed in terms of the benefits to the organization.

3 That we should acknowledge the similarities between our role and that of an athlete's 'fitness coach'. We are not like GPs, diagnosing the illness and prescribing pills, where all the patient has to do is to keep taking them. We are not like surgeons, removing offending parts of the organization and transplanting healthy ones, while the patient's job is simply to lie passively in intensive care and await a return to good health. We are not even like corporate engineers, tinkering with the components of the organizations mechanism to replace defective elements with newly-designed and efficiently functioning ones.

The reality is that it is our client who is competing in its chosen arena or marketplace. Like Arthur Batty, we can observe how well the client performs, diagnose areas needing improvement, suggest workout programmes that are designed to improve capability, provide facilities to support the improvement and monitor the results that the client accomplishes. But the motivation, the effort, and the sheer hard work have to come from the client.

It is a role at the same time more humble and yet more focused than we have sometimes been prone to adopt in the past.

But in these strange times, something different and yet more effective is called for.



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