

### Using the team; don't be a 'jack of all trades and master of none'

Should a Project Manager be a 'jack of all trades and master of none' i.e. should they excel in all 52 areas of project management as defined in the APM's Body of Knowledge (5th Edition)? We think that the answer to this is clearly no. There are areas where the Project Manager critically must excel, for example, in the areas of stakeholder management, leadership and communication; and more technical areas where a general appreciation and understanding is probably enough.




A more particular question is should Project Managers be experts in project scheduling software and other information systems? Some of you might immediately say yes they should, but we think the answer to this question is no too. So if the Project Manager is not an expert in scheduling software who should be? The answer lies in the Programme or Project Support Office (Project Controls to some of you in the more traditional industries). This is where specialist expertise can develop and thrive and as a result provide a real complementary and supporting service to the Project Manager.

But not all Programme Support Offices (PSOs) are the same. Over the last 10 years we have worked with organisations with very different views of what a PSO should do. These have ranged from, at one extreme, a pure data collection and data chasing role that is totally passive and reliant on others, mainly the Project Manager of course, to do all the work; to a data creation role that is proactive

and supportive to others and in particular the Project Manager. There are then many variations between these extremes but based on our personal experiences we have started to group PSOs into three types.

- **The Passive PSO** which is characterised by a group who rely on others to produce data or reports that they then collate into a higher level format without making any comment. They insist that project schedules and budgets are produced and that issue and risk logs are kept up-to-date and they will police the implementation of a change control process.
- **The Reactive PSO** which does not generate anything for the Project Manager unless they are requested to do so. In addition to what the Passive PSO does they will comment on what is produced by others and make 'reactive' recommendations.
- **The Proactive PSO** will, on behalf of the Project Manager, develop schedules, oversee the budget, define resource requirements, keep the issue and risk logs up-to-date, administer the change control process and monitor quality. In addition they will suggest changes to the project management plan or solutions to problems that they become aware of and pre-empt other likely Project Manager needs. You could say that they act as the Project Manager's 'right hand man'.

**The Proactive PSO will allow Project Managers to be just that - managers and not coordinators or administrators.** We find that too many Project Managers spend too much time either in an administration role; filling in issue and risk logs, chasing timesheets, validating invoices or as an IT specialist spending hours using project scheduling software trying to produce a schedule that is truly representative of the work to be done and perhaps wrongly but importantly looks good.



We assert that an effective, proactive PSO will not only make Project Managers more effective but they will also make them more efficient and therefore reduce the overall combined head count of Project Managers and PSO staff. **Project managers do not need to be a 'jack of all trades and master of none' they need to be 'master of some and have an overall understanding of the others'.**

Large construction and engineering companies are probably the last bastions of Project Controls, but this doesn't mean that they are out of date in their business model. In late 2004 a new set of National Occupational Standards for Project Controls was approved and these are being used by a number of large organisations to develop a new generation of support personnel for projects. These make very interesting reading and are an excellent set of competency statements around which project support expertise can be grown. In particular, they make it clear what is the domain of project controls (or support) in contrast to the domain of the Project Manager.

The companies that we have worked with range from huge multi-national engineering and construction companies to nationally based law firms. The huge multi-national companies have always recognised the benefit of having skilled project support personnel, particularly scheduling experts, in their project teams. **We firmly believe that ALL companies and therefore ALL projects will benefit from access to skilled project support personnel and especially those with project scheduling expertise.** To quote a very well respected and successful Project Manager 'a good planner (scheduler to be precise) is worth their weight in gold'. Our most recent experiences working across a whole range of different sectors that are looking at project management for the first time tells us that there is actually some truth in this statement.

It may be that there are things that can be done in your organisation to make sure that Project Managers are actually managing and have time to do this because other skilled people are providing support with the IT and administration.

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