

So - there seems to be a general agreement on what a project is and what a Project Manager does - but yet overuse and/or misuse of the terms. Whilst wondering why this was, we came across two examples that seem to typify the problem.

Last month while reading a careers supplement from the Times newspaper we spotted a job advertisement for Project Managers. While this is not by any means an unusual occurrence what struck us was the actual requirement. The document management company that was advertising was looking for Project Managers for its day, evening and night shifts i.e. three people to do the same job at different times of the day. A second example occurred only last week when we were contacted by the 'Project Manager' responsible for organising a five-day training event for an international construction company visiting the UK. The 'Project Manager' wanted to know where our presentation was and if we would be staying overnight or not!

It appears to us that the title 'Project Manager' is now used by almost everyone as the name given to the person in charge of getting a job done. Surely in the first example the job title should have been production manager or operations team leader but certainly not Project Manager and in the second example maybe event organiser or event coordinator.

In order to further substantiate our hypothesis on overuse and misuse we decided to carry out some research. Without the means or time to conduct a massive research programme we wondered how we could find out how often just the term Project Manager was used in daily life. We decided that a simple test of this would be to carry out a Google™ search on the term (searched as a phrase) and compare it with other well known jobs and roles. The results certainly surprised us; see the table opposite.

Based on a Google™ search on the phrase (search conducted on 2nd March 2007)	Number of hits
Project Manager	51,500,000
Accountant	39,900,000
Civil Engineer	7,360,000
Operations Manager	4,350,000
Human Resources Manager	1,410,000
Risk Manager	1,270,000
Medical Doctor	1,250,000
Electrical Engineer	1,210,000
Mechanical Engineer	1,200,000
Production Manager	1,340,000
Finance Manager	1,330,000
Rocket Scientist	1,050,000
Brain Surgeon	473,000

Whatever we think about statistics what we found tells us that the term Project Manager is used more than any of the others we looked at, and we tried to think of the most likely role descriptions in an organisation; and yet of those considered it is probably the least well defined or understood.

It is true there are some small projects where a single person is responsible for doing the work and managing it to defined time, cost and quality objectives such as producing an advertising leaflet on your own PC for your new house-minding service and then distributing it to the local community. There are also other 'projects' that are not

projects at all but are just work to be coordinated and managed, or there are projects where someone is managing just one aspect of it (a work package) and they are not responsible for time, cost and quality of the overall product. It is perfectly reasonable on large projects for work to be delegated to others but not everyone can be Project Manager. In an organisation where the Finance Director has a team of people working for them, not everyone is called Finance Director; so why is it that everyone is a Project Manager?

Why does any of this matter? We suggest the profession faces a significant dilemma. While the terms project and Project Manager are thrown around like confetti on a wedding day then the profession of project management can never genuinely exist as it cannot be differentiated from what many consider is just managing work. Popularity of the role Project Manager and all it brings with it (including examinations and rival associations) and the requirements of a true (even chartered) profession seem to be at total odds with each-other.

Is the popular use of the terms and concepts good, so we shouldn't try to curb the enthusiasm? Or is the inaccurate use damaging to the development of a serious profession? Should we care? We'd be interested to hear your views.

To read more Lucid Thoughts from Lucidus Consulting, please visit our website www.lucidusconsulting.com