

Achieving Success in Project and Programme Management – The unsolved mystery

There is so much written about Project and Programme Management (PPM), and many training companies around to train you and your staff in PPM, so why is it that many organisations still struggle with achieving successful outcomes from their projects and programmes?

It is possible to find many individuals and companies that will provide project or programme management support, either as advisors, or as interim posts to carry out the work for you; But is it really a lack of skills in your staff that is hampering success, or is it the organisation itself?

Before looking at this in more detail, let us first be clear about some principles that make project and programme management successful. There are many descriptions about what ensures success, but they all tend to agree on some basic fundamental parameters:

- There must be a robust process within the organisation for identifying, prioritising, resourcing, and initiating new Projects and Programmes (PPs).
- PPs must have clearly defined benefits, (what you want to achieve), which can be measured. Therefore there must also be in place a process to evaluate progress towards the desired objectives.
- PPs are time limited temporary structures, which exist to deliver the benefits identified. In other words they are not business as usual.
- PPs must have clear governance arrangements, and a process by which the manager is held to account for delivering the agreed benefits against the plan and budget.

If we consider the original question again, it is perhaps clearer that actually none of the characteristics identified above are solely dependent on a person who has been trained in project management techniques. The key to success is largely determined by the processes and structures within the organisation. The roles that senior management fulfil are critical in this regard.

It follows therefore (This means) that sending staff on training courses, and telling people to abide by a set of rules or terms will not make for successful outcomes or PPs.

The author is not proposing that experienced project managers are not part of the success factors, far from it, but often the best Project Managers are severely hampered if the fundamentals of processes, structures and management are not in place, and competent Project Managers with less experience can be completely undermined.

So what is the solution?

Unfortunately there is no easy solution, like many issues in any organisation the solution needs to be led from the top. The senior managers need to define what they expect of PPs, and they must understand the role they need to play in the approval and ongoing governance process. They must require that projects and programmes will be required to report against agreed objectives, and that as a final resort it is acceptable to stop a



project or programme even after it has begun.

This does not mean that the senior management team should be monitoring every project and programme in the organisation. This is where process becomes critical in identifying what level of governance is required, and ensuring that all projects and programmes pass through the stages of identification, planning, initiation, implementation and realisation.

If your organisation is struggling to achieve the results from projects or programmes that it expected, and as a senior manager you are concerned that the organisation may not be achieving the best outcomes then ask these simple questions:

- Do you know how many PPs are underway, in your area of responsibility, or PPs which could affect you in other associated areas of the organisation?
- Are you clear about what benefits are expected to be delivered from these PPs?
- Is there a clear process for initiating new projects and programmes that ensures they are prioritised?
- Are you clear about the role that you play in the governance of the projects and programmes under your control?

If the answer to any of these is “no” then it suggests that a realistic look at you processes and structures is needed.

ICD Consulting has significant experience working with organisations to make sure their processes and structures will support the achievement of successful projects and programmes. If you would like to discuss how we can help you in more detail, please contact us on enquiry@icdconsulting.net.