Project Support

In most small to medium sized organisations, either with or without a specialist project management function, project managers are inevitably required to perform more than one project role; over and above that of a pure Project Manager. *(This multi-role performance by project managers is also prevalent in some large organisations that are relatively immature in their approach to project management.)*

Typically project managers are required to perform two additional roles - part of the sponsorship function, often managing elements of the project justification, ie the business case and seeing through project sign off. Secondly, those of a project administration or support function.

It is the second of those, project support, that we are recommending that with proper formalisation can make a real difference to the delivery of your projects.

The difference between these two typical project manager extracurricular duties is not the distance they are outside of the boundaries of your average project manager's ability but that the former typically occupies only a relatively fleeting, point-in-time overhead, whereas the administration/support function is a constant 'burden'. The use of the word 'burden', in this case means both a time constraint and a personal irritation.

Most project managers that we have assessed perceive the more menial aspects of project management as a chore. Conversely the higher-brow aspects of project management are what motivates and drives them. This is not surprising. Most of us have aspects of our roles in professional life that we would rather not undertake for a variety of reasons. The difference with project support and administration is that there are people who enjoy and excel at these tasks. These people will undertake these duties with genuine enthusiasm either because they have a definite aptitude or, they may do so by way of getting involved in project management as part of their own personal career progression, or indeed both. (Career progression is also a very important subject for organisations – but career progression within a project environment is another topic for discussion elsewhere) Either way, the point is that almost every organisation can benefit from providing their project management team with a formal, professional project support function.

Analysis of typical market rates shows that the cost of project support roles is 1/3rd of that of a project manager. Simple maths shows that using this ratio assumption illustrates those organisations where project managers undertake multiple project roles can easily make significant savings.

So what do PMs do with all this extra time on their hands? Well typically companies fall in to two camps on this:

1) They are able to undertake more projects, which is extremely useful for those organisations experiencing a very high growth rate.

2) Project Managers have extra time to undertake higher value activities such as stake-holder management and risk management. Both of which lead to more successful project delivery.

Our preference is naturally for the latter.

The real-life implementation of a formal Project Support function undertaken by us was based on the analysis of project managers' time showing that 20% of their working week was spent producing reports of one form or another on their projects and other non-PM specific roles. We implemented not only a formal project support function but also a process for providing support that was easily flexible according to the number of active projects and project managers. It was also able to provide support to both multiple projects and more than one project manager concurrently. In a few months this yielded an increase of 35% improvement in PM productivity coupled with a 20% reduction in operational costs. Additionally, there was a 30% increase of surveyed project manager job satisfaction. Staff turnover and career progression were not monitored for this engagement but we recommend anyone implementing a long-term project management capability strategy should baseline both of these at the start of this sort of uplift in capability.

For more information on this or our other engagements or to enquire how we can help your organisation achieve an increase in PM productivity contact us here.