

The office – Education and Training

“They just don’t get it”, exclaimed one of the new contract Project Managers over a recent coffee. “I attended the Project Steering Committee meeting and they gave me a hard time over the fact the cost estimate has blown out by 50% since June. The fact is the project was way under funded, their original estimates in the Project Charter were so unrealistic. Also, they recently approved a scope change that added five new countries and two new languages to the roll out. Apparently its all my fault though, not theirs. No way, I’m not taking the blame !”

A couple of issues ago we wrote an article for this magazine about the role of the PMO with respect to professional development, with a focus on Project Managers. This time we are going to consider a similar topic but for the rest of the organisation.

Once of the hardest things an organisation can take on is the education of Senior Managers about Project Management and Project Governance. Senior Managers tend to have a number of traits:

1. Many lack knowledge of Project Management or Project Governance
2. They are incredibly busy, so often cannot attend scheduled training or spend time doing self paced reading/training
3. They are by their very nature senior, they are used to leading, not following
4. They may be reluctant to admit they don’t know something
5. They are generally highly intelligent people with vast business experience so pick up on things faster than most

Roles and Responsibilities are interesting. The Project Manager’s role is to deliver the project. It is the Sponsor and Business Owner’s role to define the objectives, deliver the benefits and contribute to decision making. While the Project Manager does not have a role in either of these aspects, they obviously have a huge interest in ensuring they are done properly for the benefit of their project. This means the Project Manager has a training and education role, albeit a subtle one. Educating senior managers may mean leading them through the process, patiently explaining the steps. It could mean “clarifying” roles with them as part of establishing the project, ensuring they pick up on their own role along the way. It could mean deliberately pushing for decisions to be made, especially gate approvals. It could mean reviewing their Business Case document and even helping them with it.

Similarly the Project Manager will be dealing with various Team leads and/or vendors, delivering parts of their projects (major WBS elements). These Team leads and/or vendors will likely have varied knowledge and skills in Project Management. While it is not the Project Managers role to train them, any lack of knowledge or skill they have may affect delivery of their part of the project. In some respects, their part of the project is like a mini project, they are effectively the Project Manager of it. They will need to know basics of managing scope, time, risk, quality, people, communications and sometimes procurement, all Project Management domains.

And then there is the PMO. While we would like to think that PMO are suitably skilled and experienced, often they are not. We have previously written about young graduates

and the pathways that exist into Project Management through support roles such as the PMO. Project Managers sometimes need to educate these more junior PMO staff about the realities of Project Management. The complexities of governance, and stakeholder management are often not well understood. Managing cost, schedule and risk require specific skills often lacking in young PMO staff.

We have also previously written about the importance of the PMO manager having a background in Project Management. The PMO manager should be able to provide Project Managers with advice and also to educate them where necessary. Education in this context would be unlikely to be formal instructor led, more likely through a coaching/mentoring arrangement or through occasional advice. Either way it is important that the Project Managers respect the PMO manager and are open to the education being offered.

Lifting Project Management maturity in an organisation is difficult and takes time. Patience, education and training are key factors. This is where the PMO has a role, along with all the Project Managers.

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If you'd like to debate or discuss, join the AIPM PMO Special Interest Group or contact your local PMO SIG Chair for more details.

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