# Project Managers in Demand

## By Pip Peel

According to a study commissioned by the Project Management Institute, there will be demand for over 15 million more project managers across the globe by 2020…….God help us!

With Project Management skills firmly placed as a core requirement for growing organisations, the expansion of the Project Management profession is set to continue. In the UK, roughly one million new project management roles will be created by the end of the decade. This highlights the need for more, better trained project leaders. Salaries and fees will increase as demand outstrips supply and the best Project Managers can expect to be busy for years to come.

That's great news for training institutions, Project Management professional bodies, recruiters and consultancies; not so good for the organisations that need the expertise.

**Still Failing Us**

Most studies still conclude that fewer than two-thirds of projects deliver their intended goals. More worryingly, project delivery success rates are falling and have been for the last decade. It seems the efforts of the main Project Management accreditation bodies have failed to turn the tide of these dismal statistics. What hope is there for the very companies that seek those one million more Project Managers or, as a Chief Executive of a large UK organisation once coined them – "Agents of Under-Achievement"?

This is not to denounce the efforts of, say, the Project Management Institute (PMI) or the Association for Project Management (APM). These bodies and ones like them have been advocating best practice for years, providing valuable resources for Project Managers and the companies that employ them. Membership of these organisations has continued to grow, but together they "account" for just 23,000 of the 1.5 million practising Project Managers in the UK. It is time for a radical new strategy to improve the quality (and increase the number) of Project Managers in the UK and around the Globe.

**Be Practical**

A simple internet search for Project Management training throws up some signs that all is not right in the drive for better equipped Project Leaders. "Become a Qualified Project Manager in 4 days" announces one training company. "Earn between £40k to £80k with a PRINCE2 qualification" (a popular Project Management "theory") claims another. Even a so called professional Project Management qualification (for example, the PMI's Project Management Professional certification) can be gained in the classroom in 5 days according to some training specialists.

Project Managers are not born in a classroom. To claim that a few days in a seminar can qualify a would-be Project Manager to lead a business transformation or manage the roll out of a new product to the UK market commoditises the profession. It undermines those experienced Project Leaders who have toiled and have the scars to show for a life-long honing of their skills. It is time to discredit these claims once and for all. Building a globally recognised professional certification that is founded on both education *and* (more importantly) work-place experience is an essential first step in driving up Project Management competence.

A model along the lines of the UK's Engineering Council is what is required specifically for the Project Management profession. This body, whose formation started 50 years' ago, is the UK's regulatory body for the engineering profession. It sets the standards of professional competence for engineers. Its Chartered Engineer (CEng) status can only be achieved through a combination of academic learning and "Assessed Professional Development" – on the job inspection. It works. Driven in some part by a Health and Safety compass (people can die when engineering projects go wrong), the CEng is a globally recognised accreditation that has the trust of employers and provides a measure of a professional's practical competence, not just his or her theoretical knowledge. Project Management has much to learn from this model.

**Get Personal**

Building technical ability is only part of the challenge, however. There is a vital (and, in the views of this author) over-looked core competence that must be part of the tool-box of any successful Project Manager. This competence is not straightforward. It has an air of the "art" rather than the "science" about it. It is Leadership. On the face of it, this seems too obvious to call out. The distinction is drawn here, however, between *Management* and *Leadership*. A Project *Manager* can analyse the relevant project status data, determine the necessary actions required to remain on track and disseminate instructions to their "resources". A Project *Leader* on the other hand does all of this but has an innate ability to motivate, engender teamwork, build co-operation between disjointed parties and deliver the project within the context and complexities of the changing organisation around them. The Leader has highly-tuned inter-personal skills. He or she is all about *people*; not *resource*s.

There is an on-going and healthy debate among the many authors on Leadership as to whether this competence is inherent, in the genes; or is nurtured, garnered through experience. It doesn't really matter. What matters is results. A professional development model for Project Managers that analyses an individual's project delivery record and which recognises and assesses Leadership skills would provide a marked improvement in Project success rates.

**In Good Company**

There is one other facet missing in the Project Management market. This is for the companies that retain the services of said "Agents of Under-Achievement" to consider.

Project Management has been in the mainstream corporate psyche for some years' now. Utilised as a vehicle for implementing strategic intent, it is central to many organisations' ability to grow revenues, increase margins, out-wit competitors and delight customers (and, of course, shareholders). Yet there are very few companies that systematically invest in recruiting, retaining and, especially, developing Project Management talent. In one study of the UK's FTSE 100 companies, it is estimated that while nearly all deploy Project Management skills across their organisations, a mere handful have a meaningful, high attaining, career path for employees that wish to spend their professional life running projects.

Nearly all hire in Project Management capability from the consultant or independent contractor markets to help deliver some of their most business critical projects, when their own investment in what is now a core corporate competency, is woefully inadequate to meet current demands, let alone the demands of the next decade. Organisations need to focus more on creating an environment and career structure to nurture home-grown talent. The advantage is, of course, that this talent will be built to fit the specific technical and cultural nuances of the organisation and be able to drive greater value for the business as a result.

The corporate landscape is shifting rapidly. The estimate of 15 million more Project Management based roles globally and about 1million for the UK in the next decade points to a recognition that project-style working is going to be the new norm for organisations. It is well past the time to improve on historically poor project success rates. Key to this is to start to build a generation of tried and tested Project Leaders who come with a globally recognised set of credentials based in the real world and not the classroom. If we don't… God help us!

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