

To many professionals worldwide, programme management is a start-up - it's the new recruit that no one's sure about yet. But to many others it is a proven discipline with a distinct skills set that dates back more than five decades from its routes in the US military. **J LeRoy Ward** of US firm ESI International explains programmes.

ALL GUNS BLAZING

IN THE 1950s, the United States Department of Defense began using best practices in programme management to oversee major weapons systems development and acquisitions initiatives such as submarines and fighter planes. Grounded firmly in the Government, the discipline has evolved into the private sector as businesses have identified it as an effective way to successfully manage ongoing, mission-critical initiatives and organisational change.



Pictures courtesy of the US Department of Defense.

Defining programme management

Programme management focuses on achieving successful results by paying attention to the overall business benefits through a focus on benefits management. These benefits will only be realised by keeping a sharp eye on the many complex interdependencies that exist between component projects, and not necessarily on any one project. Note the distinction from project management, which operates largely within the confines of a clear beginning and end - the singular tense, if you will. Programme management, on the other hand, lives almost exclusively in the plural.

Consider this: your company likely has dozens of projects running concurrently. Each project has a separate budget, scope and timeline, and, more importantly, a discernable start and end date. However, don't all of those projects exist under the same corporate umbrella? Furthermore, don't individual objectives across certain subsets of these projects align to broader organisational initiatives - initiatives that may not realistically have a defined end, but rather the required delivery of a set of business benefits? If the answer is yes, then you and your organisation are in the business of managing programmes.

As you know, project success is measured against deadlines and budgets. As important as time and money are to all of us, programme success is measured against the overall benefits achieved given the time and costs involved. And, because programmes are often ongoing

initiatives, one must take into account issues such as maintenance, employee training, product support and on-going organisational change.

There are several examples from my career that differentiate my work on projects and programmes. Back in my pre-grey-hair days, I worked in the Programme Management Office for the Indian School Construction Programme in the US Government. We were responsible for the construction, refurbishment and maintenance of approximately 10,000 buildings on 400 Indian reservations, where some 40,000 Indian students were being educated.

After more than six years there, I saw hundreds of projects come and go, such as meeting safety regulations, overseeing new construction and facilities management, training new staff members and creating budgets. But that's just it: the projects came and went. The organisation remained, as did its stakeholders and its overall goals. You see, this was an annual programme, and there are many programmes just like it, both in Government and the commercial sector.

More recently, my company, ESI International, has begun the long, slow implementation of SAP. On the surface, one could look at this as just a massive software implementation project. Oh, if only that were the case. If ever there was an initiative that could be deemed as a programme, SAP is it. In order to bring SAP on board, we've had to reconceive many facets of our organisation from the ground up.

The first step in the process was to completely re-engineer many of our processes to accommodate the software operations.

Because these processes are cross-functional, this affected almost every division in the company. For example, it requires new billing and accounts receivable processes, which are having a dramatic effect on our back-office operations.

Secondly, our global IT staff is hard at work rolling out the software on our various servers



around the world. And, thirdly, our staff needs to be trained on SAP and how it will affect their individual jobs. Each of these important activities represents a project, but, all together, they equal ESI's SAP implementation programme.

Programme management: the next step for a project manager

Last year, the Project Management Institute began offering its first credential recognising the discipline of programme management, the Programme Management Professional (PgMP). PMI did this in large part due to demand from certified project managers who were looking to take the next step in their career.

To qualify for the exam and to earn a PgMP, a professional has to have a baccalaureate degree (or international equivalent) and be able to document four years (6,000 hours) of project management experience and four years (6,000 hours) of programme management experience. This new credential, which I was masochistic enough to earn myself, goes a long way toward validating programme management and standardising the unique skill sets required to manage programmes successfully.

I've organised these skills into nine primary competency areas, each of which, as I experienced the hard way, are represented on the PgMP certification exam. These skills go beyond those classically associated with management and into the realm of true business acumen.

1. Big-picture thinking and the ability to sell the vision

A programme manager must be able to look beyond a single project and see how it fits into larger organisational objectives. And, more importantly, he or she must be able to sell his or her vision to colleagues at all levels.

2. Superior analytical skills

The ability to analyse disparate strands of information and identify trends and change drivers is essential when dealing with many interrelated projects.

3. Leadership and Teambuilding

As budgets and scopes become more aggressive and responsibilities increase, a programme manager's team will grow exponentially. Being able to build and lead a team and collaborate with others is an absolute requirement.

4. Communication

From day one, a programme manager is required to communicate both in writing and verbally with a wide range of individuals, from executives and governance boards to colleagues and stakeholders.

5. Influencing and Negotiating

Politics and hierarchies are inevitable in business. Being able to navigate an organisation's political scene, negotiate effectively and influence sponsors, will help you guide your programmes to success.

6. Conflict Resolution

With politics and hierarchies comes conflict, especially as the stakes increase. Being able to face conflict directly and solve problems will help you diffuse potential problems early.



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7. Stakeholder Management

By keeping your stakeholders and their expectations in check, and forging a collaborative relationship with each of them, you'll create a mutually beneficial harmony from the start.

8. Planning and Resource Management

As a programme manager, you must be able to develop a variety of plans - risk, cost and contingency to name a few - and align those with the organisational objectives the programme is designed to meet.

9. Mastery of Tools and Techniques

There are a myriad of proven tools and techniques available from both project and programme management, from milestone planning and statistical quality control to scenario analysis and brainstorming. My advice: learn them all!

So, even if programme management is just making its way into your business lexicon, now is the perfect time to introduce it to your organisation—and to your personal career development plan. The benefits will be felt in both the short and long term, for you and your organisation's programmes.

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