

Transfer of Project Management Competence within and across Organizations. An MPA seminar held at the Institution of Civil Engineers, 1 Great George Street, London on 19 June 2001.

MPA events are confidential, although this summary has been compiled so as not to breach confidentiality. Full proceedings and entry to MPA events are available only to members.

Participants

More than 50 participants attended the seminar and the following organizations were represented:

Anglo Operations Ltd, Anglo American Plc, BAA Plc, Bovis Lend Lease, BPOil International, British Energy, CMS Cameron McKenna, Cogen – An Innogy Business, CSE International Ltd, Defence Procurement Agency, Electronic Data Systems Ltd, Hewlett Packard Consulting, Imperial College, Laing Ltd, Lockheed Martin UK Integrated Systems, Mott MacDonald, Mouchel, National Grid, Oracle UK, Oxford Projects Ltd, PA Consulting Group, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Rolls-Royce plc, Rolls-Royce (Naval Marine), Sir Robert McAlpine Ltd, Strategic Rail Authority, Swedish Project Management Society, Templeton College, UKAEA, Wembley National Stadium Ltd, WS Atkins, WSP Management Services

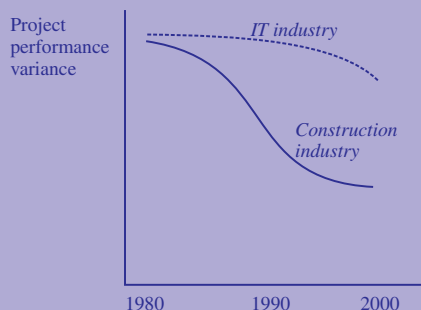
The effective transfer of project management knowledge is not always easy and this seminar was set up in response to a recognition of that fact among member companies. A major problem is the desire of each succeeding generation to reinvent the wheel. As new people come into project management in an organization, they fail to benefit from the know-how that has grown up in the company and do not profit from the experience that is there. And when people apply project management techniques in new sectors—that is, a sector that is different from the one in which they originally learned to manage projects—they have difficulties in transferring their skills.

This seminar set itself the task of finding solutions to those two problems through a mixture of group work and presentations from experienced project managers in the IT, energy, construction, manufacturing and consulting sectors.

Characteristics of the learning organization

It was agreed that to nurture a learning environment, a number of characteristics had to be developed and integrated into an organization. It must:

- have a board which recognizes the value of project management and which champions project process, management and methodology;
- be committed to competitiveness, innovation, continuous improvement and increased productivity;
- have effective, consistent and committed leadership with vision and business drive;
- promulgate consistent messages;
- have a clear definition of roles;
- have flexibility as well as a recognition that projects are “different”;
- be capable of effective sponsorship and be able to follow through on initiatives;
- be able to manage through the peaks and troughs of the business cycle;
- support a learning culture and forum, as well as good training and career development;
- have the ability to retain and reward staff and/or foster an environment in which people are “happy with us” and with their jobs;
- empower people, tolerate first-time failure and know what the organization wants from its human resources;



“Over the period 1980–2000, the top end of the Australian construction industry consistently reduced the variance in project performance. By comparison the IT industry had a much flatter curve and had not changed much over the period.”
Dr Chris Sauer

- have an effective assignment process to select “the right person for the task”, since selecting the project manager and his immediate staff is more sensitive in projects;
- recognize that lessons can be learned from successes as well as failures;
- use the language of performance;
- embrace teamworking.

Within the learning organization

- To establish a learning culture, the organization must develop a set of “target” behaviours and build a project management centre of excellence. The centre of excellence will share best practice through meetings and internal publications.
- Peer reviews should be encouraged with 360 degree feedback.
- At a more basic level, make sure project management staff have competence in the core function and in working with other cultures and behaviour.
- Develop career paths to encourage capability development.
- Move individuals around the organization to give them experience of different project phases and types.
- Use work shadowing.
- Use training needs/gap analysis to find out what each individual’s needs are.
- In addition, the organization’s knowledge base can be enhanced by:
 - recruitment from competitors;
 - benchmarking with companies in other sectors;
 - people exchanges at team member level with other organizations; and
 - attendance at conferences/seminars and use of external publications.

Apply its skills to other sectors

To do this:

- an organization can move into adjacent business sectors (either vertically or horizontally);
- present at sector-specific conferences to build credibility, capability and track record.
- Use partnerships, alliances and acquisitions.