



## SUCCESS IS SOFT PEOPLE SKILLS

Seminar 150 held on 16th June 2009  
at 4 Hamilton Place, London

SUMMARY

Successful project outcomes are not just dependent on project management techniques, processes and good technology. They have much to do with leadership, culture and inculcating good behaviours, yet these people skills are often given insufficient attention.

Through presentations, discussion and debate, the seminar explored this important topic from a number of different angles, and provided new insights to help the selection and personal development of future leaders and contributors to major programmes.

Presentations included discussion of a new approach to organisational leadership, lessons in turning around failing companies and change management within the public sector. In addition, results of research carried out within the MPA membership to identify the skills and attributes of 'elite' senior professionals were examined.

The first of the day's presentations looked at the Judgement Index™. Created in the US by the late Robert S. Hartman over 40 years ago, the Judgement Index is an assessment tool that measures the value judgements of individuals and teams, and uses this information to predict their performance.

With over 70 indicators of judgement assessed, it was explained that the Judgement Index is both diagnostic and prescriptive, as it assesses work judgements as well as self-judgements. It allows both the individual's and the group's strengths to be reinforced and the weaknesses improved.

This makes it not only a useful tool when employing people, but a developmental tool that can be used in succession planning and leadership development. For instance, it enables an understanding of how to choose individuals who will be well focused, can resist stress, make good decisions and find solutions to problems.

Prior to the seminar, key personnel within the MPA membership were invited to take part in the Judgement Index process by completing the Judgement Index Assessment. This process involves assessment of indicators, such as work ethic, dependability, noticing, basic insight, problem solving, focus and concentration, and the ability to prioritise.

Results of the research were presented to delegates at the seminar. Common themes were explored, and there was reflection on what this means for the major project industry in terms of the development of key personnel.

The presentation concluded by summarising the main applications and benefits of using the Judgement Index:

- Facilitates coaching and mentoring
- Increases retention of capable personnel
- Enables good team building and improves the decision making process
- Encourages a culture of safety and well-being
- Is an excellent aid to risk management
- Reduces the training budget

## EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT DRIVES PERFORMANCE

Why should people follow you just because you are senior and have more hierarchical power? How do you engage people so that they are giving their best because they want to? These were some of the questions considered in the presentation from Engage for Change, a consultancy involved in advising on engaging leaders and employees to drive change, transform organisations and raise day-to-day business performance.

Drawing on the consultancy's UK-wide research among 25,000 workers and directors, the clear link between business performance and the degree to which leaders at every level practice effective employee engagement was discussed.

Engaged people or groups can produce surprisingly good results for themselves and for their organisation; the key to success is the alignment of self-interest with the objectives of the organisation.

The presentation looked at what drives this engagement, and the benefits that flow from it – for instance, an engaged person will be creative and productive, seek to initiate change, make other people's change programme their own, and be ready to enjoy their work and make it enjoyable for colleagues and clients.

One of the main drivers for employees is increased participation in day-to-day decisions that affect them, and a greater say in 'big ticket' changes. Leaders or managers who inspire confidence and commitment, empower their employees and build effective teams, generally have a positive impact on engagement. Those that are forceful or controlling do not, and it was questioned whether the fast-moving charismatic leader who makes quick decisions is really the best person to achieve the vision and the business objective.

In an age of increased project or programme complexity, the drive for best practice is based on accessibility and relationships. This involves key shifts in terms of leadership: moving from an individual 'command and control' perspective to a collective one, a distribution of power from the top of the organisation to the bottom, and business objectives delivered through willing employees.

The Royal Opera House (ROH) Covent Garden is one of the five great opera houses in the world, and home to the Royal Opera, the Royal Ballet and the Royal Opera House Orchestra. In 1997 it closed for a £200 million redevelopment, funded by the National Lottery, private donors and the sale of property in the area. Six months later the ROH was bankrupt and the plans were in chaos, but by 1999 the redevelopment had been completed, and the Opera House was reopened in time for the Millennium celebrations.

This presentation from a former Chief Executive of the ROH outlined the background to the crisis, how it was resolved and the lessons that could be drawn.

For over 20 years prior to redevelopment there had been a continual decline in the physical infrastructure of the Opera House in both the performance areas and front of house. Moreover, there was no air conditioning, and limited catering facilities: it was no longer a world-class venue. The trigger for implementing the redevelopment plans came with the awarding of a £78 million lottery grant – the second largest grant made by the National Lottery.

The building project itself went according to plan: it was well organised, and delivered on time and to budget. However, it was explained that a number of events which happened in the early stages dislocated the programme. For example, the idea was put forward that, following closure in July 1997, the company would go on tour and play in other venues. However, this meant that there was no longer money coming into the ROH for advance ticket sales for the few months prior to closure, which provoked the first of two financial crises.

Appropriate management and communication structures were set up, one of which was to renegotiate the funding for the redevelopment and the annual subsidy with the Government. This resulted in additional support for the redevelopment, in return for a reduction in annual subsidy and number of performances. Overall, by the time the ROH reopened there was better management of financial information and processes and improved internal confidence.

One of the lessons that can be drawn from this crisis is that there can be real success after awful failure, and sometimes there has to be a significant degree of failure en route to give really good success.

For oil and gas majors such as BP, the challenges of major projects are growing rapidly, creating increasingly complex portfolios. For example, hydrocarbons are extracted from more extreme environments, new technologies are required to recover heavier oils and regulatory environments are becoming tighter. At the same time, many experienced project managers are retiring.

This presentation outlined the background and response to some of the specific challenges facing BP, looking in particular at its major investment in the development of project management capability.

In order to move towards developing standardised practice BP has established a Capital Value Process; a 'stage-gate' process that divides a project programme into distinct stages separated by management decision 'gates'. It enables every project to be evaluated at each common stage of implementation and establishes a common language for delivering projects throughout the organisation. The overall aims are to establish the 'BPway' and develop a comprehensive training programme for project management excellence.

The architecture of the different elements of this programme was outlined and compared. The BPway on projects and engineering sets out the practice for project excellence in the selection, development and delivery of projects, and is run by ESI in Houston. The other two elements are the Managing Projects and Engineering Management programmes delivered by the University of Manchester, and the Projects and Engineering Academy at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. It was noted that all three stages play a distinctive role in the overall scheme.

The presentation concluded with an assessment of the benefits of the overall training programme, which not only brings value to BP, but improves the management skills of the major projects community and the professional status of major project management.

This presentation, from speakers with responsibility for two very different areas within the BBC – property and technology – discussed how these traditionally insular worlds can be brought together in a project environment.

The session focused on how projects can deliver organisational change, which essentially relies on getting the best from people. It looked at the importance of working together with mutual respect and understanding, and the need to provide leadership, inspiration and encouragement to the respective teams in order to move things forward.

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Both the areas are charged with providing the right workplace and infrastructure to enable the BBC to meet its goal of becoming the most creative media organisation in the world. This comes at a time of major change in terms of where the BBC operates from physically, and the need to upgrade the technology to meet the demands of a rapidly evolving broadcasting industry: it was stressed that for this change to be successful the teams have to work together to accommodate it.

Some of the current major projects were outlined, for instance the refurbishment and extension of Broadcasting House in London and the construction of MediaCityUK in Salford are in progress, whilst Pacific Quay, Europe's first end-to-end digital production and broadcast system, opened in Glasgow in 2007.

Many of the project and programme issues are common to both teams when implementing projects, but there are also major differences. For instance, while construction undergoes a relatively slow rate of change, technology change is almost impossibly fast, which has serious implications when writing a property or accommodation strategy. Being asked to provide a budget for technology provision at the start of project that will not be delivered for another five years is unrealistic, because the risk cannot be accurately estimated.

Integrated governance is required between the construction and technology teams. This means that there must be the mandate and flexibility to trade and offset effort across the various work streams that have to be controlled for successful delivery. In summary, it is essential to start the journey together, combine the programmes, understand each other's business and focus on requirements, not solutions.

The presentation concluded by posing two questions for delegates to consider:

- How do you get all staff to buy in to a common responsibility?
- How do you get companies in the supply chain to work across job boundaries in order to offer the best solution?

## CONCLUSION

From the presentations and discussions throughout the day it was clear that the importance of people skills is undoubtedly recognised by MPA member organisations.

However, these skills are not always given sufficient weight in their ability to give predictable and reliable outcomes for projects; more training may be required in this area to ensure that the talents and wisdom of the whole project team are orchestrated to produce outstanding results which inspire others.

It was noted that people are constantly expecting more from themselves and those who work for them, and it was clear that strong, well developed judgement abilities are vital if this expectation is to be met



## PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS

Advance Consultancy Ltd  
Arup  
BAE Systems Air  
Balfour Beatty plc  
BBC Projects  
Bechtel Ltd  
BG Group  
BP International Ltd  
Centre for Research in the Management of  
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