

What's it like on an MSP course?

As part of my professional development, I am preparing to be accredited as a trainer in Managing Successful Programmes (MSP®). I have passed my Practitioner and Advanced Practitioner with the elevated mark needed to become a trainer, which is the entry criterion for the Maven 'train the trainer' programme called Maven Excellence. This article explains how I got on at one of the Maven Excellence events.

Last week I sat in on a Managing Successful Programmes Course (MSP) at the Maven Centre in London. The purpose for me was two fold. One was to refresh my knowledge prior to my assessment to be able to train the method. The other was to observe the training of the course for when I will have to stand up and deliver it.

In terms of refreshing my knowledge the course was invaluable. Like any other training event that you attend, whilst on the course you are in the midst of the theory but post-course if you aren't applying all of the theory on a regular basis it will drift from your consciousness quickly. The course provided me with a thorough refresh of the method.

From a delivery perspective it was great to see the timings, emphasis and explanation that goes on within every course. The other bonus was experiencing a course from a learners perspective. As trainers we can, if not careful, become desensitised to the learner experience of sitting on a course, having to take in large amounts of information and trying to balance general understanding with what to commit to memory. It also gets you to watch someone else deliver information and glean new ways of explaining information and new or alternative methods of teaching.

In terms of learner preparation, there are certain things I would always recommend prior to attending the course:

- Always use the pre-course workbook to guide you through trying to get a basic understanding. Unstructured reading is not the best way to approach trying to gain understanding of any new method. The "staring at pages" approach rarely seems to work
- Accept that you will not commit it all to memory and don't try to. There is no point in putting unnecessary pressure on yourself to try to remember every detail of a several hundred page method
- Try to paint yourself a basic picture of how the method is put together and what happens where. The explanation will come from your course tutor as to "why" these steps are sensible but it does help if you have a basic view of how it fits together
- Make a note of any questions you may have so you are prepared when it comes to covering the topics on your course. Tutors never mind questions, it's how we learn

As far as practical application of the MSP® method is concerned, it couldn't be at a more relevant time in the current environment. Any organisation that is running or considering running multiple change activities risks not achieving all the expected benefits if they don't manage the bigger picture.

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If organisations just run and monitor change from a project perspective, they may achieve certain goals but will they realise if they have duplication of projects? Will they recognize that they have some projects that are causing a counter effect on other initiatives? If they are delivering major transformational change will they achieve this through delivery of a single project? All these challenges are all too familiar to me from my time working as a programme director.

Through using MSP®, organisations are given a considered process to use to trigger major change, group current work under a consistent framework and most importantly ensure that they are embarking on programmes that are in line with strategy and will deliver organisational benefits. In the current climate I would not ask the question “should we think about this type of control?” I would ask “can you afford not to be considering this approach?”

My advice for applying what you have learnt on your MSP® course is to:

- Think carefully as an organisation as to how you will adopt the method if you're not currently doing it. Sending staff on courses is only one small step
- Try not to rush at it. Assessing strategy and current projects can take time. When rushed, this often leads to not realising the true benefits of the method
- There are elements that you can adopt that will help you in everyday business. Assessing business strategy, stakeholder engagement, benefits management to name but a few that can be invaluable business disciplines
- If you are unsure about applying the theory, consult with someone with experience of it. Valuable lessons can be learned. If Programme Management is not implemented effectively it could cause long term damage

MSP® is part of the OGC's Best Management Practice library. This includes PRINCE2®, P3O®, M_o_R®, MoV® and MoP®. For more information about the subjects discussed in this paper, please visit www.maventraining.co.uk/whitepapers/

About the author

Will Palmer is an experienced project consultant and trainer. His project management experience includes marketing communications, IT, plant installation, management systems implementation, process engineering and change management. Will trains a wide range of project related courses including PRINCE2, APMP and bespoke events including benefits management, planning, risk management and earned value analysis. Will was accredited as an MSP trainer 3 days after finishing this article!

As a Project Management Consultant Will has an extensive track record of implementing project management methods and mentoring project managers and project teams in developing their capability.