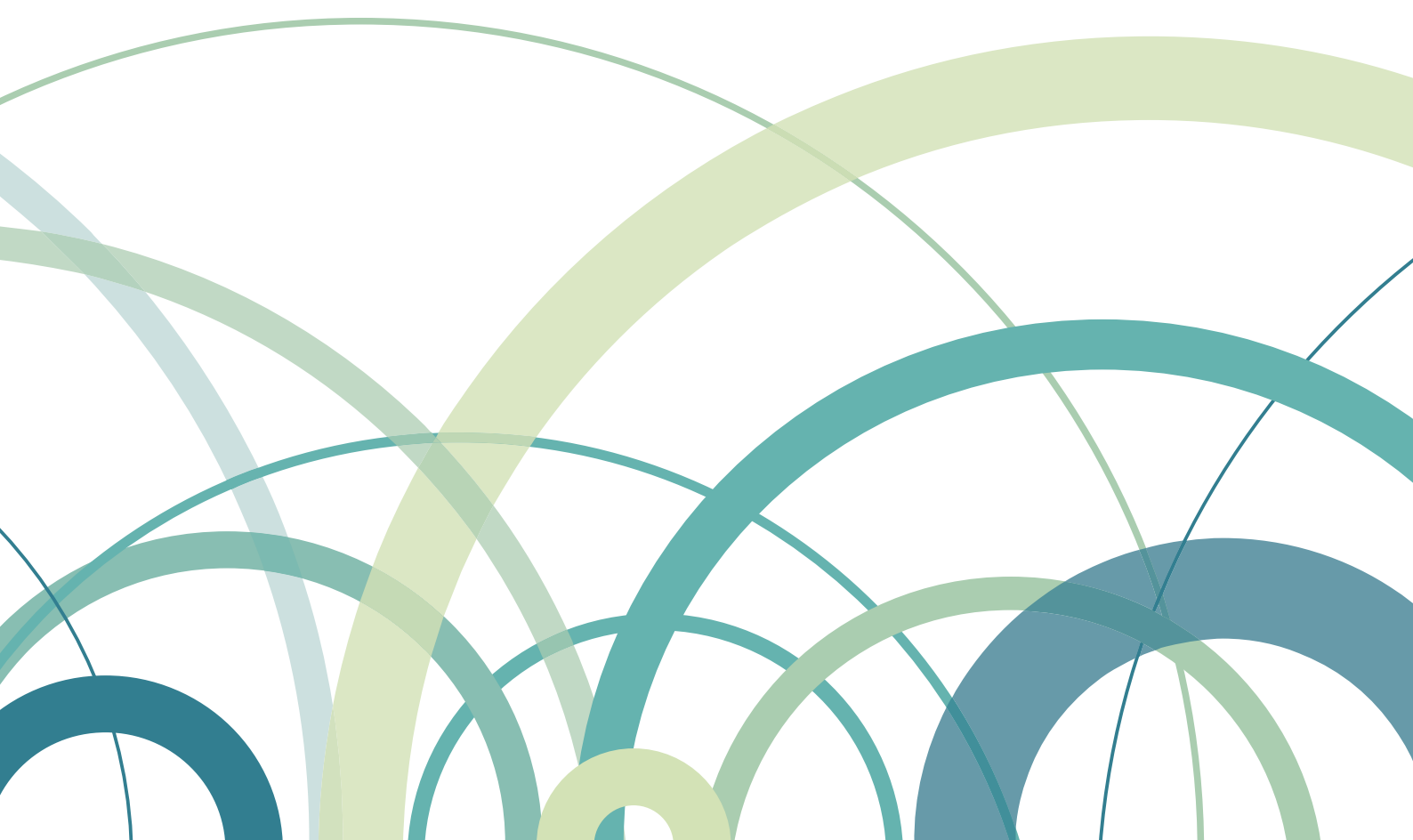


Building capability to support
project management as a
mainstream management discipline

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Project management is fast becoming a mainstream management discipline. This paper explains why this is the case and identifies the challenges that the project management community and the general management community face as project management develops as a formal skill set required by a broad range of staff.

“ Project management is the process by which projects are defined, planned, monitored, controlled and delivered such that the agreed benefits are realised. Projects are unique, transient endeavours undertaken to achieve a desired outcome. Projects bring about change and project management is recognised as the most efficient way of managing such change. ”

APM Body of Knowledge 5th edition

This wide definition recognises that modern project management incorporates the disciplines of risk management, change management and programme management which in turn, involves the management of multiple, interdependent projects. ‘Mainstream’ means a major prevailing trend and is applicable due to the high growth in the number of projects that are initiated by those not traditionally seen as ‘project managers’.

The reasons for becoming mainstream, and the pressure that this puts on existing training and development concepts, is explored, and a model for the future is explained. This model is based on the premise that we can no longer train staff in skills or methodology without first being clear about their longer term goals coupled with the strategic objectives of the organisation for whom they work.

In this challenging economic environment there is a need to ensure that training initiatives are integrated into a wider programme of capability building activities which ensures that the organisation has sufficient skilled resources for today but is also building skills and experiences that will be required as the organisation grows and matures.

Typically departments responsible for project management have excluded HR from the project management environment as the widespread use of project methodologies has brought with it clearly defined training paths leading to recognised qualifications. In doing so they have failed to benefit from the tools that HR have been introducing through their work in organisational development, and which has translated through to learning and development functions.

The longer term view of the organisation exists within the learning and development community, but its application to project management and the associated skill sets of programme management, change management and risk management is just beginning, and is identifying challenges which must be addressed if organisations are to create an environment where strategic objectives and the changes they require are delivered as a normal part of business - not as one off ‘miracles’ amongst a sea of project failures.

The model of the future outlined in this paper incorporates the longer term approach, identifies how project management skills development can form part of building a wider capability in project management and how the development of capability supports talent management and succession planning initiatives across an organisation.

The management of projects is largely an intellectual exercise, therefore capability in this instance is a product of:

- The skills and experience of the human resources assigned to the project
- The number of these human resources available for project initiatives
- The effectiveness of the processes that they apply

The capability, taken together with the rate of work of the individuals involved produces the available capacity of the organisation for change initiatives and therefore for growth and the achievement of strategic objectives.

Project management is the vehicle through which we deliver change into our organisations. This means that project management deals with uncertainty and the flexibility required of staff and processes when entering new territory. Business as usual is an environment of relative stability and certainty of information. Team structures, processes and systems are built for long term use. The two environments collide as project management is responsible for creating the future state of the business as usual environment and therefore, by definition, introducing change into the business as usual environment.

Project management in its most recent iteration has been recognised as a discipline for the last ten to fifteen years. Progress has been made in developing methodologies and frameworks detailing how projects should be conceived, managed and implemented. This work has been supported by the creation of roles, job descriptions, document templates, IT systems and training courses that support the formalisation of project management within organisations.

This formalisation has led to a maturity in understanding of project management with recognition from the most senior management downwards that projects are the way in which the strategic objectives of the organisation will be achieved. It is now much more common for the board to refer to the need for an initiative to be established as a project than it was even five years ago. However this understanding does not extend as widely to the idea of programme or portfolio management – these battles are still to be won.

The terminology of project management has become adopted more readily than before, such that project management is no longer seen as the preserve of certain departments or industries (such as the IT department or the construction industry). It is just as likely that a project team will be formed to launch a new advertising campaign or restructure a department as it is to implement a new IT system.

This spread of understanding of project management and the involvement of a much wider range of staff in its application has led to the recognition of project management as a mainstream discipline, as important as those other stalwarts of management including leadership and team working.

As it has become a mainstream discipline there is an expectation that all staff will possess or will work to develop these skills. This means that the use of specialist project managers is falling. In a recent survey of job sites¹, the average proportion of specific project management jobs across all industry types was in the range of 7-13%. However if the search was for project management skills instead of the job title 'project manager' then this percentage rose to 65%. This is leading to the expectation in many organisations that specialist project managers will not be recruited but instead existing staff will be asked to manage projects related to their expertise, alongside their day to day responsibilities.

Whilst this is helpful in embedding the application of project management across an organisation, it does put great strain on existing resources who have to balance their 'day job' with the time and

¹ The following sites were reviewed during the period June 7th to June 21st 2010: www.jobserve.co.uk; www.totaljobs.co.uk; www.jobsite.co.uk.

commitment needed to drive a project through to successful conclusion. There is unlikely to be a lessening of their other responsibilities so project management has to be fitted around existing tasks. In addition as project management is seen as mainstream some senior managers are assuming that their staff have an immediate capability to manage or sponsor projects. However in many cases they have been given no formal training and no opportunity to develop these skills other than what they have been able to glean from seeing others in the role.

In addition to the growth in formal education, a significant amount of training has been undertaken within organisations in an effort to adopt 'best practice' approaches in project management and establish a core set of trained project managers. For example, many organisations in the past five years have successfully trained significant numbers of staff in the PRINCE2® methodology.

Whilst this is admirable, there is now the recognition that an understanding of this process driven model is not sufficient to deliver experienced and skilled project managers. This realisation is driving the demand for skills-based training to sit alongside the structural information offered by PRINCE2®, Managing Successful Programmes (MSP®), Management of Risk (MoR®) etc.

There is a growing recognition of the place that professional bodies including the Association for Project Management (APM) and Project Management Institute (PMI) have in offering 'thought leadership' and subject matter expertise.

The most recent step in the evolution of project management is the application of specifically designed competency frameworks to identify actual and target skill levels for individuals, teams and organisations. This can provide an objective baseline from which personal development plans and training needs analysis can be devised and skills gaps closed.

There is a need for those conceiving, managing and sponsoring projects to ensure that the deliverables created by the project are business relevant - that they are contributing to the longer term strategic goals of the organisation. Whilst those in senior management positions can define the contribution for large-scale initiatives, this is not the case further down the hierarchy. If project management is to continue its climb towards acceptance as a core business skill emphasis must be given to ensuring that all those involved in projects, however small, are clear that the deliverables will help to take their organisation to where it plans to be in the next three to five years.

Currently there is very little attention paid to the need for commercial understanding and awareness in traditional project management courses. However the current economic climate will continue to force comprehensive justification of projects before they will be funded. Successful justification relies on a clear understanding of the commercial, political, competitive and supplier environments into which the project will deliver. Understanding strategy and the commercial environment is critical to success in the public and the private sectors.

Another challenge is to ensure that any steps taken within the project environment to develop skills, processes and procedures are aligned with the approach that the organisation takes as a whole to its 'professionalism'. Structures exist to ensure quality, professionalism and ethical behaviour and project management should form a part of this.

For example organisations that are accredited as ISO9000 require quality procedures that include how to manage and sponsor projects, Investors in People schemes should include project management training, professionalism may dictate that membership of professional bodies is mandatory or that project management forms part of induction programmes for new joiners.

It would be counterproductive for those in project management to create structures that run counter to these core initiatives, as it would indicate that project management is not mainstream but is on the margin of how the organisation behaves.

The challenge is how to build structure that develops capability and is practical enough to be successfully implemented. A considerable impediment to implementation is the differences in priorities between capability building (long term staff development and succession planning) and project management (short term delivery of outputs).

Project managers and project sponsors are incentivised to deliver on time, on budget and to the required level of quality. Essentially there is a short termism and an urgency in successful project management, driven by the need to achieve all of the tasks on the project plan often to an aggressive timescale. Where is the motivation for project managers to go more slowly than their existing team are capable of so that new team members can learn the skills and practice applying them to real life project situations?

The productivity dip that we all experience when acquiring new skills has a significant cost to the project in longer delivery times and the risk of stakeholders waiting to make their contribution whilst others catch up. There is also the cost of mistakes which are an inevitable part of the

process of learning a new skill. Project plans rarely include time and other resources to perform rework so mistakes will lead to delays and budget overruns.

Another facet of this challenge is that those most active within project management rarely have a background in personnel development, education and career planning.

It is essential that new skills are not developed ad hoc but are planned as part of the considered development of the individual. This development must be in line with their career plans and the future needs of the business. It is a significant challenge to those embedded in the delivery of change to step back from these highly demanding responsibilities to ensure that their resource pool is receiving this considered development. It will be extremely damaging if the project management discipline establishes its required skill set but does not provide the support for its acquisition. For example it will be easy to lose the impetus and motivation of staff if they complete competency assessments but the information goes nowhere:

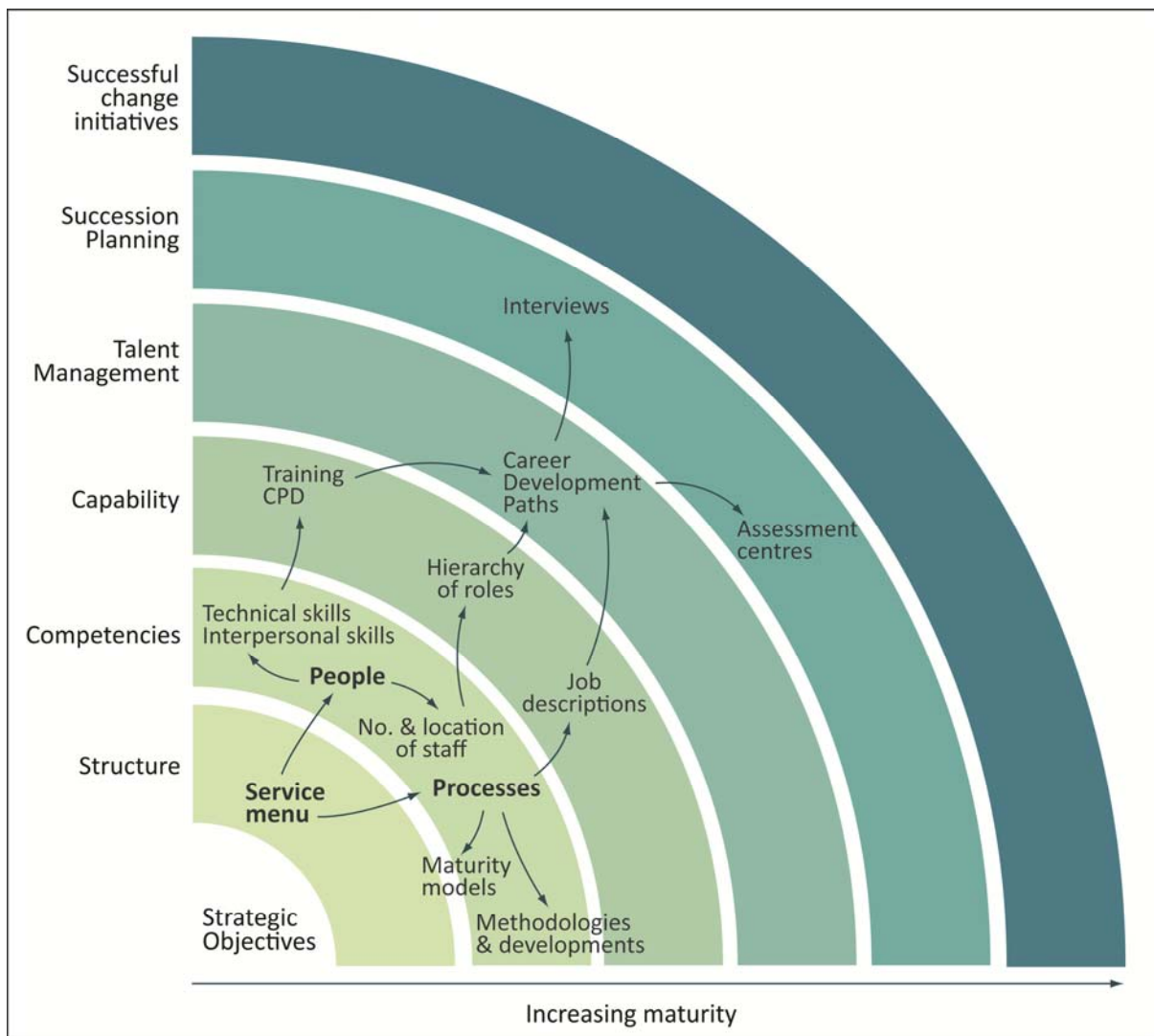
- Staff will want access to training, coaching and mentoring and other development opportunities to bridge the gap between what they know now and what they need for future roles
- Staff will want to know that the organisation has acknowledged their skill set and is making use of it in opportunities that it is offering them

To meet these challenges, project professionals must enlist the services of their HR function who can provide a vital coordination role. HR is responsible for delivering a people-based strategy that meets the broadest possible needs of the organisation. They have experience and understanding of activities and structures that develop inspired and committed staff.

In recent years HR functions have transitioned into 'HR business partners' who support and enable managers to manage their staff directly. HR business partners can enable the creation of capability building by developing a structure for identifying, tracking and communicating with those they identified as having the aptitude to excel within a project management environment. This structure can ensure that organisations can successfully deliver projects today whilst building skills, knowledge and experience that will meet the needs of current and future resource requirements.

This model is a representation of the future that can address the challenges outlined above. It provides an example of the sorts of structure that organisations can adopt to deliver successful change on a continual basis.

There are seven levels in this diagram, starting with strategic objectives and demonstrating how these ultimately define which change initiatives are required. Once change has been successfully achieved, the strategic objectives are re-conceived for the next time period, representing a continual cycle of growth for the organisation.



Strategic Objectives

These objectives set the longer term direction of the organisation establishing how it will grow in size, product or service range and market position. Senior management require a comprehensive picture of what project management excellence looks like if they are to plan the growth of their organisation successfully and resource it appropriately.

They recognise that those who are responsible for successful project and/or programme delivery need to understand what drives business performance and ensure that their project or programme contributes to this.

This means that traditional project management training programmes that only concentrate on methodology or skills development do not go far enough. Project management training must provide guidance in commercial understanding and the management of change.

Services

Project management is a service to the business and, as such, must clearly define what it is offering and what the business will be expected to acquire from other sources.

A service menu provides this clarification by defining the catalogue of services that the project management discipline offers the organisation. These services might include business analysis to support requirements gathering and scope definition for projects, technical expertise in planning, scheduling, risk analysis and testing of deliverables, and change management activities to ensure behavioural change within those responsible for adopting the deliverables created by the projects.

As well as the definition of services that are offered, the service menu can be used to define the likely number of resources required to perform each service and the desired location of those performing the service in relation to the business function they are supporting. For example I tend to categorise staff location as Near or Far to identify if the service can only be performed 'face to face' or if it is something that can be performed by resources not co-located with the project teams. A good example of a 'Far' task is processing of the expenses connected with running a project; and an example of 'Near' task is implementation support with the business unit responsible for using what the project has created.

Competencies

'Competencies' are the behaviours that employees must have, or must acquire, to input into a situation in order to achieve high levels of performance.

To perform any aspect of project management requires a mixture of technical and interpersonal (people or soft) competencies. This is because whilst there is a need for technical ability to plan work, assess risks and control progress none of these activities will happen without the ability to persuade, influence and motivate the project team, the project stakeholders and those that will ultimately use what the project is creating.

Project management relies upon many 'standard' management competencies such as leadership and teamwork but the most comprehensive skill set has already been defined for us in the competencies frameworks that have been developed in recent years by the various professional bodies for project management.

In the U.K. the Association for Project Management has developed its 'APM Competence Framework' which identifies 47 competencies in seven distinct skill areas specific to project and programme management. For each competence, an individual will assess themselves against two dimensions:

- **Knowledge** – an individual has understanding of the subject
- **Experience** – an individual has practically applied the subject

APM is a founder member of the International Project Management Association (IPMA), a federation of over 40 national member associations. The APM Competence Framework is aligned with the IPMA Competence Baseline (ICB). The ICB sets out the knowledge and experience expected from the managers of projects, programmes and project portfolios. It contains basic terms, practices, methods and tools for professional project management as well as specialist knowledge and experience.

Project Management Institute (PMI) also has a competency framework, called the *Project Manager Competency Development (PMCD) Framework – Second Edition*, which provides general context for the definition, assessment and development of project manager competency. The framework outlines the key dimensions of project management competency and identifies those competencies that are most likely to impact project manager performance.

Project manager competency comprises three separate dimensions:

- **Knowledge** – what a project manager knows about the application of processes, tools and techniques in project activities
- **Performance** – how a project manager applies project management knowledge to meet project requirements
- **Personal** – how a project manager behaves when performing activities in a project environment

The equivalent of competency at an organisational level is maturity which is usually assessed using a maturity model. There are many management maturity models in existence, including those specific to project management. For example the P3M3[®] model from the Office of Government Commerce assesses the 'competency' of an organisation in project, programme and portfolio management, providing an indication of maturity from levels one (awareness of process) to five (optimised process).

The Project Management Institute (PMI) also has a maturity model called the Organisational Project Management Maturity Model, *OPM3*. This helps organisations understand their project management processes, ensures that their projects are tied to the organisation's larger strategy and measures and guides their capabilities for improvement.

Capability

Capability is the ability of the organisation to deliver its objectives. This ability can only be developed if there is clear instruction on what capability is in the context of what is being achieved. Project management relies upon matrix management as individuals are expected to work as part of a project team and to retain responsibilities for business as usual. As a result the reporting lines and levels of authority that each individual has in different situations must be

clarified through a hierarchy of responsibilities. Job descriptions are needed to establish all of the assumptions that are made about each role within this matrix.

Effective training must be coupled with a programme of continual professional development which encourages individuals to take responsibility for acquiring knowledge and experience relevant to their career aspirations. Organisations can use their training budgets for courses and workshops but individuals can increase the effectiveness of these events through the additional support offered by membership of professional bodies, subscription to professional journals, joining communities of practice, contributing their experiences to action learning sets etc.

Talent management

“Talent consists of those individuals who can make a difference to organisational performance, either through their immediate contribution or in the longer term by demonstrating the highest levels of potential.”

CIPD Talent Management Research Insight, June 2007

By establishing career development paths, talent management provides a route for individuals to participate in their own development and therefore generates support for continual professional development.

Career development paths, integrated with Personal Training Plans and Continual Professional Development programmes, are important in the matrix management environment that projects rely upon. When staff are asked to participate in project management, questions arise over who their ‘real’ manager is – line manager or project manager/sponsor, who is helping to plan their career, who understands their contribution to the organisation and their future potential.

One challenge is building a career framework that incorporates the different project roles without creating a structure that only addresses project responsibilities at the expense of business as usual activities. Earlier in this paper it was stated that organisations are moving away from specialist project roles to including project responsibilities within other roles in the organisation. Therefore a career development plan solely for project and programme management does not reflect the environment in which individuals are expected to perform. Maturity and experience in their ability to manage projects has to dovetail within increasing ability in other skills in their chosen specialism.

The following diagram provides an example of how organisations are creating career paths that have levels reflecting management grades but that are not specific to job titles. This enables an organisation to future proof job descriptions as roles evolve and minimise potential claims for unfair or constructive dismissal as roles adapt and gain or lose responsibilities. This is a sensible approach as in a fast moving environment (often driven by technology, economic and legislative changes and customer demand) there is a danger that job descriptions will only describe a role using past and present responsibilities and not those of the future which may not even have been conceived.

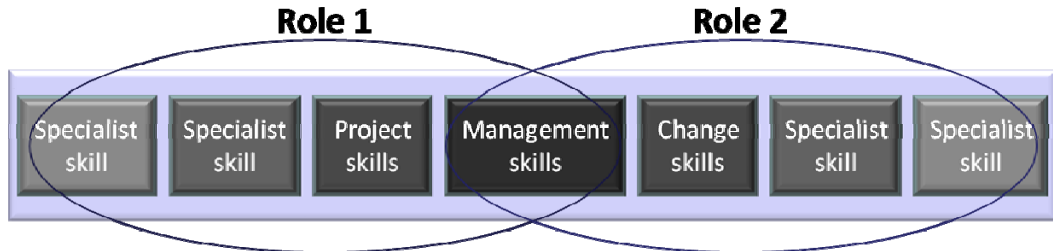
L5

Job descriptions and career paths

L4

For one or two of the competencies, a L3 may have L4 ability, but overall is still a L3 grade until the other areas develop to L4

L3



L2

For one or two of the competencies, a L3 may have L2 ability, but overall is still a L3 grade

L1

The approach shown in the diagram avoids a constant round of updating of these documents. Job descriptions become modular with a module for each specialism (management or technical). The modules specify the skills and competencies required rather than describing the activities and tasks involved. This enables flexibility and speed of change to meet the innovation that is part of organisational development in the 21st century.

This approach also allows for the inclusion of the multiplicity of job titles that is a result of job title inflation, which is often a product of non-financial reward that has taken place during the recession, and which is likely to continue as bonuses are cut and pay freezes come into operation.

Succession planning

“ A process by which one or more successors are identified for key posts (or groups of similar key posts), and career moves and/or development activities are planned for these successors. Successors may be fairly ready to do the job (short-term successors) or seen as having longer-term potential (long-term successors). ”

HIRSH, W. (2000) Succession planning demystified. Brighton: Institute for Employment Studies

In the past, there has been a tendency for the main determinants when forming project teams to be past history with the project manager and availability. Whilst these factors will always be important, the increasing importance of successful delivery of projects requires a move to a more objective basis for selecting project staff. This is also a natural extension of the application of career paths and competency frameworks. Interviews and assessment centres can be devised to review the required competencies and levels of experience and ensure that promotions deliver individuals who have progressed in their understanding and ability.

Conclusion

Project management continues to grow in importance to organizations and is being adopted across all roles and functions. Adoption into a wider set of job functions is impacting how project management is treated as a skill set. It is becoming a mainstream management discipline.

This means that the development of project management skills is maturing away from individual training courses to become a package of capability building measures that deliver certainty that the organization has the project management capacity to meet its strategic goals.

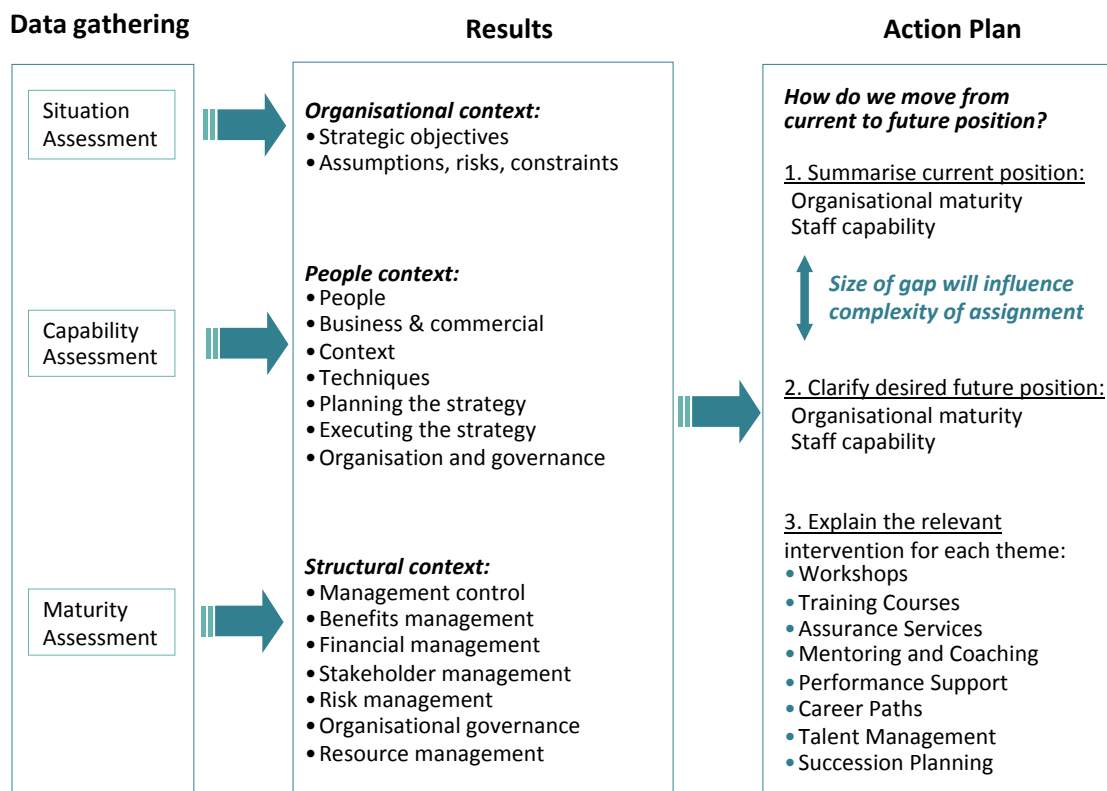
The project management community has much to gain from a greater integration with the HR function, as partnering organizational development with project management skills and competencies will drive further professionalism in project management.

Maven can assist you to address project management in the wider context of organisational development. We cannot fix all of your problems – we are not, and do not claim to be, a management consultancy. We are however experts in capability building and can work with you to align programme, project, risk and change management with the organisation you wish to become. We have the expertise and experience to do the alignment for you but it is our ethos to transfer the skills into our clients so they become self-sufficient going forward. Our services are designed to tap into initiatives designated as ‘transformational change’ programmes, talent management strategies etc. - in other words, to take our services outside of the narrower definitions of project management and of training.

We apply a staged, structured approach to capability building by addressing:

- **The situation:** we gather information on the objectives of the organisation and the goals and key performance indicators that need to be met
- **The people:** we use a best practice competence frameworks to assess current capability
- **The structure:** we conduct a maturity assessment to demonstrate where the organisation is currently in relation to running its projects and, equally importantly, how it can progress to the next level of maturity

The diagram below illustrates the approach in more detail:



This approach has been successfully applied with our clients and Maven will be pleased to discuss its applicability to your organisation in more detail.

For further information about Maven Training and its capability building services please contact:

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