LUCID THOUGHT 56 { Project management development in two hours!

This Lucid Thought is about some of the extremes that we find in project management and what these extremes could mean to a profession that is soon to become officially recognised by Royal Charter in the UK.

The very entity that is a project has extremes that for many people cannot be comprehended. On one extreme we find in the Oil and Gas, Defence and Aerospace sectors projects that have budgets of tens of billions of pounds and durations in excess of 10 years (even excluding an operational phase) while in other sectors a project can actually have no official budget, no allocated resources and last for less than a month.

Another example of an extreme is the amount organisations are prepared to pay to develop their staff in project management. Some business schools charge £20,000 per day for a residential training course while some organisations are unwilling to pay more than £400 for a day's training while running the course in a tiny in-house meeting room totally unsuitable for any sort of learning.

Other extremes exist around salaries that are paid to those who work on projects and the responsibilities and expectations of a project manager.

"Of course I can teach you Project Management in two hours... just repeat after me; CBS NPV OBS PMP SOW PID ADR SPI TQM..."
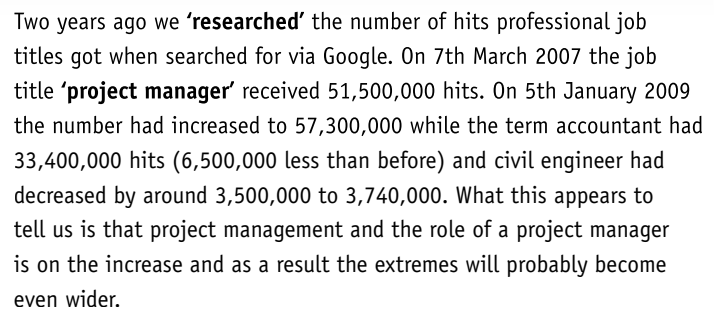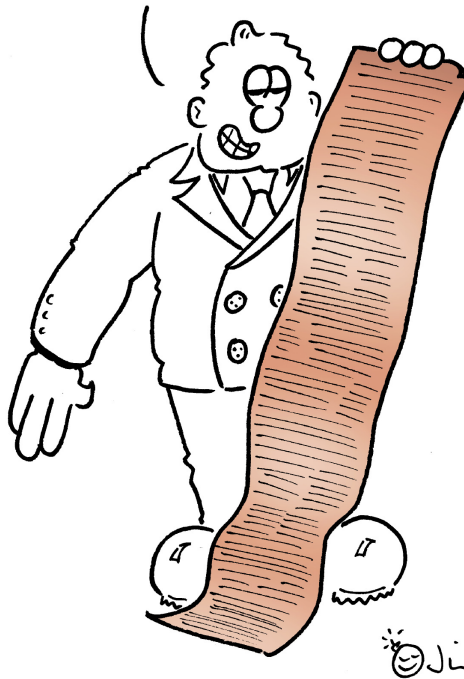

But putting aside these extremes for a very brief moment 2009 should be a momentous year for project management in the UK. If things go to plan the Association for Project Management (APM) will be granted chartered status and thus become the custodians of the newly recognised profession. Unfortunately this leads us back into even more extremes. We work with organisations that wouldn't dream of allowing someone to manage a project without having undergone a relevant development programme and demonstrated their capability. While others appear to appoint project managers on a whim; either as part or a career progression: engineer - lead engineer - project manager or software developer - software architect - project manager, or perhaps even worse based on the adage **"you're free so you can manage this project then".** In these instances any discussion around issues like **"I've never done this before"** or **"I really don't have enough time"** are dismissed with comments like **"don't worry it's just common sense"** or **"just make time to do it".**

So why the title of **"Project Management in 2 hours?"** What prompted this Lucid Thought happened to us towards the end of last year when we were asked if we would provide some project management training to a UK charity on a pro bono basis. When we enquired about what needs had been identified we were presented

with a long list of topics. **"We want to be able to plan our projects properly, manage our risks, identify resource requirements, monitor and communicate project progress and of course deliver on time and within budget".** Our immediate comment was that it might be difficult to give them the time needed for this in the time frame required (we estimated a minimum of two classroom days to do anything worthwhile). Why not was the reply - we only have two hours available - isn't that enough?

This is the manifestation of yet another extreme, but perhaps to us it is the most telling and it relates to the perception of what project management is and what an individual needs to know and do in order to be a project manager. We have on one side the APM seeking chartered status for the profession of project management accompanied by a project management competence framework that contains 302 competence statements/indicators against 47 subjects that require years of development and experience to satisfy even the lowest levels. While on the other side we have an organisation employing degree educated specialists believing that you can learn it all in two hours.

So what is at the root of all these extremes? Maybe we should go back to a Lucid Thought that was written nearly two years ago and based around some interesting searches on Google™.

Two years ago we **'researched'** the number of hits professional job titles got when searched for via Google. On 7th March 2007 the job title **'project manager'** received 51,500,000 hits. On 5th January 2009 the number had increased to 57,300,000 while the term accountant had 33,400,000 hits (6,500,000 less than before) and civil engineer had decreased by around 3,500,000 to 3,740,000. What this appears to tell us is that project management and the role of a project manager is on the increase and as a result the extremes will probably become even wider.

Does this matter? Of course projects vary in size and complexity and of course different organisations invest in their staff to different degrees as well as differing in what they can afford to pay for development. But in writing this Lucid Thought we are left pondering what the absolute essentials are if a person is to have any chance of delivering even the smallest, least complex project in an efficient and effective way. Regardless of what you think about the merits of project management being a profession in its fullest sense - project management development in 2 hours seems just a little ambitious!

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