CHALLENGES AND LESSONS, IMPLEMENTING 1000+ CONCURRENT PROJECTS IN A DEVELOPING COUNTRY

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Short Abstract

Implementing project and portfolio management in an organisation, requires significant environmental support. This paper presents challenges and lessons from implementing project and portfolio management in a developing world for the management of a thousand and more concurrent projects. The aspects of a project management office, skills development and technology are discussed from practical examples.

Keywords: project /programme/portfolio management office, enterprise programme management,

1.   Background

Global competition, rapid technological advancement and innovations necessitate constant development of new and improved products and services as well as search for and development of new forms of business operations and liaising. What today has significant market value might tomorrow already be obsolete. Organisations are faced with rapid outdating of markets that compel constant development and improvement. Apart from continual emergence of new products and services and search for innovative forms of business operations, organisations are faced with a problem how to successfully and efficiently manage all these integrated changes from the entrepreneurial, managerial, technical, economic and financial aspect. Companies and other organisations practically deal with and resolve the problems of development and improvement of products, services and business operations, and thus improvement of competitiveness and business performance, within the scope of disciplines of strategic management, project management, operations management, etc. Integrated management of multi-disciplinary teams across a wide organisational and geographic front require multifaceted environmental support as can be provided by the programme office.

The paper falls into the strategic management category. "New economy" strategy-focussed leadership and management leading towards creating and sustaining a learning and knowledge management culture is dealt with. This enables an organisation to move away from bureaucratic practices towards managing its value chain through employing a project and programme-based approach, and culminates in continuous transformation, change and improvement. The resulting enhanced communication, as also, strategy aligned coordination and integration of operations lead to a structured, yet flexible approach towards achieving measurable benefits of strategic importance.

The paper will be presented within the following key components:

- The Challenge: A summarised description of the challenge encountered, which also provides the backdrop to the discussion on environment, structure and lessons learnt

- The Environment: A summary of selected components, providing a background description of the milieu in which the programme office and sub-projects are implemented.

- Lessons Learnt: A discussion of selected knowledge gained in the implementation of programme offices as can be utilised with the establishment, roll-out and operation of future programme offices.

2. The Challenge

The challenge can be summarised as the implementation of programme offices for various multi-disciplinary project environments, spanning 1000+ projects, across 1 million square kilometres in Africa.

3. Environment

The environment influences the project design and implementation. For the purposes of this discussion, the environment is structured around the categories of people and infrastructure.

The following aspects are selected from a wide range to provide some visibility and background to understanding of the specific People- environment in which the programme offices are implemented, leading to addressing the challenges related to:

- Limited skills base and challenges of skills development and capacity building in 11 languages and cultures

- Education, literacy and wisdom,

- Broad legislative and regulatory environment, labour practices, etc.

- Financial management, financial services, risk management, qulsity management, procedural compliance, etc

In terms of "Infrastructure", the following are selected from a wide range of impacting areas to demonstrate the specific influence and challenges posed by the environment on the establishment and operation of a programme office to support 1000+ projects.

- Wide geographic spread, resulting inter alia in significant demands on logistics for the movement of people and goods. This includes the impact on e.g. training, communication,

- Access to technology, including financial services, telecommunication, etc

- Organisational thinking and leadership models, with specific reference to transformation management, multi-cultural interaction, bureaucracy and innovation management, etc.

- Economic growth, development models, unemployment, first and second economies.

These challenges present an overview of the environmental factors which are managed to support the implementation of the programme office. Its strategic aligned coordination and integration is required to support business key performance areas and operational success providing measurable benefits of strategic importance

4.   Lessons "Learnt"

The methodology utilised focused on three core components at conceptualisation, design, planning, implementation and roll-out stages for the various projects and programmes. The three are aspects related to:

- People

- Process, and

- Technology

5.   People

It is widely acknowledged that people contribute substantially in the majority to the success of any project. With the roll-out of 1000+ projects, across the diverse and geographically spread environment as described above, the reliance on individuals are significant. (EOH states "technology makes it possible, PEOPLE make it happen")

The following components required significant investment and the presentation elaborates on specific interventions regarding the following:

- Skills development and capacity building (refer examples of email and project management reporting)

- The impact of training methodology choices, accompanied by appropriate technology options for training and skills development, transforming the significant logistical challenges into unique financial benefit for all stakeholders.

- The impact of labour practices, project financial management and expectation of team members on the logistics of project implementation.
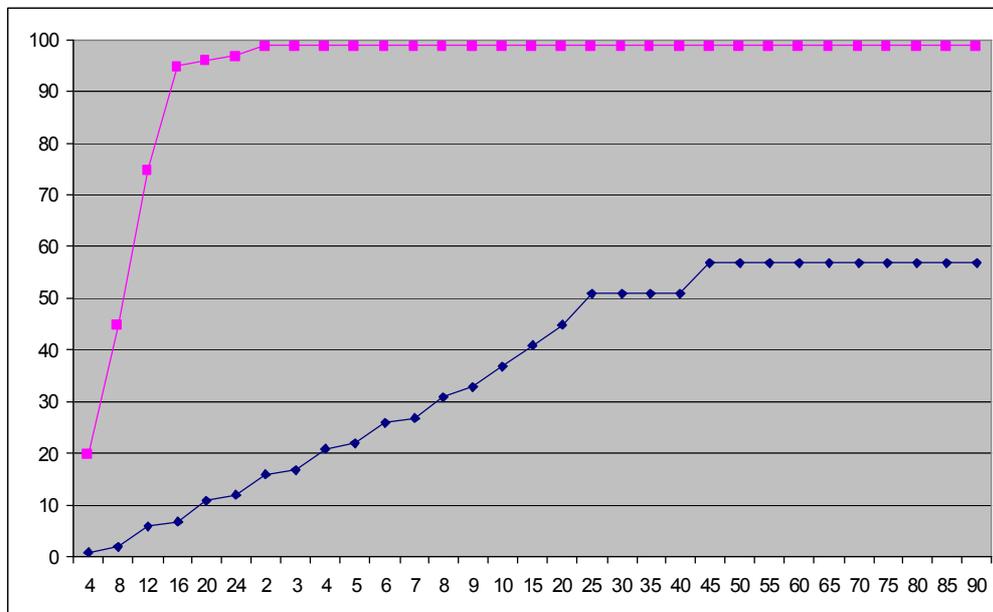
## 6.	Process

In terms of business processes, procedures and guidelines, the programme office and project implementation is significantly impacted by the balance of rigid procedures vs flexibility, as well as its influence on the understanding and commitment of the team members.

(An innocent question on whether procedures should be increased or decreased when expanding beyond 1000 project causes significant debate and requires pragmatic solutions)

## 7.	Technology

Thin client web-based technologies empower both technology rich and technology challenged communities, providing a base to integrate energies. Some examples of technologies implemented will be provided, as well as key criteria found to assist the selection of appropriate technologies in the specific applicable environments.

## 8.	Summary

This paper presents practical feedback on the implementation of programme offices for 1000+ projects in organisations. Although not a pure scientific study or academic thesis, it can provide input to the understanding of real-life challenges and the development of skills to address these challenges. Selected aspects of people, process and technology were discussed in developing the environment on which a successful project management office can be implemented.

The challenge is yours, the opportunity in South Africa