Ecademy* posting by Mark Mardell**

An Annual Report for Project Management

I often hear the argument about Government projects and their various issues which is often met with the response of shouldn't they be run by Big Business or run more like Big Business.

To me it is not valid to compare as Government is tackling projects of a complexity and scale that is tackled by very few if any businesses, for example:

- Delivering the Olympics
- Building the NHS IT system from basically scratch
- Delivering services in other languages - Scots Gaelic and Welsh
- An Identity Card scheme for 60m people

    The reason that we know about issues within Government Projects because of the following:

- Scrutiny by Parliamentary Committees
- The National Audit Office
- The Freedom of Information Act giving scrutiny by the press and the public

All of these mean Government Projects are open to scrutiny, whether it is to sufficient degree which can be argued about, however scrutiny is there. This is of course is great, successful delivery of projects is key to how well our taxes are spent and to a large degree how successful our economy is.

This does beg the question though: **To what degree are the projects of Big Business scrutinised, i.e. how do we actually know that projects within Big Business are actually any more successful (by time, quality, cost) than those in Government?**

The answer is of course that we don't, any Business can publish basically whatever information it likes on projects, and indeed most will cherry-pick a few successful examples to put forward for Awards and include in the Annual Report.

Would it be positive, if in fact all Businesses had to publish some auditable Project Information as part of their Annual Accounting?

Well clearly they would not have to publish all of the details of what they had achieved, or hoped to achieve in the project. They could however publish a few key Project Metrics, which would be auditable by an outside source (a random sample probably).

I would suggest:

- Project Code Name
- Change Area: Business Change, New Building (Physical Infrastructure), Office Move, Application Development etc.
- Initial Budget:
- Current (End of Financial Year)/Actual (Final) Budget
- Number of Changes Signed-Off Current/Actual
- Benefits Realised % or £
- Initial Timeline
- Current Actual/Timeline
- Quality Criteria Planned
- Quality Criteria Met Current/Actual
- Project Issues Raised to Project Board Level

This would give both the company some comparison figures across the industry, the key one would be for me, comparison between Number of Changes and Percentage Success rate and Costs. For an IT Director, he could say to his business, look our direct competitor makes 50% less changes and gets 60% better performance on projects.

Of course internally this would be valid information, *I wonder how many Blue-Chip Executives, could today lay their hands, on these metrics for their Business?* Wouldn't that be useful information? The fact that they knew they were externally audited figures would add to their credence, i.e. its not just spin from the Project Manager.

For me, the biggest project mistakes in Big Business, as in Government I am sure, is the failure to measure benefits after the project. An external audit would force Businesses to do this and I am sure this would be very positive for them to do so.

In terms of Shareholders it would give them valuable information, why did building the new Depot cost 50% more that the one built three years ago? Why are your projects less successful than your competitors?

For me it's a simple formula:

Better Scrutiny (Externally Audited) = Better Project Reviews = Changes = Better Projects Next Time

Of course metrics across industries would vary, for example within pharmaceutical research companies, probably 99% of projects will fail! That's OK though that is that nature of that business, the 1% that work pay for the rest.

These metrics are of course figures and no doubt it would be possible to manipulate them, personally I believe in openness and feel that most companies would gain way more than they lose by publishing the most accurate data that they had. I am sure they would show that no company has 100% successful projects.

For smaller businesses I would hope that it would drive them to use projects more to deliver their business growth, perhaps under a certain Turnover figure it would be optional rather than mandatory.

Compliance on a number of fronts (IT Security, Accounting Practice, Health and Safety, Trading Standards) is part of modern Business life, along with audit by external parties to enforce it. I am sure that Project Compliance could be added to existing processes without much extra cost and I do not think it would require an army of civil servants to administer, for example if it was just published as part of a Companies Annual (Quarterly) Accounts.

To challenge myself, as a Project Manager, would I be happy for the name of the Project Manager to be added to the list of published information? Well yes, it would not be 100% Success for me but it would be Very High, and if Heart Surgeons have to publish their success rates, why not Project Managers?

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