

It all depends on individual skills

Training courses in project management methodologies like PRINCE2 have never been so popular, yet anecdotally the vast majority of projects still fail to meet expectations. If tried and tested methodologies aren't the problem, the likely issue must be how the methodology is applied by the project team. Eddie Kilkelly, Chief Operating Officer at ILX Group plc, examines common skills gaps and argues for a new approach to ensure that project teams have the right mix of people.

Using a training provider that has been accredited by the APM Group (APMG) is a good start. However, most training courses for the various best practice methodologies are generic so learners are able to pass their qualification exams. That does not necessarily leave the learner with the best understanding of how they should apply the methodology within their own workplace. Nor does it provide complete transparency about how colleagues are applying best practice across the organization to ensure everyone is working to the same processes and standards. These problems can be overcome through the use of additional organization-specific training and coaching and mentoring from more experienced project managers to help members of the project team.

In addition, it's essential to ensure that everyone involved in the project has the right competences. One of the main barriers to success is the failure of project sponsors to be fully engaged and supportive. What does the organization need to do to ensure project sponsors are capable of providing governance and leadership? Project managers may have great experience and the right training, but if they have moved from having line management responsibilities to running a project, do they have the right soft skills in order to manage resources that don't belong to them? Can they inspire and persuade others to do what needs to be done? Can they ensure the flow of work is taking place at the right pace? Do members of the project team or other project resources understand the scope and terminology of the project, the practical techniques they will use and what is required of them? Once knowledge is gained about how to make projects work within the organization – how is it communicated so any mistakes are not repeated?

New tactics to ensure success

In my opinion, levels of successful project outcomes could be improved by two key actions. The first is to include project management training in the induction programme for all relevant staff, tailored to communicate 'how we run projects here'. The second is to assign a skills assurance coordinator to every project team; just as each project may have a business assurance coordinator. This individual would examine three main areas: first, does each individual have the right hard and soft skills to fulfil their role? Second, is the obviously qualified individual right in this particular context, for this project? Third, what action needs to be taken when the ideal candidates become unavailable due to project slippage, changing organisational priorities or career moves? How can new resources be identified and brought into the project team? What gaps in competence exist and how can they be filled? Ultimately, project success depends upon the people involved and it is time human resources are treated with the same diligence as any other aspect of project planning.

Eddie Kilkelly is chief operating officer for the ILX Group plc. Eddie has been involved in the Best Practice industry for over fifteen years. During this time he has worked as both a project manager and IT service manager and more recently as an implementation consultant providing support to organizations who have adopted the use of Best Practice methods including PRINCE2, MSP and ITIL. To date, ILX Group has trained over 500,000 people across 97 countries. For further information visit www.ilxgroup.com

