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Benchmarking SRO's attitudes: the quandary of the SRO

*By Paul Mansell,
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Private and public organisations across the globe are at a critical point in their history. The current economic climate means there will be winners and losers; the losers will succumb to the 'pull' of the recession, whilst the winners will harness the opportunities to pro-actively 'push' themselves through the current fog. Forward thinking organisations recognise that driving success through programme delivery excellence will be the key to success.

At the apex of programme governance is the Senior Responsible Owner (SRO), sometimes known as the Programme Sponsor or Executive Sponsor, and it is this critical role and its current pressures, that we considered in a recent research study.

Many SROs are caught between a 'rock and a hard place' right now – new to the job, criticised for not having the vision, leadership or experience for the role, but in reality not truly enabled by their organisations due to wider systemic misunderstanding of programme governance and immature delivery capability.

In association with our partners (BT, The Home Office, the Association of Project Management and The APM Group), we interviewed eighty SROs across the public and private sector, who are together responsible for the delivery of programmes worth in excess of £24BN. Our aim was to help SROs identify common problem areas and mutual support mechanisms, and examine general attitudes to programme leadership, governance, and stakeholder engagement so we can help this community improve delivery.

Survey highlights

The survey results showed that many SROs feel that their already complex roles will get tougher over the next twelve months. There is also a clear question mark over their team's perceived capability to deliver programmes successfully, with almost half the leaders interviewed saying their teams don't have the sufficient skills required to do their jobs successfully.

The SROs also admitted they lacked clarity around what they were accountable for and required more support in their roles; indeed, only 10% felt there was an adequate understanding of the benefits their high-profile, costly programmes would bring.

The research also revealed concerns in relation to major programme governance (specifically, in terms of getting this optimally designed into corporate governance constructs) and a lack of understanding generally, from multiple programme stakeholders, as to the role of the SRO.

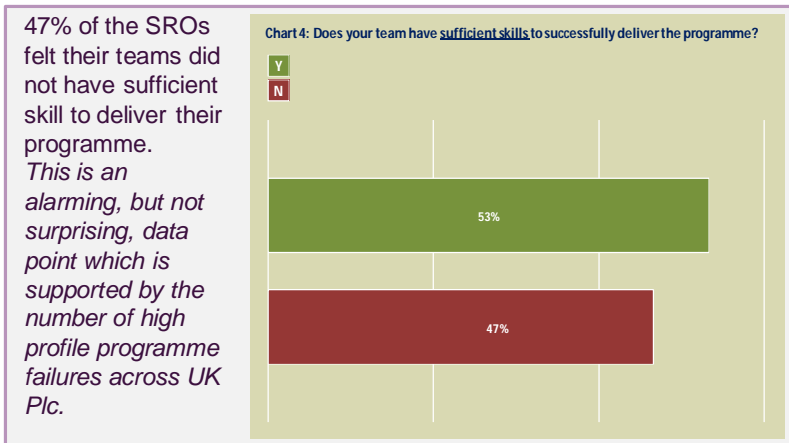
The survey highlights the fact that SROs are in an incredibly difficult position right now. Many are new to their roles and feel they, and their direct reports, are not getting the appropriate training and support needed to do the job.

Training and development

The fact that 47% of SROs felt their teams did not have the sufficient skills to deliver their programmes is alarming, but perhaps not surprising, given the number of high profile programmes that fail. Many admitted that they (and their teams) were new to the programme environment and herein lies part of the problem. Although some people were excellent at leading, they were perhaps not experienced in PPM delivery, and whilst others were very experienced at PPM, they were not seasoned

team leaders. Alternatively, some SROs were skilled in both these areas, but not in how to influence people or change behaviors – two vital skills required for winning over stakeholders and leading people through change.

It was also felt there was more that could be done to support people on a 1-2-1 basis, as well as on a team basis, and that senior staff were just as in need of training as junior.



The APM Group is addressing some of these concerns by rolling out a new, Home Office - developed training programme and qualification for SROs, which, responding to feedback from the industry,

is less based on the technical aspect of the role, but more on how the SRO should approach their role, and how these areas play a critical part in their programme's success.

Clarity around accountability

SROs also agreed that there was often insufficient clarity surrounding accountabilities and authorities to ensure that organisations knew ‘where the buck stops’ when things get difficult. It was acknowledged that this aspect becomes increasingly critical to UK Plc when these mega-programmes are such a key means of driving through the current economic gloom.

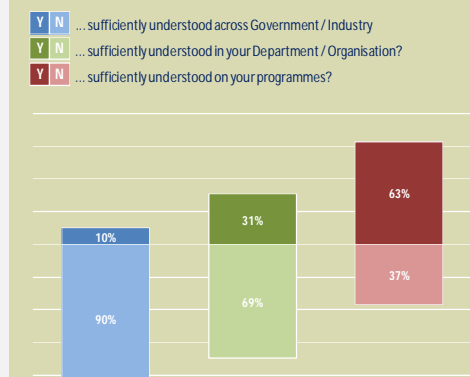
Building programmes that stay aligned to strategy and achieve relevant benefits

As for understanding the benefits of major programmes – 90% of SROs felt there was a general lack of understanding as to why they were embarking on their major change programmes in the first place, and reported that deficient business cases caused them major issues. Many business cases only did a competent job in getting initial activity kicked off, but too often weren't built to last the programme's life cycle and flex with wider organisational or economic changes – meaning benefits quickly became redundant. It was reported that more work is needed to design robust business cases that are reviewed and updated regularly in line with changing strategy and goals, to keep teams and key stakeholders engaged and on track.

But if the world is constantly changing, how does an SRO check that their programme remains on strategy and is going to deliver real and relevant value? Pulling the plug on a major programme that has gone off-track and is doomed to fail can be a good move – if it is going to save you money and resource in the medium to long term. But too few SROs are given the authority or support to take the tough decisions.

Most SROs believe their programme teams have a good understanding about business cases and benefits realisation but this weakens considerably at organisational and sector level, raising questions about the effort organisations put into educating their practitioners about key programme management topics.

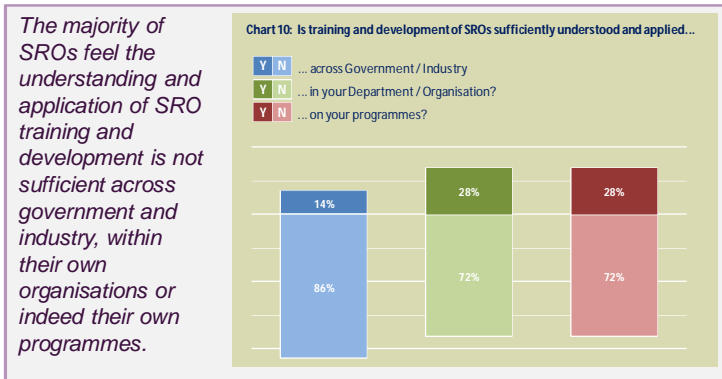
Chart 5: Are the disciplines of business case and benefits management...



Similar to business case and benefits management, there was confusion and contradiction around how well programme governance is understood. Only 25% of SROs felt there was sufficient knowledge and application of programme governance structures across government and industry. However, over 70% said they believed the programme governance

structure on their own programmes was adequate.

Going forward



Businesses need to work harder to understand the true role of the SRO within their organisation, find the person with the right blend of vision and experience to do the job, and then incentivise them to

stay – continuity of leadership being a key contributing factor to programme success.

An example of progress in this area is by the Office of Government Commerce’s Major Projects Review Group, who strategically focus on the key tenets of Affordability, Deliverability and Value for Money as a barometer for UK’s 40 major programmes’ likely success. The survey highlighted that SROs have much to do before these three principles can be achieved as standard (i.e. more likely than not) on major programmes. Until this happens, SROs need greater support, and appropriate challenge, to ensure they have the governance, the accountability, the benefits realisation and PPM capabilities in place to ensure delivery success.

Programme SRO Interactive DVD

0. Programme Diagnostic	1. Introduction to the SRO	2. Governance	3. Vision & Stakeholders	4. Assurance	5. Cost Control	6. Key Enablers
Diagnostic Results	Objectives Capability Gap Assessment P3M3 Maturity The SRO Role Sources of SRO Power Leadership vs Management	Programme Governance Clarity of RACI Delegated Authority Portfolio Programmes and Projects Enterprise Programmes Link to the BTD Operating Model PPM in an Agile Environment	Establish a vision Statement Planning Business Case Benefits Management Stakeholders and Benefits Stakeholders	Assurance Strategic Risk Management Opportunity Management Strategic Decision Making	Reporting Programme Finance Delivering Real Cost Reduction Change Control Resource	Contract Management Procurement Why Do Programmes Fail Driving Successful Change Situational Leadership

Moorhouse's SRO Handbook developed for BT

PILOT Senior Responsible Owner Handbook
Leading BT Programmes Effectively and Efficiently

Moorhouse is developing a one-to-one SRO mentoring programme. If you are interested in participating, or would like further information on the SRO topic, please contact paulmansell@moorhouseconsulting.com. For a full copy of the SRO Survey Results please visit <http://www.moorhouseconsulting.com/knowledge/SRO-Survey>

Following the survey, Moorhouse recently gathered over forty SROs from the private and public sector at BT Tower, London for a 'live' debate to discover how they could better collectively support one another, build their capability and learn 'best practice' tools and techniques. Leaders from the Department for Transport, the 2012 Olympics Delivery Authority, Siemens and the Metropolitan Police Service were among those who contributed to roundtable discussions and heard keynote speakers from the Home Office and Office of Government Commerce.

About the Author:***Paul Mansell******Author***

Paul Mansell is a Director at Moorhouse Consulting, the Association of Project Management's 'Project Management Company of the Year'. Previously a Director at Deloitte Consulting, Paul has broad programme leadership and management experience, particularly within the defence, transport, finance and telecoms sectors, and has successfully supported the delivery of high profile, complex programmes that have been subject to intense political and media scrutiny. Recent examples include lead strategic advisor to the National Programme for IT Repositioning programme and lead advisor to the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority on its new 'Intelligent Client' Operating Model. Paul has an MA from Kings College London, an MPhil from Cambridge University, and programme management accreditation (PMP, PRINCE2, MSP Advanced Practitioner). He is a Fellow of both the Institute of Management Consultancy (CMC qualified) and the Association of Project Management. He is certified as a MBCI by the Business Continuity Institute and is a Chartered Director with the Institute of Directors. Paul can be contacted at paulmansell@moorhouseconsulting.com.