

News from the United Kingdom

By Miles Shepherd

First the Good News...

Most of the world's population, at least those who attended New Year's Eve celebrations or watched on TV has seen the culmination of many time critical projects as fireworks displays and laser shows all successfully delivered on time...at the stroke of local Midnight. This demonstrates that Project Management is alive and well throughout the world and unites us all.

In UK, research from UK's Confederation of British Industry CBI shows that the British economy is growing. Projects continue to be the preferred way of doing business for both industry and Government. Reports also indicate that pressure to improve project delivery also continues and all major spending Ministries now have their Centres of Programme and Project Excellence in place. British Prime Minister Blair is well known for his insistence that all non-routine



Government spending has to be delivered by projects and is on record as highlighting the need for civil servants to become project specialists, a major policy shift in a professional area where generalists have previously been seen as the role model.

In fact, the expansion in delivery by project has continued to grow across most sectors. While major projects are reported throughout the traditional areas of construction and Defence, there has been considerable expansion in financial services and IT projects. Even in the academic world, not normally seen as the most innovative, further programmes dealing with project management and related topics has continued to expand in 2006.

...some not so good news

Not everything in the PM garden is lovely however as the record of delivery continues to be erratic. While some very high profile projects such as the new Terminal 5 at London's Heathrow Airport have made substantial progress, others like the new Wembley Stadium have had problems with contract disputes and late delivery slowing work to a crawl. Similarly, doubt has been cast on the ability of the Olympic Delivery Authority's ability to deliver the 2012 Games infrastructure on budget.

Within Government projects, the delivery record enjoys a poor and perhaps undeserved reputation. Several major programmes such as the new Identity Card, part of the National Security plan, and the Department of Health's Patient Record System have been heavily criticised for problems over confidentiality and security but are these issues the direct concerns of the Programme Managers? To some extent, this is an ethical issue and one on which some professional Project Management

Associations are silent, preferring to hide behind their bodies of knowledge. Delivery against changing specifications and timetable is always problematic and the tax paying public seldom understand the complexities, even if they see them.

Academic News

Some 30 Universities in UK offer various forms of project management education and about 40 separate degrees programmes. Levels vary from Bachelor's level in construction PM through project oriented MBAs to formal Masters in Programme and Project Management. Two new programmes have been added recently, a traditional Masters from the University of Hertfordshire with options in IT Projects and electives covering Knowledge Management and risk will be presented in 2007, while the Bournemouth University's Institute of Business and Law has inaugurated a new Masters in PM by Research, a first for a British university.

Professional Society News

The UK's lead society, APM has announced its line up for 2007 with Mike Nichols announced as Chairman, succeeding Tom Taylor. One of the first announcements by the New Chairman was the appointment of several Vice Presidents including past Chairs Peter Morris, Rodney Turner, Donald Heath and your correspondent. Nichols is the CEO of Nichols Ltd, a major international project consultancy with blue chip customers ranging from FTSE 100 corporates to government and European Commission. He was recently responsible for APM's review of their international policy. APM has several initiatives in hand to supplement their restructuring: the monthly magazine has been refreshed following a tender exercise which confirmed IMPACT Ltd as publishers, but new format has been implemented from the January 2007 issue and a editorial team has taken charge.

Outlook for 2007

So the world of project management goes from strength to strength in UK with strong Government support and an increase in the number of successful projects. The level of poor delivery seems still to be consistently higher than hoped but as benefits management becomes better understood, so too the reality of effective project management is better appreciated. The outlook for 2007 is good with increased numbers of projects, of higher total value to the nation and the prospect of better understanding of what constitutes a successful project. Academic interest increases and this is having an impact on the overall quality of project manager available to the industry.



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