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UK Project Management Round Up

By Miles Shepherd

Another Government Project Management Failure

The House of Commons Public Accounts Committee (PAC) has criticised a key Department for a range of major project management failures. Edward Leigh, PAC chairman, described the development of the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) Rural Payments Agency (RPA) as "a master-class in bad decision making". Reports

According to Contractor UK, the contractor portal, the project broke so many of the rules of government IT project management, painfully established over more than three decades, that it ought to be included in the training of all government technology staff and senior civil servants. Failures included:



- inadequate pilot testing, due to the excessively short timetable; ignoring the lessons of "the history of implementing government IT programmes," which are that the new scheme should have been trialled in the first year and only fully implemented in the second.
- failing to monitor implementation progress, through failing to keep not oversight boards properly informed; thus delays were not detected and no allowance was made to adjust the schedule.
- unclear lines of authority between the RPA and Defra
- missing the inadequate programme design and inadequate troubleshooting when the problems were discovered.
- lack of contingency planning for the event of new computer systems not working immediately.

- not halting the project despite 'red' classifications at Gateway Reviews in 2004, 2005 and 2006; changes aimed at rescuing the programme caused further delay.
- after a redesign in 2006, failing to rectify all the problems; the agency still cannot deal effectively with farmers' queries about their payments.

According to Alan Shipman of Finance Week, the mistakes at the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) that led to a seizing-up of payments to farmers in England have already become a painful 'how not to do it' lesson for many public service budget-holders. The PAC report draws a cautionary tale that will resonate with many private-sector financial managers.

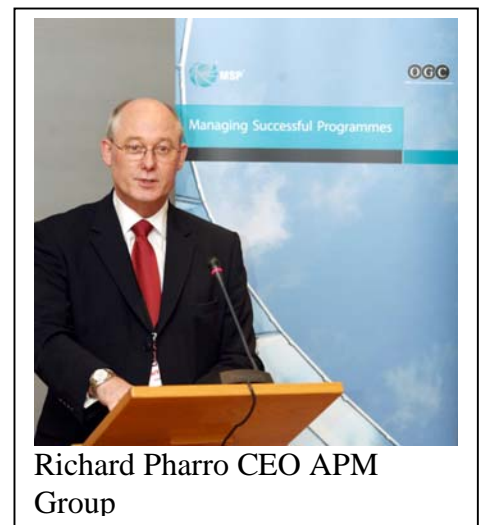
Britain's farmers now number fewer than half a million and contribute less than 1% of national output, but they retain weight at election time and are masters at raising complaint when not given their due. The RPA's errors in this case were made plainer by the adoption of a different system in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland which largely avoided the English delays.

Re-launch of OGC's Managing Successful Projects

The PAC report coincided with launch of the latest version of '*Managing Successful Projects*', The Office of Government Commerce's (OGC) best practice guide to project management practice. OGC is responsible for leading the drive to improve Britain's government projects and has just completed a 10 month refresh project to update their highly popular book.

Speaking at a Champagne reception in the Boardroom of 1 Horse Guards Rd on 6th September, John Stewart, Director for Policy and Standards, thanked the many staff and contractors for their efforts over the last 10 months. Extensive consultation took place with MSP users, experts and academics in both public and private sectors resulted in the redesigned and updated version.

Latest developments and good practice in programme management have been captured by authors of the guidance and members of the Review Team and Reference Group. Mr Stewart noted the contribution made by OGC's official



Richard Pharro CEO APM Group

partners and thanked them for their "ideas, innovation and dedication to the task in hand."

The speeches were brought to a close by Richard Pharro, Chief Executive of the APM Group Ltd, who reminded those present of the great deal of work that has gone into developing and delivering the capability of the partnership programme.

Round the Conferences

September is traditionally the time of conferences in UK and there have been several recently, including the highly successful Project Challenge, held in London's Olympia. Conference Organiser Richard White brought together a number of speakers to cover seminars, process performance and solutions in a series of free presentations. These conference zones were supported by an extensive exhibition with more than 90 vendors and solution specialists. The event was supported by platinum sponsor Microsoft Office Project with CA, CPS and Primavera as gold sponsors. APM, PMI, ACostE, BCS, project (APM's monthly magazine) and Project Manager Today also acted supporters.

Other conferences included Bournemouth University's '3rd Teaching and Learning in Project Management' and IRNOP viii organised by the University of Sussex' CENTRIM. Both are covered in Breaking News on www.pmforum.org.



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