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UK Project Management Round Up

By Miles Shepherd

'Faulty Project' Brings New Year Rail Chaos

Poor risk analysis and inaccurate estimation have been blamed for an overrunning rail project that has brought major disruption to the UK rail system. Tens of thousands of workers were unable to return to work after the Holiday season because of an overrunning maintenance project. The project involved replacement of overhead electrical cabling for high speed lines running through Rugby in England's Midlands. East and West Coast main line trains route through Rugby and closure of the lines at this point cuts major routes into London from the North West, North East and from the Midlands.



A second project delay delayed the re-opening of London's Liverpool Street Station by 24 hours, to the consternation of Network Rail who said they were unaware of any difficulties at the showpiece station until 1 a.m. on Wednesday 3 Jan – just 4 hours before the scheduled re-opening. The lack of stakeholder

communication has clearly exacerbated an already tense situation as it appeared key engineering staff were switched from one project to another in what critics have claimed was a money chase. David Franks, rail director of National Express is reported to have said that 'contractors seem to have gone where they were going to get the most cash'. This is against a background of another project at Stevenage where work was abandoned to transfer staff to Rugby.

Major contractors Bechtel responsible for the project management aspects of the Rugby project have been severely criticised. '...Bechtel completely failed to deliver...' claimed a senior Network Rail source according to the Times

newspaper which went on to claim that 'this episode calls into question the future role of contractors' in the management and execution of major rail maintenance projects.

Work overran by more than 4 days on a routine maintenance project and comes at a time when rail fares have been increased above inflation and significant parts of the system shut down over the Holiday season, all causing anger and frustration among the commuting public. Bechtel claim that the work was more complicated and extensive than they had estimated, leading to a shortage of engineers with the correct rail qualifications and experience. Others claim the work was underestimated and that no proper risk action had been taken.



This is not the first problem faced by the rail industry, privatised under the last Conservative administration in a complex deal that separated the rail track from operations. London Underground maintenance was contracted out to a consortium of engineering companies but Metronet, one of the two prime contractors failed spectacularly due, it was claimed at the time, to the overly complex nature of the contract arrangements. Similar charges are levelled at the Rail privatisation.

Many critics blame contractors for not just this project failure but for the string of major rail accidents over the past 7 years, all of which were attributed to lack of control over maintenance. Railtrack, the original Government agency overseeing maintenance of the rail infrastructure was replaced by Network Rail as a result of these criticisms. Network Rail has brought many functions in house and the latest failure seems likely to result in the removal of all contractors as maintenance oversight is brought back in house according to the Times, one of UK's leading newspapers.

Short term outcomes are likely to include major fines for Network Rail, in addition to compensation running into £millions they will have to pay to commuters. In the longer term, removal of external contractors from overseeing key projects such as routine maintenance could lead to losses of around £2.5 billion annually for work placed by Network Rail. It seems that faulty execution of key project management activities such as estimation and risk planning added to poor stakeholder communication can have expensive outcomes.

Professional News

The start of a new year ushers in new programmes for the professional societies. APM and PMI UK Chapter both announced extensive events for their

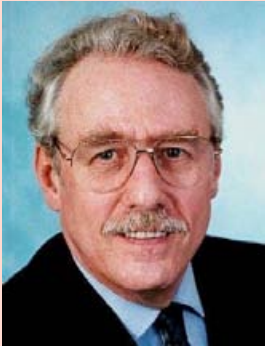
members. PMI tend to concentrate on a 4 large regions based on major centres of industry and business such as London, the Midlands, Scotland and the West of England while APM has a more detailed network of 13 regional Branches, most of whom have meetings in January (see www.apm.org.uk/apmevents.asp for details). PMI seem to mount regional meetings at the different location on a two monthly basis – details at www.pmi-uk.org.

APM continues to build its services and support for members and in January reinforced its personal development support for members. In addition to the usual CPD support, it is now offering a new tool to help practitioners identify their development needs. The APM Competence Framework allows project managers to assess their competences offering a framework for improvement. Based on IPMA's International Competence Baseline (V3) and adjusted for APM's own research based Body of Knowledge, the Competence Framework is seen as an essential component of any project professional's toolkit.



Tantalising first views of the APM Competence Framework were made available electronically as a sample on the APM website in December. It is now available for purchase as a hard copy.

The framework provides a tool to assess an individual's knowledge and experience against a recognised project management benchmark. It is thus a valuable aid in identifying training and development needs including the individual's suitability to obtain internationally recognised professional qualifications. The competence framework is also intended to provide specific areas of knowledge and experience needed as part of each members continuing professional development. While many organisations have developed their own project management competence frameworks to meet their specific organisational needs, this framework, according to an APM spokesperson, seeks to provide a pan-sector project management standard for competence which has been mapped to the international standards and qualifications available worldwide.



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