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**UK Project Management Round Up**

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Measuring Programme Progress

One of the great imponderables in the Project World is how do you measure progress in programmes. If you are dealing with a portfolio, it might be tempting to just measure the progress of individual projects but this tends to ignore the systemic aspects where benefits are not simply the sum of the parts. An interesting development in the United States this month is the White House metrics being introduced to measure progress in the Afghanistan struggle.

In times past, such as in Vietnam, the body count was the main measure; before that it was the advances made from one trench line to another. However, modern warfare invalidates these simple measures of success and so the White House has defined some fifty measures that it will use to determine whether the efforts of its troops make are cost effective. Another interesting perspective is who is filling what programme roles. Programme owners, Sponsors and Managers are difficult to discern and it is even harder to understand responsibilities and accountabilities.

Political complexities aside, the Afghanistan situation highlights a great difficulty for military equipment procurement, project and programme management. Recent UK press reports have resurrected the Chinook debacle, as though it were newly discovered. The basic facts, financial pressure to minimise overseas purchase costs lead to a desire to develop critical computer codes to help operate the helicopter in combat roles only for the UK developers to discover that they could not do complete the task. So the Chinooks have been grounded for 8 years after their delivery in 2001. A useful summary is available from The Times online at (<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/politics/article6808604.ece>).

The point here is not the errors that were made or who made them but to highlight the complexities of satisfying multiple stakeholders. It is rarely the military who are the major stakeholder in any equipment programme with Treasury, politicians and civil servants all having critical influence. True, short duration tours in key specification roles often hampers long lead development items (a main battle tank can take up to 20 years from initial concept to introduction into service) can lead to major design issues to say nothing of the problems that can be caused by the rapid development of technology.

Such problems are not confined to the military as the listing from the Times of 25 August shows:

NHS electronic records service This digital records service, about which doctors say they were inadequately consulted, has broken down more than a hundred times and is now more than four years overdue in going fully online. Estimated overspend: £15bn

HMRC tax credits Millions of claims were held up and nearly 400,000 emergency payments made in April 2003 after software went live. Nearly 10,000 companies received fines by mistake and £5.8 billion was paid to people who should not have received money, much of which cannot be recovered. Estimated overspend: £2bn

Benefits Pathway This ambitious scheme, begun in May 1996, hoped to transfer all benefits claims from paper to swipe card. Described by the Public Accounts Committee as "one of the biggest IT failures in the public sector", the system collapsed in January 2000. Estimated overspend: £1bn

Magistrates' courts Libra Fujitsu was the only bidder, at £146 million, in 1998 for this case management system. After spending £232 million on an incomplete system the Government brought in other contractors and suppliers. Estimated overspend: £300m

Aviation ATCS Plagued by bugs, including text that was too small to read, the Air Traffic Control System was six years late and cost almost double the original £350 million budget. Estimated overspend: £300m

Police Impact Designed to allow police forces to share data, the programme is more than three years late and nearly tripled in cost. Estimated overspend: £200m

Economy

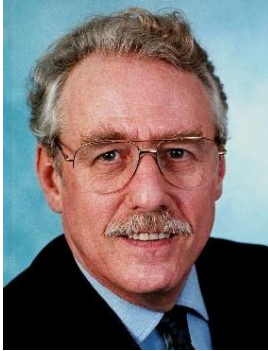
While the economy continues to show some signs of recovery, the construction industry is still in the doldrums with major developer Bovis Homes reporting a loss of £8.6 million in the first half of 2009 compared with a like for like 2008 profit of

some £9.5 million. Significantly, it also reported that the average price of its homes this year is £160,000 compared with £196,700 a year earlier.

PM Education

The education of project managers in UK has been a success story for many British Universities with something like 170 project related courses at undergraduate and post graduate level across more than 40 universities. However, as a new semester approaches, there are signs that Company sponsored places are becoming more difficult to obtain. The latest in Corporate cut backs come from steelmaker Corus and smoothie manufacturer Innocent Drinks who both have reportedly cut graduate entry schemes.

While this is not directly project related, it does indicate a general trend that is bound to affect some of the project management courses, particularly at post grad level. Reports put the loss of Graduate entry schemes has resulted in about 13% fewer posts being available and only four employment sectors (Armed Services, Public Sector, media and retailing) raising their entry numbers.

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Miles Shepherd is a global advisor and International Correspondent for PMForum in the United Kingdom. He is also managing director for MS Projects Ltd, a consulting company supporting various UK Government agencies, nuclear industry organisations and other businesses. Miles has over 30 years' experience on a variety of projects in UK, Eastern Europe and Russia. His PM experience includes defence, major IT projects, decommissioning of nuclear reactors, nuclear security, rail and business projects for the UK Government and EU. Past Chair and Fellow of the Association for Project Management (APM), Miles is also past president and current chair of the Executive Board of the International Project Management Association (IPMA). He was recently named Chair of the ISO committee that is developing the new ISO 21500 Guidelines for Project Management. He was also involved in leading APM's recently published guidelines for project management oversight and governance. Additional information about Mr. Shepherd can be found at <http://www.pmforum.org/ambassadors/ambassadors.htm#Shepherd>. Miles Shepherd is based near London and can be reached at miles.shepherd@msp-ltd.co.uk.