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Project Management Update from the East Midlands

By Philip Smelt

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Introduction

Welcome to this my second PM update for *PM World Today*, with your help I intend to provide details of Project Management news and events around the East Midlands of interest to all. So please get in touch with any Project related information.

Someone once said ‘we live in exciting times’; well they don’t get more ‘exciting’ than when the purse strings are constantly being drawn in. What this has meant for projects regionally is a re-focus, a re-prioritization, with some tough decisions having to have be made. i.e. Just what is it we can’t not afford to do? The impact of this re-prioritization has yet to be fully understood as the region’s public sector senior management teams re-assess the hundreds of programmes and projects that make up their business plans. Inevitably the private sector will be impacted upon too, as the region’s IT companies, constructors and consultancies in turn have found programme and project work harder to find.

However, all is not doom and gloom and at the end of the day there is a certain rationale here that perhaps should always have been in play. Why are we really doing this project? Does this represent the best use of (public) funding? Are these identified benefits real? For some of us this is leading to a new way of working, new reporting approaches, tighter controls, greater transparency. Exciting times indeed; and I believe that times like these can only lead to one end, a greater level of professionalism within programme and project management. Thank you Darwin.

People

Kevin Parry, Director of Cogenic Limited, and a friend and colleague of mine at the Association for Project Management (APM), Yorkshire and North Lincolnshire branch, has informed me that he will be in Hong Kong between April and June this year meeting business contacts and is very interested in meeting fellow professionals as well as to make presentations on the subject of project and programme management to suitable groups.



Kevin (pictured at left, with me at last year's Project Challenge) is a Programme Director and Consultant, having held programme director roles in global telecommunications businesses and healthcare.

He is a regular writer, and was a contributor to the APM's guides on Project Governance, and Portfolio Management. He is also a member of the specific interest group on Programme Management.

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More information about Cogenic is at www.cogenic.co.uk

Events

February 2010, University of Huddersfield

With over forty pre-registered attendees, the snowy night event I attended at the University of Huddersfield in late February was extremely well received. The presentation, entitled ‘How to Avoid Project Failure – Learning Lessons from the Past’ represented the APM Yorkshire & North Lincolnshire branch’s first foray into this area of their regional coverage; and was delivered by Richard Schofield the Managing Director of Rider Hunt Management Services, an international project management consultancy based in Leeds.



Providing numerous examples and case studies of both historical and contemporary project ‘failures’, Richards presentation was aimed at Students, PM newcomers and Project Professionals alike. Throughout the talk Richard posed the question, ‘why haven’t we learned the lessons of the past?’ as it became apparent that as a profession we are still making the same mistakes – particularly when it comes to allowing ‘P’olitical and/or ‘p’olitical interference on a project.

(Photo, left to right, Eric Summers, University of Huddersfield; Richard Schofield, MD, Rider Hunt Management Services; Philip Smelt, APM Y&NL branch Chairman.)

As well as providing clear direction on the use of approaches to help embed a lessons learned culture within a project, through for example the use of project closure tools or reality checks at key stages; Richard also explored the softer side of project management in terms of knowing when to say enough is enough, and holding that key conversation with a troublesome stakeholder or sponsor, that gets the project back on track. Richard also posed another question, just because it went over budget and took far longer to achieve, did the project really fail?

And finally.....

Dr Peter Parkes – A catch-up

Readers of my last update may recall mention of Peter Parkes, Chairman of APM's London Branch, a friend and colleague, and his availability to speak to interested parties during his three month sabbatical to Australia and the Asia Pacific. Well Peter has now returned to Blighty having managed to avoid our worst winter for 40 years, and catching up with him recently he let me know how he lost no opportunity in promoting the latest offering from the APM's Governance SIG – 'Sponsoring Change: governance aspects of Project Sponsorship'. He also justified the trip in terms of allowing him time to complete the drafting of his book, 'NLP for project management: making soft skills less hard'.

Peter managed to mix business with pleasure to meet up with fellow directors and project luminaries from the States that he visited, clocking up about thirty meetings. All in all, the PM profession and industry seemed to Peter to be in good health in Australia, and he looks forward to returning in October to present at the AIPM annual conference and meeting up with the northern and southern States.



As part of the Governance SIG's Outreach programme, Peter, also an APM Director, called in to the Hong Kong branch. He presented best practice for governance of PM in general. Over fifty pre-registered for the talk at Hong Kong's prestigious yacht club, which proved to be a very interactive affair. Mark Lomas, chairman of the branch, informed Peter that 'The project management profession in Hong Kong is not as mature as the UK, US or Australia, so many of the concepts presented would have been new to a lot of participants, and

it was a privilege to have an acknowledged expert in the field of governance to answer questions'. Photo: Peter Parkes (right) with Hong Kong chairman Mark Lomas at their regular Yacht club venue overlooking the skyline of Kowloon

Peter also visited Singapore where he noted that project management and the economy in general were booming with many new construction projects visible across the skyline. Moving on to the Philippines, unrest around upcoming elections was visible with military checkpoints on main roads. However, Peter found that many in the Philippines still continued to find better opportunities abroad than at home.

About the Author:***Philip Smelt****Author**International Correspondent – UK
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Philip Smelt, B.Sc.(Hons.), M.Phil., MAPM works at Lincolnshire County Council (England's 4th largest County) as a Project Manager within their new Programme Centre. Philip began his career as a research chemist for the Ministry of Defence at the Chemical Defence Establishment, Porton Down; studying gas adsorption on novel polymeric materials, research that resulted in an M.Phil. Philip has traveled the globe whilst working on projects in the scientific instrumentation industry, including 5 years in the Former Soviet Union at the time of Perestroika and Glasnost. His work involved the commissioning of multi-million pound state-of-the-art Surface Science Instrumentation. Philip also held the post of Innovation & Technology Counsellor for Humberside's new Business Links where he managed a portfolio of 200 companies, providing solutions and advice utilizing schemes and initiatives delivered through the UK's Department of Trade and Industry and European Commission. For a Westland Helicopters Computer Based Training sub-contractor, he led a team of courseware designers, authors, graphics artists and application software engineers in the production of multi-screen Computer Aided Instruction and Emulation Systems. He has also worked for several overseas Navies and delivered multi-million pound control room projects for a 'bluelight' company specializing in Integrated Communications Control Systems. As a Managing Successful Programmes (MSP) Practitioner and Management of Risk (M_O_R) Practitioner, Philip has broad private and public sector exposure. Philip also possesses a Post-graduate Certificate in Systems Thinking and a Post-graduate Diploma in Management Studies, both from the University of Lincoln. He has been a member of the Association for Project Management (APM) since 2005 and Chairman of APM's Yorkshire & North Lincolnshire branch since 2008. Philip is also an Associate Consultant for Cogenic Ltd., www.cogenic.co.uk a UK consultancy that specializes in helping organizations implement strategy, reduce wasted resources and effort, and increase return on investments. Philip can be contacted at project_prince@hotmail.com.