

PM WORLD TODAY – CASE STUDY – NOVEMBER 2009

Supporting the next generation of school leaders Introducing flexible programme and project management at the National College for School Leadership

By Bob Hendicott

It's a little known fact that around 25% of heads are aged 55 or over and will therefore retire over the next five years. So, who is responsible for finding and guiding the vital next generation of leaders? The National College for School Leadership (NCSL) was set up in 2000 by the Blair government, and its remit is to produce the next generation of quality school leaders by promoting and developing improved leadership skills across the education sector.

Based in Nottingham and with a staff of 250 nationwide, this 'non departmental public body' (NDPB) funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families offers its tens of thousands of customers a menu of personal development options that can be tailored to individual need. Training is flexible so it fits around individual school leaders' preferred learning styles and commitments, and is provided by, currently, around twenty specialist training providers.

A flexible yet robust approach to managing programmes

NCSL was keen to use a programme and project management (PPM) approach to help manage its course content, infrastructure and procurement processes.

A successful approach needed to be flexible enough to encompass their many activities and initiatives, but also robust enough to provide standardised processes. Previous attempts to formalise procedures had been less than successful, so the question this time was – how do we make PPM 'stick'?

Moorhouse Consulting was brought in at the start of 2007 to help create and embed processes, templates and understanding that would allow programmes and projects to be managed in a successful, efficient and repeatable way across the College.

Working together to standardise and document procedures

We knew we had to engage with the NCSL project management community quickly, so we worked very closely with them, involving them in every step of the process. This inclusive approach was vital in encouraging 'buy in' to our work. The 'Moorhouse way' helped too – we are people who take our client work very seriously, but not ourselves. I

think NCSL appreciated the fact that we brought deep knowledge and experience of our professional specialisation, but were also approachable, available and people they could talk to and share their concerns with easily.

The project team comprised both Moorhouse and NCSL staff and the joint team developed templates and guidance to support the new ways of working. These, along with examples of progress reporting and dashboards to help view project status, were made accessible for all on the College's intranet.

One-to-one support

Another key success factor of this project was the one-to-one mentoring provided to the College's directors, programme and project managers. Two consultants worked with the directors and senior NCSL project managers acting as mentors and helping to build their PPM capability. The mentoring meant the NCSL leaders deepened their knowledge of PPM and were able to offer more support and credibility to the project as a whole.

Their increased understanding and expertise really brought the project to life, and as they and others really began to 'live' the new approach, we were able to embed the new ways of working in just three months - half the original estimated time.

Building a centre of excellence

An NCSL PPM Centre of Excellence – known as the Programme and Project Management Unit (PPMU) – was also created as a focal point for all aspects of PPM. The unit acted as a repository of best practice, offered central ownership of the new ways of working, provided guidance and support and became the physical embodiment of everything under-pinning the new PPM approach to delivering change across the College. This proved a vital component of the successful adoption of the new way of working.

People not only felt in control of their programmes and projects but they also had somewhere and someone to refer to for ongoing examples of excellence and/or additional guidance.

Similar units had worked successfully for other government agencies, and the team were delighted to emulate wider success with a unit of their own.

The result? Flexible PPM happily embraced by NCSL

The joint NCSL and Moorhouse team transformed the College's PPM into an effective, slick and standardised approach that is fully understood across all parts of the organisation. Staff say it has enabled a deeper understanding of project roles,

responsibilities and deliverables, and enabled them to work more effectively in their programme and project delivery. As a result support to assisting the next generation of school leaders is now being undertaken using a much more structured approach and PPM has been successfully embedded as NCSL's 'new way of working'.

About the Author:**Bob Hendicott***Author*

Bob Hendicott is a Director at Moorhouse Consulting in the UK, recently voted the Association of Project Management's 'Project Management Company of the Year'. He has many years of programme leadership and management consultancy experience and bases his style on a pragmatic blend of practical common sense and teamwork applied to tried and tested delivery frameworks. He has successfully supported a range of high profile and challenging programmes at the heart of central government and in a range of local authorities. For a period of 2 years he led all Moorhouse Consulting's work in support of the National College for School Leadership. More recently his consulting activities have focused on the utilities and telecommunications sectors and he is currently supporting a portfolio of strategic out-sourcing programmes in BT. Bob works regularly at Board level but also particularly enjoys operating as part of joint delivery teams. He regards coaching and skills transfer as key elements of his consulting offering. Bob joined Moorhouse Consulting after five years with PA Consulting Group's public sector practice. Prior to that he was a senior Army officer and brings 25 years' practical experience of delivering complex programmes and projects as a military engineer supporting intervention operations across the globe. He holds a number of consultancy and programme management accreditations and is also a Chartered Director.

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