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Why has there been increased interest in Project Management over the past decade?

By Kevin Archbold

Over the past ten years the US-based Project Management Institute (www.pmi.org) has grown from around 25,000 members to over 250,000. This ten-fold increase represents a marked departure from the steady but slow growth of the organization since its creation in 1969, and is a significant indication of an increased interest in project management.

Certainly the institute has played a vital role in its own growth. PMI[®]'s Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK[®]) has become a standard in many industries, along with its Project Management Professional (PMP[®]) certification. International marketing has also created a global membership, versus a primarily US-based membership ten years ago.

However there are other, more broad-based changes that have also contributed to PMI's growth. These include:

- A recognition that many of us are managing projects, whether or not we have the title of project manager, and that project management skills are beneficial for a wide range of employees. Similarly, there has been a wider recognition that projects in all industries benefit from project management, not just the “traditional” industries of engineering, construction, and more recently IT.
- As global competition has increased in many areas over the past decade, so have customer expectations. This has meant larger and more complex projects that need to be managed more efficiently to remain competitive.
- With the advent of global competition, and therefore a global supply-chain, so outsourcing has become more popular on projects. This may be more cost-effective, but it also increases project risk (as multiple organizations in separate locations with different processes and cultures strive to work together), thus requiring better project managers.
- With more potential suppliers around the world, and a desire to reduce their project risk, major manufacturing OEMs are moving away from time and material contracts, to fixed-price contracts. Fixed priced contracts require more aggressive project management on the part of tier-one vendors, and increase the likelihood they will subsequently subcontract to tier-two vendors

on a fixed price basis. This quickly cascades an increased need for project management down the supply chain.

- As organizations strive to complete, so they attempt to standardize their processes and make them as repeatable as possible. Project management is often one of the processes that is standardized and spread across the organization, not only because it's an example of best practice, but also because it helps to ensure that other best practices are followed.
- Those organizations that are competing successfully are growing – often very quickly. Bringing large numbers of employees into an organization to work on projects, often in multiple locations, presents significant challenges that need to be well managed. But even those organizations that are not aggressively growing, are striving to be more productive with the resources they have available – requiring better project management.
- The final reason is that there are simply more projects to be done today than a decade ago. Each new technological innovation requires more R&D projects, more product design projects, more manufacturing design projects, and so on. This is in addition to maintaining and upgrading existing facilities, products, and technologies, and it's happening in an environment where each product needs to be brought to market more quickly, and for less money.

There is little evidence to suggest any of these factors will be going away any time soon, and so we should expect this increased interest in project management to continue during the next decade. If you haven't already, you might want to consider taking on one more project within your organization – that of implementing project management.

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Kevin Archbold, PMP has 20 years of project management experience with large and small organizations in a variety of industries, including automotive, nuclear, telecoms, trucking, IT, recruiting, HR, and government. Kevin has presented at both the local and national level within the Project Management Institute (PMI), and is currently VP of Programs for the Tucson chapter of PMI. He has been providing project management consulting and training services through Key Consulting (www.consulting.ky) since 1999, and has been residing in Tucson since last year. Kevin can be contacted at archboldk@consulting.ky.