MSP® in Practice

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This article provides an insight into what the Managing Successful Programmes (MSP) qualification is, how it can improve programme management and the benefits of implementing its methodology in today's businesses. MSP, as a methodology, will be explained and its role within organizations will be discussed. Furthermore, some recent examples of MSP in practice will be evaluated to demonstrate the advantages of using the MSP framework.

In response to the need for organizations to have improved connections between their objectives, goals and projects and their long term strategies, MSP was developed in 1999. It provided a framework allowing the delivery of an organization's current and future inter-related projects to comply with its long term strategies. MSP is essentially a best-practice framework which outlines how best to implement a long term programme. The most recent version of MSP was released in 2007 comprising of improved concepts and techniques.

MSP states that "Programme Management may be defined as the co-ordinated organization, direction and implementation of a portfolio of projects and activities that together achieve outcomes and realize benefits that are of strategic importance."

Any organization undertaking change should run a strategy to best deliver the process that will take place to reach the end transformation. MSP was created to support change within an organization. This includes - but is not limited to - organizations developing and launching new products or developing a new facility, merging organizations or those going through an acquisition and organizations implementing new policies.

MSP warrants strong leadership and a solid system of management and control. This is done through clear definitions of roles and responsibilities and excellent lines of communication. Additionally, stakeholder and employee engagement is established and maintained throughout the course of a programme. MSP provides a common framework in which all individuals can work, with particular focus on clear communication between departments. MSP helps to analyse initiatives to form succinct projects while providing the methodology to make each project a success.
MSP tracks benefits gained from a project within a programme rather

than simply completing each project and moving on. This way, the long term programme can be monitored and adjusted accordingly in order to create the best possible outcome. Furthermore, MSP can ensure the programme responds to change as well as identifying and anticipating risks through continual monitoring.

As MSP is not prescriptive, it can be adapted to suit an organization's individual needs. Whether an organization is national or global, or in the private or public sector, there is no limit to the size of programme it can be applied to. It works on both smaller and larger scales. This flexibility is mirrored in the three categories of programmes that can implement MSP. The first are Vision Led Programmes, these involve substantial change within an organization and tend to be innovative. A clear idea of the programme is established at the beginning of the programme and is designed to comply with corporate strategy. Secondly are Emergent Programmes; these develop from existing projects to establish relationships between projects and associated duties. The final category consists of Compliance Programmes. These programmes will put less emphasis on benefit realisation and more on achieving essential results.

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The MSP framework is made up of three elements. Firstly are the principles, of which there are seven, which form the foundation of the entire framework. These are to remain aligned with corporate strategy, lead change, envision and communicate a better future, focus on benefits and threats to the organization and design and deliver a coherent capability. Moreover, to add value and learn from experience. The second element is the governance themes which are topics which need to be continually addressed from the start of a programme to the finish. This is the control element, with a purpose of successful completion of a programme as well as providing

information for stakeholders. The governance themes comprise of organization, vision, stakeholder engagement and leadership, blueprint design and delivery, benefit realisation management, planning and control, business case, risk and management and quality. Lastly, transformational flow refers to a series of processes created to direct the programme management team through the programme. This starts at identifying and defining a programme, to managing the tranches, delivering the capability and realising the benefits then ending with the closing of the programme.

MSP has been successfully utilised by organizations worldwide. For example, Siemens USA had spent seven years trying to improve the efficacy of its project management prior to adopting MSP. They not only wanted to improve, but also to discover why they had not been reaching corporate expectations. One issue was that the benefits of completed projects were not being analysed by project managers. This means that although projects were successful, they did not encourage progression. Siemens utilised MSP to provide a formal approach to benefits delivery and programme governance for their internal projects, which was what they had concluded was their problem. Joe Sopko, an organizational project management consultant for Siemens, initiated the use of MSP. When asked for advice for any organization undergoing transformational change, he replied, "Use MSP.".

Noel Scott, an experienced, MSP trained programme and project manager, has a history of successful programme management to which he credits the MSP methodology. He was given the task of staffing optimization for the customer service department of a major international IT software and services corporation. The problem was that the company did not cope well with change and its stakeholders would not hesitate to stop a project they did not fully support. Additionally, the failure of previous programmes had been caused by the announcement of change and employee engagement coming too late, causing stakeholders and staff to reject plans. Initially, Scott identified the people who were involved in making the change and those who would be affected by it and involved them in the process from start to finish, including providing training to global managers to create advocates of the programme. Value was placed on selling the vision and focusing on carrot rather than stick. By following the MSP guidelines of strong leadership and governance structure, with emphasis on stakeholder engagement, Scott generated financial benefits by reducing staff turnover, improved the organization's customer services and boosted staff morale.

Scott was also hired to increase customer satisfaction for a major IT software and services corporation in the private sector. This involved approximately 3000 members of staff from 25 countries, a third of which were outsourced support personnel. These details highlight MSP's scalability and flexibility. Again, the education of stakeholders about programme management was crucial to the overall success of the programme yet Scott credits his focus on the programme's benefits for its success. By aligning the new customer services programme to the overall strategic objective of the company and regularly referring to its benefits, visibility and momentum was quickly gained. Scott not only made fundamental changes, but perceptual changes as well. MSP provided the framework required to improve then maintain customer service standards which, within this company, were used as an example of how successful change can occur.

Mark Harwood, director of Skills for Local Authorities Ltd., was assigned the role of Programme Manager of Phase Two (the opening of 23 centres) of the Sure Start Children's Centres Programme, a central government initiative being implemented by local UK government. Sure Start delivers services and information to young families in order to ensure each child is given the opportunity to fulfil his or her potential. Harwood addressed the issues that had arisen in Phase One, learning that governance was key for Phase Two, confirming that MSP was the right framework to utilise. Following the framework, Harwood established that better communication and higher involvement from senior management were necessary as well as the need to work the programme into existing organizational structures. The methodology used and the team created for Phase Two was so effective it was carried over to the next stage of Sure Start's long-term objective because it had resulted in project completion on time and in budget. As a result of 'lessons learned' reports written by the project managers, feedback showed that MSP methodology worked and it delivered. A number of them also received promotions as a result of the programme.

MSP is ideal for companies going through mergers and acquisitions. This is proven by its implementation at Manchester City Council (MCC). Working to meet the Government's Decent Homes scheme, MCC needed to realign its workforce to best meet the scheme's requirements. Their solution was to transfer 1000 members of staff to local housing companies or a new joint venture company. With millions of pounds and hundreds of employees' livelihoods at risk, MSP was implemented by construction and management consultants, Turner and Townsend, who were to run the programme for MCC. This risk, estimated at £27 million, would only be supported by the MCC's treasurer if a reliable strategy was in place to manage it. Jim White, director of Turner and Townsend, said, "A programme of this scale needs to be underpinned by a sound, reliable method and OGC's [MSP] enabled us to deliver it on time and was fully endorsed by political members, central government, staff, trade unions and the new private sector partner. It also interfaced well with MCC's own award winning PRINCE2® derivative and with ISO9001... This robust framework allowed us to manage the risk while optimising the outcome and benefits." His company now uses MSP for business change programmes. White continued, "MSP focuses on benefits and it's a very effective method used by all of our consultants on major programmes. We believe that MSP is a good framework and it gives you credibility with key stakeholders... You need to be able to look them in the eyes and see their commitment to the programme." MCC's brief was fulfilled and the venture was a success.

With MSP, organizations have the potential to improve project management efficiency by creating a longer term programme to align with corporate strategy. This framework provides a foundation that can be applied to any organization and will ensure skilled leadership, communication and direction.

The MSP qualification is available through all APMG-International offices. Please visit www.apmg-international.com for further information and guidance.

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