

Accountability: Create the Competent Workforce these Times Demand

WHEN ARE BAD TIMES GOOD FOR YOU? — when they result in changes that separate the essential from the non-essential. As government and the private sector struggle to get more done with less, they must reexamine their processes and assumptions. Only by doing so can they create improved transparency and accountability, resulting in the improved public confidence that will fuel economic recovery. Accountability is key.

Making Competence and Accountability the Norm

Executives today not only want to have a grasp of the details of the initiatives underway in the organization—they are required to do so, by Sarbanes-Oxley in some cases and by the guidelines for managing American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds in others. Forging a link between the decision-making level of the organization and the project level is therefore a pressing business need. That link—providing up-to-date status reporting on important initiatives in the organization's portfolio of projects—is the project manager. But merely naming a position “project manager” does not create a disciplined and organized approach to complex tasks, although this is a mistake that even the best organizations often make. Project management is a *discipline* with known key success factors and best practices, and research has shown that a qualified project manager is the single most important factor in success.¹

Under Watchful Eyes

The following straightforward “Accountability Quiz” directs our attention to what really matters to organizations during these lean times:

- » What is the purpose of the investment?
- » What work will the money pay for?
- » How will the money be controlled and accounted for?
- » What will be accomplished and how will results be measured?
- » How will performance and status be reported?
- » What will the benefits be, and for whom?
- » Who will be responsible for expenditures, reporting and results?!

Tough questions: but all of them are answerable through the discipline of project management.

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Project managers, with their focus on planning, control, reporting, and learning from both mistakes and successes, bring order to the chaos. By understanding the details of ongoing work, and articulating them to the executive level, they provide an unmatched level of accountability to stakeholders. Project managers are schooled in identifying requirements and stakeholder issues, in communicating issues and status both up and down the organization, in planning work and sticking to schedules and budgets, and in measuring progress and results.

Sample “Accountability” Learning Program

The courses listed here provide a roadmap to retraining and reenergizing the workforce, so that they can accomplish more with less, bring improved judgment to bear, and accurately track the performance of their projects.

- » Overcoming Barriers to Organizational Change
- » Project Management Essentials
- » Project Cost and Schedule Management
- » Measuring Project Management Performance
- » Managing By Project

By developing project talent now, the discipline and accountability established in a crisis mode becomes the new organizational norm, leading to a refreshed and more effective organization when the funding crunch eases. Meanwhile, those organizations who expect to benefit from ARRA funds will be in a position to meet the strict guidelines established to track the benefits derived from the stimulus package.

Potential Paybacks:

- Create more efficient and effective job behaviors that result in tangible outcomes such as cost savings and reduced rework.²
- Meet or exceed the tracking expectations of the ARRA.³
- Mature project management capability, thus improving, decision-making, collaboration, communication, transparency and accountability.⁴

Where to Start

Boosting skill levels begins with identifying which skills are already present in the workforce, and where the gaps exist. This information is then used to create a lean, “just-in-time” training program that brings the right skills to the right people in a way that allows them to apply new learning immediately to the tasks at hand. Even implementing the most basic project management methods has been proven to result in quick improvements that impact not only project schedules and spending, but employee morale and productivity and customer satisfaction as well.⁵

PM College offers a host of onsite and online corporate learning solutions to advance organizational and individual project performance. To learn more, contact PM College at 888.619.2819 or info@pmcollege.com.

¹Toney, F. (2002). *The Superior Project Manager*. New York: Marcel Dekker/Center for Business Practices.
²Thomas, J. and Mullaly, M. (2008). *Researching the Value of Project Management*. Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute. ³Management objectives for ARRA can be found at: <http://www.recovery.gov/?q=content/accountability-and-transparency>. ⁴Thomas and Mullaly, *ibid.* ⁵Pennypacker, J.S. (2002). *Justifying the Value of Project Management*. Havertown, PA: Center for Business Practices; and *The Value of Project Management*, forthcoming from the CBP in June, 2009.