



The benefits of Enterprise Project Management using Microsoft Office Project Server

In my previous article I focused upon the benefits of the Microsoft Office Project and how it can support Project Managers. Providing them with the information they need to manage their projects more effectively. In this article I look at how the Microsoft Office Project Server Enterprise Project Management solution can help organisations achieve competitive advantage.

“Advanced Project Management, Best Practices on Implementation, 2nd Edition” by Dr Kerzner has identified 3 stages of project competency. They range from immaturity through maturity to excellence. Dr Kerzner has identified consistent Project Management competencies as being a major contributor to organisations enjoying sustained competitive advantage.

The Standish Group in their 2005 “Chaos Survey” identified the top 10 recipes for Project Success. Top of the list was user involvement followed closely by executive management support. Clear business objectives were at number 3. Having a formal methodology was at number 8 with standard tools and infrastructure at number 10. If you want to know the full top ten visit – www.standishgroup.com/chaos_resources/index.php

So how can your organisation look to cover these points in the top ten and achieve a significant and consistent competitive advantage? Doing projects “right” is a good start or even better how about “doing the right projects right?”

Microsoft Corporation has the following vision for Project Server. “Improving organisations by providing business insights to **all** employees leading to better, faster and more relevant decisions” Their design objectives include making projects more visible to the enterprise and helping align projects more closely to organisations strategic objectives.

Project Server can help promote compliance with corporate standards and methods through the provision of templates and required data. Templates can be aligned to the methodology employed by the organisation. Required data can ensure that project plans include key information for reporting, analysis and appraisal. Only those Projects that tick all the right boxes for the right reasons should be considered for approval.

Once a project has been approved senior management can keep up to speed as to its status through the Project Web Access browser. A variety of high level reports and dashboards can be configured to allow different perspectives on project performance using objective data derived from regularly updated project plans. This information can be displayed in graphical format allowing for swift assimilation and analysis. A classic example would have RAG (Traffic Light Indicators) displaying different indicators for ahead of target, on target, within tolerance and outside tolerance against metrics such as time, budget and

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workload targets. If any project displays signs of distress at a high level it can be looked at in more detail, with awkward questions being asked and appropriate remedial actions approved.

Portfolio Analysis provides senior managers with the facility to report and analyse project performance by any number of defined criteria. This feature is both powerful and perhaps more importantly robust. No matter what an individual does when analysing portfolio information the core data on which their analysis is being performed is unaffected.

Whilst Project Server can raise the profile of the project manager within an organisation which is a positive; the downside is that they are also more open to scrutiny which can be uncomfortable when objective as opposed to subjective measurement of project performance is employed. This in itself may be a considerable incentive for some project managers to raise their game if they know that they are being more closely watched!

Project Server as a tool connects people at all levels within an organisation with the information they need to better perform their role. Controlling who sees what information and what they can do with this information is at the very core of the tool. Using basic windows security principles allied to SQL security it is possible to compartmentalise an organisation so that individuals are only granted access to the information that is relevant to **both** their role and the area of the enterprise in which they reside. Senior managers can be assured that access to sensitive information is rigidly and securely managed and that individuals cannot “hack” into areas where they are not permitted.

Poor or ineffective communication is frequently identified as a primary cause of project failure. Information or changes are not passed on to the relevant individuals or people can be working to redundant or out of date deadlines. Project Server addresses this by ensuring that all users always have access to up to date information. Email alerts can be used to ensure that individuals are aware of any relevant changes as soon as changes are made.

Individual team members can view their current workload across projects in Project Web Access. This allows them to assess and prioritise their personal workload. They can be assured that the information they are viewing is always up to date so they can work to targets with confidence. Team members can also feedback information to the project manager by means of adding notes to their tasks, identifying issues or risks. Recording progress is supported using the Project Web Access tool. This allows team members to update one or more managers at the same time with their progress on current tasks.

Viewing and assessing the workload for individuals, teams or groups is also elegantly supported by the tool. This gives resource managers the opportunity to anticipate excessive peaks in the demand curve for available resources and to take appropriate action to balance supply and demand across all live projects. Generic resourcing can support both more accurate forecasting of future headcount for organisations enjoying a

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growth phase. It can also support the matching of skills to tasks and identifying individuals with the skills **and** the availability to match forecast demand.

For project managers a significant benefit lies in the tracking and updating features of the tool. Individual team members can be reminded to submit updates within defined time periods with laggards being quickly and easily identified. Updates from team members are received and processed with their actual progress updated to the plan without having to transpose information from one format to another. If tasks are re-scheduled the tool will automatically alert all affected resources of the change so that they can continue to work to up to date targets.

All in all the potential for Project Server to extend the value of effective project management to an organisation is considerable. To realise the benefits takes time and needs planning, however the payback on this investment can lead to excellence and sustained competitive advantage.

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