

Surveying Project Management Capabilities

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In the February *PM Network*, I described the PMI® Standards Program's project to develop an organizational project management maturity model. Now I'll focus on an important part of that project: *gathering real-world information through an upcoming survey of organizations like your own.*

An increasing number of organizations are turning to management by projects. In some organizations, the implementation of project management is leading to more efficient service delivery and production, more accurate budgeting, improved stakeholder relationships, and greater profitability. However, reported experience is that not all organizations attain these benefits. Why is this so?

Organizations across a broad spectrum of application areas are seeking approaches for methodically growing their project management capabilities in order to increase the consistent and successful delivery of projects. The output of developing approaches for methodically growing an organization's project management capabilities can be described as an *organizational project management maturity model.*

Why "Maturity"? The use of the word *maturity* implies that capabilities must be grown in order to produce repeatable success in project management. *The Random House College Dictionary* defines *maturity* as "full development or perfected condition." *Maturity* also connotes understanding or visibility into why success occurs and ways to correct or prevent common problems.

Why "Model"? In order to promote repeatable, successful delivery of projects for organizations, it is first necessary to understand what is meant by *success*. This complex question requires one to explore the relationships among perceived wants or needs, actual processes, performance, infrastructure, and contingency variables. Once project success is defined and its relationship to project management is understood, we can assume that an organization will not achieve successful project management all at once. A *model* defines the steps.

Incremental improvement must be anticipated and planned. Priorities in this phased improvement must be guided toward the development of the organization's project management capabilities. These capabilities are useful for describing and explaining areas where organizations must be effective and what it means to be effective in order to achieve project management maturity. *Random House* defines *capability* as "1. The quality of being capable; capacity; ability. 2. The ability to undergo or be affected by a given treatment or action; e.g., the capability of glass in resisting heat. 3. Usually, *capabilities*, qualities, abilities, etc., that can be used or developed." In the context of organizational project management maturity, the word *capability* may be applied using all of these definitions.

The Problem. Many have explored the relationship between the maturity of the organization and project success. However, additional in-depth primary research into

organizational project management capabilities is needed. Existing maturity models are designed to enhance and increase project productivity, but an opportunity remains to develop a model based on empirical discovery and observation of the relationships among perceived wants, needs, and associated outcomes across a broad spectrum of organizational types.

We Want to Survey Your Organization! Qualitative research methods employed across a spectrum of organizational types can improve our picture of the criteria for success and the ultimate future state of organizational project management maturity in various environments. Such methods not only elaborate our idea of success, they help us identify prerequisites for different project management outcomes in different organizational environments. Analysis of qualitative data provides a basis for understanding the different drivers and organizational enablers of success.

Developing a survey is the first step in identifying candidate success criteria, including factors that executives, senior management, and project managers consider indicative of success. The intent of the survey is to explore and identify factors, issues, root causes, and perceptions in the language of the person running projects, managing business units, and other stakeholders. This data will be analyzed to understand patterns that emerge.

An organizational assessment factored into the survey tells a story about how people perceive project management is being applied as compared to how they envision it should be applied. This kind of assessment questions how participants see the current state of project management within their organization and what they would see as the ultimate future state. (See Executive Notebook column, February 1999 *PM Network*.) We will seek the underpinning drivers of this future state.

The survey will also capture hard data that might be quantified; that is, output in terms of elements like quality, cost, time, and customer satisfaction. The purpose of collecting this data is to isolate prerequisites for outcomes. Quantitative research analysis methods applied to the data will allow a classification of success criteria by trying to identify hidden variables and reduce a large number of variables into a smaller number of dimensions.

In addition to exploring perceptions of project management that may be influenced, we hope to link problems to root causes and postulate how these parts interact. We will hypothesize the rules that govern this interaction based on empirical observations about project management.

Our team is developing a survey now. Organizations who participate in the survey will influence the model's development. We would like to establish a community of interest and innovation. Once a first draft of the model is ready, we would like to test it in the organizations that had input to its development.

Is your organization interested in being surveyed once the survey is designed? If so, contact model@tpmg.net.

Capabilities to Think About

Capabilities can be broken into component parts. At the PMI Standards Program Open

Working Session at PMI '98, a focus group of individuals representing a cross-section of application and geographic areas discussed capabilities that contribute to effective organizational project management. The group identified the following capability areas, which reflect early thoughts by experts to provoke further discussion. Look over the following list. How does your organization measure up?

Project Management Methodologies and Processes

- Defined existence of PM methodologies and processes
- Recognition of best practices in the profession (e.g., *PMBOK™ Guide*)
- Requirements for project status/forecast reporting
- Internal project reviews
- Approval/review process for major project changes
- Quality control of methodologies and processes
- Focal sponsorship for the organizational PM practices

Human Resource Factors

- Development of potential project managers
- Project management training
- Cross-training
- Communication approaches for projects
- Integrated product teams
- Definition of team roles
- Motivating, team building, leadership
- Conflict management, issue resolution
- Management of project time commitments by staff; stress management

Organizational Support Structure for Projects

- Technical, procurement, subcontractors, quality assurance, manufacturing, project accounting, contract administration
- Multiproject staffing, assessment of multiproject needs, provision of the right people at the right time (until no longer needed)
- Project support office
- Project management and related systems/tools, including selection, implementation, upgrades, and maintenance centers of excellence for practices and use of tools

Alignment of Projects to Business Strategy

- Project fit to strategic plans
- PM involvement in business plans
- Future value to technologies, competencies, and skills
- Organizational fit, project risk, technical capability
- Application of existing versus new technology
- Project sponsorship by internal management
- Multiproject interactions and interfaces, assessments, and related decisions
- Project priorities, decisions on organization resource/funding assignments
- Management of project life cycles, including canceling/closure

Organizational Learning

- Continuous improvement process implementation
- Evaluation and feedback from project teams
- Post-project phase debriefs and feedback to practices
- Changes to general organization systems/procedures to support improvements in PM capabilities
- Periodic review of PM effectiveness
- Reliability of status summaries and forecasts
- Metrics for project management effectiveness
- Standardization, productive and unproductive application
- Lessons learned and feedback into all capability areas.