

Many organisations fail to relate project management to business strategy. **Paul Major** of Program Framework says those at the top should be using their skills and processes to manage strategic change.

CHANGE HAPPENS!

VICTORIAN PRIME minister Benjamin Disraeli famously observed that change was inevitable and constant. Yet here we are, some 140 years later, still being taken by surprise when it comes along.

So if it is constant, why is 21st century business not constantly managing and provoking change as business as usual? In today's competitive landscape, failure to do so could impact on a company's very survival.

Most organisations already have the key to the cupboard of the skills and processes needed to do this, they just don't realise it because they do not relate project management – the management of change – to business strategy.

They are stuck in the belief that project management is for putting up buildings, creating a new fighter plane, developing a new IT system and so on. It is time for those at the top to realise they are sitting on a pot of gold and to take pragmatic lessons from the world of project management.

A decade ago, organisations could get away with being less focused on the way they dealt with strategic change, whether the change was developing a new product or service or handling mergers and acquisitions. Often these would be managed in an ad hoc way or through 'personal heroics' – bringing in somebody to run the merger or develop the product.

Organisations now need to be more disciplined to deliver strategic change faster and more accurately. That calls for upgrading to a more powerful model, one that is enterprise capable and sustainable.

There are three fundamental aspects to delivering

strategic change successfully – choice, governance and execution – all of which are familiar to any self-respecting project or programme manager. There should be no need for senior management to cast around looking for ways of doing this because the answers already exist.

So why is this link not being made? Why are companies not cashing in on this pot of gold and bringing project and programme management into the boardroom, using the processes in a combined way as a highly effective business tool?

Perhaps they think strategy is a totally different concept to project management, which they regard as a specialist language that they don't really understand and best left to 'those project geeks'. They would be wrong.

Our boardrooms are populated by representatives of the organisations' functional areas (or silos!), be that the finance department, business development teams, engineers, marketers or the IT department. But rarely is there anybody at board level who has an understanding of how change – or projects – are delivered across these functional barriers, even though this knowledge is essential for making smart strategic decisions.

I have seen this for myself during 20 years of experience in managing performance and strategic change across a range of multinational organisations. It becomes even more evident if we look at where firms have typically spent money on enterprise management solutions in the past 10 years. Investment has been made on customer relations management, enterprise resource planning





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PRACTICAL LESSONS: Projects can teach an organisation more than just how to put up buildings, says Paul Major.

solutions and financial processes to manage the money.

Little has been spent on enterprise-wide programme or project control solutions that could help to drive decision making through better corporate governance, leading to fewer failed strategic initiatives and increasing the chances of achieving real success.

As motivational author and thinker, Stephen R Covey points out that we are all drawn into the urgent, rather than concentrating on the important, but it is the latter that will deliver tomorrow.

Of course, not all change is strategically planned. Sometimes it can be thrust suddenly upon us by external forces, such as the global credit crunch following the collapse of the US mortgage market. How much better to have a best practice framework to constantly manage change already in place in order to deal with this kind of crisis, rather than running around in a panic wondering what to do!

Business needs to acquire some project management skills. We need to demystify the language and raise the profile and potential to senior decision makers. We need to let them see that there is a framework they can use and that there are people out there already expert in these areas.

I would urge decision makers to seriously consider bringing that expertise into the

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boardroom, to give somebody the overall responsibility of managing change because that is the single most important business criterion for future success.

My challenge to project managers is to inspire your organisations to see change as the driver of success in your company or with your client. Don't be afraid of raising these issues with directors, let them see there are people qualified and experienced to take them on. Encourage business development managers to go with you to conferences and seminars and explore these topics.

Are you a driver of change or a victim? As a project manager do you want to shape the future of your world or are you content to sit back and run a few Gantt charts? Questions are being asked in the boardroom, are you willing to present the answers?

• Paul Major is the founder of Management Framework, which coaches business leaders in creating and sustaining organisational change and business transformation, and is a director of enterprise project management solutions deployment consultancy and Microsoft partner, Program Framework. He is one of the professional members of the APM Policy Unit, which aims to define the association's position on issues affecting the project management community.

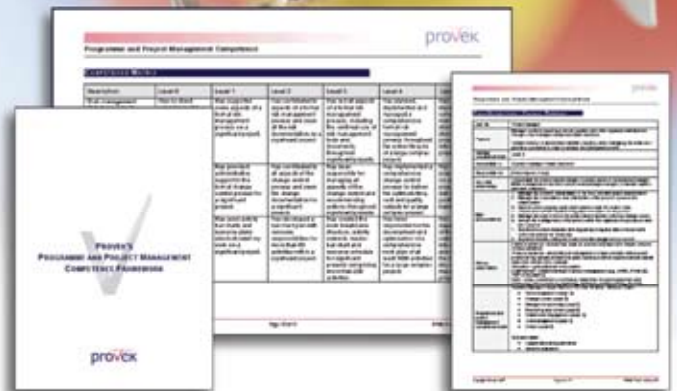


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