Organizing for Project Management Maturity

The purpose of the Project Management Institute's (PMI®) Organizational Project Management Maturity Model is to help organizations implement their strategies through the successful, consistent, and predictable delivery of projects. When we begin to view and perform an organization's work as multiple projects, we begin to understand project management as a holistic system that spans the enterprise.

Projects interact and change in a web of dynamic priorities. Projects deliver the work that achieves organization strategy. In this context, project management is more than implementation. It also covers a strategic domain encompassing more than the multiple project delivery systems of program management, spanning both activities that align projects to strategic priorities and infrastructure that enables the project environment. It is thought that capabilities across this spectrum of areas distinguish organizations that can translate organization strategy repeatedly and reliably into project success from those that cannot. Capabilities must be developed and improved incrementally, and the steps must be planned.

The use of the word "maturity" implies that capabilities must be grown over time in order to produce repeatable success in project management. The 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.

"Model" implies change, a progression, or steps in a process, in that the dictionary defines a model, in part, as "a preliminary work or construction that serves as a plan from which a final product is to be made … such a work or construction used in testing or perfecting a final product." Because the number of organizations that are managing by projects (either in part or as a whole) continues to grow, there is increased interest in learning about and developing a maturity model that shows such a step-by-step method of increasing and maintaining an organization's ability to translate organizational strategy into the successful and consistent delivery of projects.

Recently there have been reports exploring the relationship between the maturity of the organization and project success. Many have linked project management competence to project management effectiveness. Yet standards describing organizational project management capabilities and their relationship to organizational success are lacking.

In May 1998, members of the PMI Standards Committee chartered a project to create a standard that would describe how organizations that manage by projects might become increasingly more capable. It was agreed that the vision for a standard in this arena was to promote project management success in the interest of creating project successes that result in organization success, emphasizing organizational project management as a strategic tool. That project was reorganized into six integrated projects of 200 volunteers from all over the world who bring a variety of knowledge, skills, and experience to the program. John Schlichter is the Organizational Project Management Maturity Model Program director, responsible for program strategy. Terry Cooke-Davies is program manager, responsible for managing the leads of the program's project teams.

This project's customers include the project management profession, organizations, executives, senior managers, and project management professionals. The project management profession is the audience PMI serves. Organizations are the target of an organizational project management maturity model. Executives and senior managers are the persons in organizations who will sponsor the implementation of such a model by project management professionals. The goal of this program is to develop a universal standard that will benefit each of these customer groups.

The team is in the process of identifying all of the elements that compose a mature (reliable, effective, successful) organizational project management system. They intend to mobilize small design teams or "cells" (see Exhibit 1) to describe the perfected condition of each element and to model the incremental steps that result in the perfected condition of each element of this system.

The project team is seeking thought leaders to lead the design cells, which would be composed of part-time volunteers, who interact electronically (fax, e-mail, phone) and sometimes in face-to-face PMI-sponsored meetings. The use of design cells is a new concept for the PMI Standards Program.

If "alignment of projects to strategy" is a necessary element of a mature enterprise project management system, the team will mobilize a cell to describe what such alignment looks like in an organization that does this reliably, effectively, and successfully. The project team will ask the cell to model the steps leading to a perfected condition in this area. The team hopes to identify the general elements of a mature enterprise project management system and to enroll leaders of design cells as soon as possible. The goal is to deliver a preliminary model at the 2001 Seminars & Symposium. The Program Plan and the PMI 2000 Seminars & Symposium Open Standards Working Session presentation are located at www.pmi.org/ opm3. The program plan describes the history, organization, and processes for producing deliverables.

Design cells make the project team a "small, big project" with enormous collective experience and creativity as well as the flexibility and agility to make mistakes and fix them quickly, and to deliver revolutionary ideas. Cells are the heart of the design process.

The project team is recruiting volunteers for its cells. The team needs innovative, experienced, thought leaders who are interested in doing something new, building something radical and incredibly valuable to the profession of project management. Is this you? If you or someone you know might be interested in leading a design cell or participating in a team, contact the project team at model@tpmg.net.—John Schlichter