

*Authored by Martin Vaughan and published in the The Project Manager Magazine
for the Australian Institute of Project Management – April / May 2009.*

Global Portfolio Reporting

One of the more challenging aspects of providing Portfolio summary reporting is getting consistency across projects, particularly when they cross geographic and cultural borders.

Those of us working in PMOs already know how tough it is to get project status reporting at all, let alone getting people to report on Time, Cost and Risk in a consistent manner. Project Managers, you have so many reasons why reports cannot be submitted or why certain sections of the report cannot be filled out. It is the tool's fault, or you don't have the time, or you are currently replanning, or the format isn't quite right. Now add to that the different tools, languages, timezones, networks and standards that might exist and you start to understand why people in the PMO can seem a little "difficult" at times.

It is recognised there is complexity relating to reporting – possibly different accounting standards, reporting cycles, commercial considerations, risk profiles and funding processes across organisations and countries. Aside from the obvious geographic cultural differences there can also be significant cultural differences within the organisation, especially where there might be internal politics at play. We have seen quite a dramatic difference in openness of reporting between Business and IT projects for example. Nothing tests cultural norms quite like Project Status reporting, particularly forecasts of Time and Cost and the visibility of Risk.

While lecturing international students in Project Management at Post Graduate level at Melbourne University, students explained that speaking out or challenging a respected elder's view in their culture was disrespectful and rude. They had been brought up to be agreeable to the elders' views and would rather say nothing than say no. Open group discussion was a challenge, as was getting status on assignment work when lecturing this group. They were willing, they said, to try to adapt to the different cultural norms here in Australia, particularly when considering future employment opportunities.

The best analogy for Program or Portfolio status reporting is a newspaper. Status reports should "tell it like it is" with people's most accurate forecasts of the future provided as the basis of reporting. The data needs to be concise and as up to date as possible with Project Manager's comments on areas of variance. The PMO would then take on the role as the editor in chief, ensuring there is a certain

consistency of wording, that there is a focus on accuracy and that the endorsed format is followed. The PMO would also provide the valuable analysis and in depth comment. The recipients of reporting do not want “state run media” where content is heavily censored and controlled with only good news offered, they want accurate reporting in order to make decisions.

So at an enterprise level, the PMO must provide leadership in terms of what is expected from reporting. They must work with report providers to overcome the cultural barriers and undertake their global editorial role. They should push the Project Managers to provide better quality reporting and give them support through better tools and processes. The PMO should have a key role in portfolio reporting.

About the author

Martin Vaughan is a Senior Consultant and Director of Core Consulting Group who has specialised in Project Management across Construction, Defence and IT. With a strong interest in education, Martin has been active in the Project Management profession, helping to define standards and competencies, particularly around Cost and Schedule.