

## Infrastructure

Theoretically at least, a good Project Manager should only need a pencil and paper to control his or her project. Anyone with memories of the “good old days”, calculating a 1000 task CPM network by hand, would probably dispute this and remember their joy at discovering Project Management software. Tools have come a long way since 1981 when the IBM XT was released together with early scheduling software such as Primavera and Timeline.

Project Managers these days want tools to help them with collaboration, with document management, scheduling, estimating and cost modelling, time tracking and actual cost tracking, control lists for Issues/Risks, Changes and actions as well as helping them compile regular status reports. Workflow automation, automated funding requests, prioritisation systems are all requiring input from Project Managers. Some Project Managers in the IT field also need tools to help with requirements, testing and configuration management.

Tools have evolved over the last 30 years, with technology supporting centralisation, accessibility and standardisation across organisations. While plenty can still be achieved with the Microsoft Office suite on individual projects, larger organisations are looking for consistency, particularly with controls and reporting. As these tools become increasingly integrated to Enterprise systems such as accounting, time tracking and HR systems, the need for Project Managers and PMO staff to become skilled up and tool savvy grows.

A typical PMO will need tools such as an Intranet Portal (e.g. SharePoint), tools for compiling Portfolio summary reports (ideally automated), they will need to keep track of Lessons Learned and they will generally be the custodians of the overall Resource Model. PMOs also tend to be Subject Matter Experts on the accounting and finance systems and potentially set up and administer any Enterprise Project and Portfolio Management systems. As PMOs mature, particularly at the Enterprise level, they seek tools to support them with strategic alignment of the portfolio as well as project versus “Business as usual” demand. This area is currently a focus PPM tool innovation.

So how does a business choose a suitable toolset? Carefully is the short answer. The longer answer involves defining the operating model – who will use it and how. Consider the functionality – what does it need to do? Consider accessibility – hosting and network issues may mean the Software as a Service or SAAS model may be more suitable. Consider integration and interoperability with legacy systems and processes such as accounts. Consider the full cost and ensure adequate funding is available - a dollar for dollar spend (licence fees vs. implementation costs) is not unusual. Choosing and implementing such a system should be considered a formal project, with a focus on change rather than IT. It will need Executive support.

Businesses must provide their staff with effective Project Management infrastructure. Tools such as the ones discussed here are fundamental to capability growth in large organisations. Where the balance lies between complexity and benefit is still open to debate. With growing complexity in the tool space there is a growing sense of the need to “keep it simple”. Maybe we should just stick to the pencil and paper after all??

***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.*