

# Program Resource Management

*Is Resource Management the greatest challenge in multi-project environments?*

Effective Resource Management continues to be a challenge for many programs with availability being the number one resource selection criteria. Employment agencies continuing to thrive on urgent resource requests and Internal HR and Procurement groups continue to be expected to perform miracles. Why is Program Resource Management so difficult?

A colleague recently agreed to take on and recover a program that was showing signs of struggling. Within hours the lack of morale was evident. The team showed little enthusiasm, passion or belief that success was even possible. Some areas of the program were over resourced while others were poorly resourced. Commitments made by some business units had apparently not been met, yet the process for engaging the different units was unclear and ad hoc. Some business units had good visibility and forecasting of what their resources were working on, others planned by crisis on a daily basis. Turnover of program resources was high and knowledge loss and rework was causing delays. Project Managers were jostling for resources and competing for priority and at the same time pointing at other projects for not delivering on interdependencies. Many of the team had been moved over from the last major program because it was convenient to do so, but limited skills mapping had been done. Even though it had been known for weeks the new Program Manager was starting, no desk, chair, laptop or phone was available on commencement. Sound familiar?

Is Program Resource Management just Project Resource Management on steroids or are there other considerations?

We often see programs that approach Resource Management as a simple workforce planning exercise and not much more. Resource Management within program environments is more than supply and demand and can be the difference between success and failure. Poor resource planning can result in disgruntled team members and high turnover while good resource management can result in great engagement and team dynamics.

Projects certainly have their fair share of Resource Management challenges. They face challenges including poor engagement with resource owners, inadequate project planning and cross project resource contention typically solved by project prioritisation. However programs are unique.

Larger programs often struggle to mobilise effectively due in part to challenges in non-human resource planning. Finding the right office space for the right price and availability, commissioning an office fit-out, phone as well as data connections, installed and working computers are all a logistical challenge for Program Mobilisation. All of which consumes a great amount of energy just when the team needs to be focussed on Human Resource Planning.

From a Human Resource Planning perspective, programs are also unique in that they tend to touch many parts of the organisation(s), usually crossing business units and the projects within the program often carry equal priority. Resource dependencies between projects tend to be more closely tied with increased single point dependencies. The program, not the project must be the priority in Resource Management decisions and the physical resources (such as test facilities) are likely to suffer greater contention on programs with multiple parallel projects. There can be multiple vendor relationships each with their own Resource Management challenges. While there is usually an expectation that projects undergo rigorous planning, programs are frequently not given the time to “plan” the resultant total of the projects. Recognising these differences, we have collated our TOP FIVE TIPS for Human Resource Management success for programs.

## **TOP FIVE TIPS – Program Resource Management**

There are a number of common challenges in Human Resource Management for Programs and the tips below will help to minimise them. These tips assume the basics of resource planning each project, understanding required skills, responsibilities and organisational structure has been undertaken.

- **Early Demand and Supply Visualisation** – Being able to achieve a visual representation of resource demand and supply for the entire program is as critical to program success as interdependency mapping. Only when inter project resource dependencies are mapped can the program realistically estimate delivery timeframes. Don't forget that capability is just as important as capacity. Assuming different business units understand their capacity, capability and commitment in different ways, the program needs to select a modelling process that relates to each business units existing processes. Models also need to be able to cater to part time resources and may need to model Business as Usual activity as well as Program / Project activity.

A key challenge is how to achieve this. Is it a summarisation of resourced schedules into a master resource schedule? Is it a separate lower technology system such as excel? Is it an enterprise resource or enterprise

project management system? Our experience indicates simple systems deliver 80% of possible value with 20% of effort compared to larger, more complex systems.

- **Internal Engagement Model (Resource or Outcome)** – Engagement, or lack thereof, is the cause for many resource management errors and therefore the internal engagement model is key to effective resource management. The engagement model needs to be agreed with all impacted business units. It must be clear on the difference between engaging a resource (based on time) on loan or secondment or engaging an internal group for a deliverable or outcome. The process must also recognise the difference between a resource request and commitment.
- **Resource Forum** – Provide a context in which resource contention can be resolved quickly. Project Managers should be able to quickly articulate the impact on their project and the program. The resource forum chair can then decide the best outcome for the program and everyone can move on.
- **Program first, Project Second** – All resource decisions must be taken in favour of the Program. This is more easily achieved in an environment where Project Managers have greater incentives for program success than they do for individual project success.
- **Planning and Stability** – When resources are assigned based on the squeakiest wheel principal, they lose focus, passion and faith in Program and Project leadership. Create an environment of strong planning, plan visibility and stability in resource assignment.

While the **TOP FIVE TIPS** will keep most Programs out of Resource Management trouble, there are some other factors that should be considered. These may be equally applicable to Projects as they are to Programs.

#### **Burn Out**

With the increase in the number of larger programs running in many organisations, we see a good number of people who are on their second or third large program in a row. Most of them have been on the end of an endless line of deadlines and deliverables for some time. Many haven't had a decent holiday since the last enforced Christmas embargo period. For a Program to achieve great results the "Human" component of Resource Management needs to be recognised and mechanisms for looking after people and avoiding burnout need to be implemented.

#### **Talent Identification and Management**

Programs offer organisations a great environment for talent identification and nurturing. Where does talent identification and management fit in Program Resource Management? Is it the responsibility of the Program Management team to undertake this role on behalf of the organisation or is it HR? There is no correct answer to this question, however in the absence of Line Management to perform this function, the Program Management team is the obvious surrogate for this role.

#### **Personal Development & Training**

With people on their second and third program in a row, many have lost sight of any personal development plans they used to have when they had a regular line manager. In some cases it has become unclear who their line manager is and if there is even any room for personal development in the program environment. Programs can and should consider the inclusion of a training and development budget to underpin organisational capability development for those people who no longer clearly fit into an operational business unit structure.

#### **Succession Planning & Knowledge Retention**

Turnover will occur no matter how well the Program is managing their resources. To reduce the impact, Programs can proactively identify key resources and plan for succession and knowledge transfer. Formal induction and handover needs to be carefully planned with overlap between resources.

#### **Contractor Management Strategy**

Some Programs are now recognising the need for a clear strategy to achieve the right contractor / employee mix. Contract resources require a slightly different management approach and would normally fall outside of the Personal Development and Training approach above. However, contractors may be included in talent identification and be targeted for permanent roles. Programs that have a clear strategy for managing this mix and the associated processes tend to produce greater, longer lasting benefits for the organisation than those that do not.

Planned, structured and well executed Resource Management is achievable on Programs if the importance of it is understood and agreed. Program Directors and Managers should seek to establish the value of good Resource Management early in the Program lifecycle. Where Resource Management is not permitted the visibility and importance it requires, the risk(s) of inadequate Resource Planning and Management needs to be raised and the consequences understood.

**About the Author.**

Chris Dwyer is a Senior Consultant and Director of Core Consulting Group. He is an active member of both AIPM and PMI PMO Special Interest Groups and has provided guidance to a range of organisations around PMO implementation and optimization.