INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR COMPLEX PROJECT MANAGEMENT

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ENABLING SUCCESS IN COMPLEX ENVIRONMENTS

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The Importance of Visualisation in Complex Projects

Bob Laslett
CEng FEI FIET HonFAPM FACostE FCMI FRSA FIoD

Bob Laslett is Managing Director of Laslett International Limited, an Individual Member of the ICCPM, a Chartered Engineer with over 40 years' experience in the energy, process and offshore oil and gas industries. A recognised expert in project management and project planning of complex capital projects for energy, petrochemicals, offshore oil/gas, shipbuilding, infrastructure and renewable energy projects. Bob acts as an Expert Witness for delay and project management on major complex dispute cases.

The plethora of technology today, particularly social media makes it attractive to use for everyone, with software applications and social media being user friendly and easy to use.

However, planning a complex project is not simple. The role of project planning is crucial to the success of a project from start to finish. There are millions of projects in progress every day including ever more complex projects. Projects must be delivered successfully if they are to benefit business and the developing world we live in. It is therefore paramount that project management must be the top priority.

Project failures are a disaster for governments, businesses and people. So despite an ever changing world we live in why are projects still over-running?

Now more than ever an increasing number of graduates are entering industry and commerce but is their lack of on the job experience having a detrimental effect on projects when it should be beneficial to the process of delivering projects successfully?

Graduates are being more involved in supporting the project manager and in the production of plans for billions of $'s work.

Are graduates coming through university being taught how to manage projects in a structured and professional way that accurately reflects the project objectives, do they need more on the job (involved on a project) experience? So, are they being short changed when it comes to live 'on the project' experience?

Until the late 1960's when apprentices were still at the forefront of engineering and construction, upcoming engineers were introduced to the world of work on the job or being directly involved in a project. There were no lecture rooms, no 10,000 word essays, no dissertation, etc. One of the reasons apprenticeships have been so respected throughout history is because of their close association with Guilds. Guilds in the UK enjoy considerable influence within their community and in the past exerted a strong influence on apprenticeships.

Whilst there is no argument that the graduates of today are continuously improving industry and commerce with their intellect, they may not have a full understanding of the detail of an actual project in order to reasonably contribute from project kick-off.

Combined with the lack of on a project experience there is often pressure to be successful when it comes to bidding for projects. The pressure to win a contract often means that an unrealistic schedule is being created.

Projects are said to be 'fast-track' projects, why? Is this realistic. We do 'front end loading', Why? We do 'risk assessments' but we still manage to fail.

The question is do we understand a project sufficiently at the outset, is the objective(s) clearly visible to all involved or are we hiding behind a misconceived contracting philosophy, maybe one that is flawed or has us believing that using sub-contractors will fill our knowledge gaps or even obscuring our lack of appropriate resources.

Is it because we do not plan the project properly or in sufficient detail that projects are delayed, over-run, exceed the budget, etc. Do we not put sufficient time and effort into the planning before the project starts e.g. in the proposal phase?

The world is advancing faster than ever so is there enough focus on education and training to ensure it is aligned with what industry needs going forward. Especially with the increase in complex projects.

Our own experience in delivering projects has shown that using a more visual approach especially in the linking of subject matter, items and technical issues, etc. reduces the potential for conflict or disagreement and hence help to accommodate changes or variations to a project as it progresses thus reducing the opportunity of ending up in court.

Having been involved in many dispute cases especially those of a complex technical nature it is obvious that these are very challenging for all concerned particularly for those who were not actually involved in the project or are not experts in the specific case subject but in its legal and contractual interpretation.

We have found that using a more visual approach significantly helps as it makes it easier to demonstrate to both stakeholders and to those who may be non-technical but if involved in a dispute need to fully understand the links, interaction, causes, effects that occurred on a project as it progressed. A more visual approach significantly helps to clarify a complex project and on a dispute case can clearly demonstrate cause and effect of delays etc.

VCM Index is a new application developed by Laslett International which assists with planning of complex projects through visualisation and linking. It allows everyone involved in the project to share project data and collaborate on line in real-time.

Should a project end in dispute then VCM Index organises case information through visual structures thus allowing the legal team to present the case information through a visual story telling mode.

VCM Index facilitates the linking of all the components and elements of a project and simplifies exploring detail at all levels of the project. VCM Index can visually assist in the successful execution and delivery of complex projects it can also significantly help and support those involved in any dispute case.