

## **Project Management Challenges in 2011**

By **Ravi Sahi, ESI International** | May 22, 2011

Leaders play a key role in driving global organizations forward, but the rarity of trustworthy and reliable leaders pose new challenges for businesses moving forward.

For the third year in a row, ESI is forecasting the top ten trends in PM, which is an annual exercise that taps on ESI's knowledge base, extensive consultation with clients and industry professionals, taking into account the current state of the world economy, industry practices and other factors.

### **The War for PM Talent Will Be Waged in all Industry Sectors**

In order to have the best chance to move into better, global positions, project managers (PMs) should have some experience working on global projects and interacting with cross cultural teams.

Focused and continuous training, action learning, coaching and longer term mentoring sends the correct signals to employees. It will be necessary to consider the ongoing development of PMs, instead of asking "What if we train them and then they leave"? The more pertinent question in this fast-paced, complex, dynamic era is, "What if we don't train them and they stay?"

### **Leadership Skills will be the Project Manager's "X Factor"**

In 2011, leadership skills, such as critical thinking, crucial communication, and organisational change management will be strategically imperative PM competencies to master. The challenge for each organisation is to define what "leadership" means within its environment.

PMs and their organisations must recognise that project management is a people business. Projects can succeed or fail based solely on people skills, and acquiring and applying soft skills can be a difficult and frustrating journey. Businesses must acknowledge this is a genuine need that requires the expenditure of money and effort. Once honing these skills has been made a priority, any organisation in any industry will be making a huge step forward in the right direction.

Three basic areas to focus:

**Leadership is crucial at the heart of any successful change effort or project.** This becomes even more important in complex, fast changing environments. Leadership will be required at all levels of the project organisation so that empowered individuals have the ability to set direction, tie the project to the business and motivate teams to give it their all.

**Critical thinking is focused and clear thinking around solving a business problem for positive outcomes.** PMs will be called on even more to come up with several options to solve problems. This demand will be further complicated by larger projects with multiple inter project dependencies. PMs who can see the bigger picture and apply focused, innovative thinking to generate multiple solutions, will be in great demand.

**Courageous communications, specifically open and robust communications will become a hallmark of successful teams, with a greater emphasis on honesty.** Stakeholders will realise it is better to receive bad news early (a hallmark of successful, collaborative teams) than to wait around fruitlessly for good news.

Strong PMs will make this crystal clear at project kick-off meetings. Teams will realise that a solid communication plan will have to be better thought-through and developed instead of the adhoc email driven communications that exist today. Intermarket communication remains important, so PMs will need to be conversant in English especially if overseas experience is required.

### **Competency Models Will become the basis for Hiring, Promoting and Professional Development**

In 2011, PM will gain greater acceptance as a management discipline in mature organisations. Therefore, the hiring, assignment, promotion and professional development of PMs will be based on comprehensive competency models.

Such models describe the behaviours required at varying proficiency levels that a project manager must demonstrate in order to be successful and take on larger and more complex projects. In order to develop these models, HR and the Enterprise Programme Management Office (EPMO) need to work shoulder-to-shoulder to identify and codify the competencies building a framework of success in the world of talent management. Generic models will no longer be relevant.

Only those models designed specifically for the organisation, taking relevant factors into account and tailored to each organisation's unique needs, will yield the greatest benefit.

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