

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

**On the subject of Alan Stretton's series article: Some deficiencies in published causes of project failures Jan. 2015.**

14 January 2015

Dear Editor,

Whilst wholeheartedly agreeing with Allan's conclusions and appreciating the fact this paper is a meta-study of published works, there remains one serious flaw in the source documents and the analysis which I hope will be addressed in a future article in the series.

Many of the project management and project leadership failures listed are likely to be either unavoidable consequences, or symptoms of far more significant underlying issues. Focusing on the superficial prevents a more thorough 'root cause' analysis of the real issues and problems in organizations. I will take 2 examples and borrowing from Toyota's 'Five Whys':

1. **Failures of PM leadership.** The project manager did not appoint him/herself, some of the unanswered questions are:
  - a. Why did the organisation appoint a PM lacking the requisite skills?
  - b. Why did the organisation fail to support/train the PM?
  - c. Why were the failings not picked up and resolved during routine project surveillance?
  
2. **Failing to use recognised techniques such as risk management.** Some of the unanswered questions are:
  - a. Why does the organisation allow sub-standard practices to exist?
  - b. Does the organisation have proper templates, processes and support in place to support the practice?
  - c. Does the organisation provide adequate time, training and resources to implement the practice?
  - d. Why were the failings not picked up and resolved during routine project surveillance?

The answer to these questions goes back to organisational culture, the overall organisational ability to effectively manage and support its projects ('the management of projects') and ultimately the governance of the organisation.

Certainly some projects will fail for project related reasons; projects and programs are innately risky and this means project related failures are to be expected - minimising this cause of failure will be valuable.

However, I expect a proper study of the root causes of many so-called 'project failures' will show many more projects are set up to fail by the organisation. And allowing executive management to continue with these practices is ultimately a governance failure. Addressing the 'root causes' hidden in executive management practise, culture and governance is likely to generate significantly greater benefits. Work is happening in this area in some parts of the world. ISO is developing a standard on the governance of projects, programs and portfolios and Prof. Peter Morris and the APM (UK) are starting to focus on the overarching management of projects; to name two.

Hopefully Allan's studies can help support these efforts.

Yours sincerely,

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