

Project Management Maturity Takes Time

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The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language defines maturity as *“having reached full natural growth or development; having reached a desired or final condition of, relating to, or characteristic of full development, either mental or physical.”* Based on this definition, it is safe to say that organizations have the ability to mature in terms of their knowledge, skills, and capability as time progresses. In the process of maturing, organizations and individuals either gain or lose ground, but they never stand still. Determining the level of project management maturity is a topic that has created a great deal of interest in the business world in recent years. A number of project management maturity models have been presented in various publications by both organizations and individuals since the mid 1990s, which have created an increased level of interest in the development of a standard. So much so, that the PMI® Standards Committee created a project in 1997 called the “Organization Project Management Maturity Model” (OPM3®) project. The objective was to develop a model that was intended to become a standard for measuring the project management maturity of an organization. The project team presented the initial draft of this model at the PMI® 2001. Annual Symposium Standards Committee in Nashville, Tennessee on November 4, 2001.

One of the reasons there is so much interest in establishing a project management maturity model standard is that some organizations want to be able to measure their capabilities of applying project management best practices against others in a particular industry, and against their competitors in particular, to see how they measure up. Another reason, which probably is more prevalent, is to use the model to help identify the steps required to achieve improvement and measure their progress toward accomplishing the highest level of performance in the model. Most of the maturity models share common elements, especially at the highest level - continuous improvement as an enterprise-wide capability.

The important lesson to learn about using models is that regardless of the one being followed, models need to be modified to fit the organization that uses them. No two companies apply project management the same way, because the products and environments differ from one company to another. Let’s compare project management with finance, for example. Every company follows the standard practices and principles of finance established by the profession. However, they each apply them differently because their application is influenced by many different variables such as the size of the business, the type of products or services, the number of accounts, industry/governmental rules and regulations, the use of manual versus computerized financial systems, etc. Project management as a business function also follows standard practices and principles established by its profession, and they also are applied differently in every company because of the same or similar influences.

Part of the maturing process is that organizations must ask the question; “What must we do to effectively implement enterprise-wide project management?” I have heard this question posed by a large majority of the 200-plus companies that attended the two-day seminar entitled: “Project Support Office: A Format for Development,” I developed and presented in 1997 and 1998. Some of these companies have well-established localized project offices, but are hitting a wall of resistance that limits their penetration across the organization. The answer lies in establishing the supporting elements of authorization,

standards, education, and readiness, as well as closing the gap among the four areas of influence found in every organization. These four areas are the management of projects, management of products, management of environment, and management of organizational change. The means to accomplish the realignment and closure of gaps are found in a concept called managing organizations by projects (MOBP), which was introduced in recent years by Paul C. Dinsmore. He refers to it as a holistic way of applying classic project management methodology on an enterprise-wide scale in his latest book, *Winning in Business with Enterprise Project Management*. MOBP is the adoption of project management disciplines and practices as a methodology for completing almost all forms of work performed in an organization. MOBP is an integral part of the maturing processes that organizations typically go through to achieve the highest level of excellence.

Achieving organizational project management maturity is not an easy or short-term goal. It is not a trivial undertaking but tenacity and perseverance is required to achieve any level of excellence. Those companies who have are among the world-in-class leaders in their fields.

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