

The Suite Life: Enterprise Project Management in Government

By Tim Jaques, PMP

Project management is rapidly evolving in government organizations. Over the past five years, Project Management Offices (PMOs) have flourished across all levels of government. PMI has recognized this trend and advanced the commanding role of project management with the publication a PMBOK Government Extension. Agencies have begun to see success with project management (PM), with increased numbers of trained project managers, training courses, formalized PM career tracks, and PM being required on projects. One year ago, the Federal Government published a set of guidelines, documented in the Federal Acquisition Certificate for Program and Project Managers (FAC-P/PM) that outlines the structured development of PM practitioners. Clearly, project management is on the rise in government.

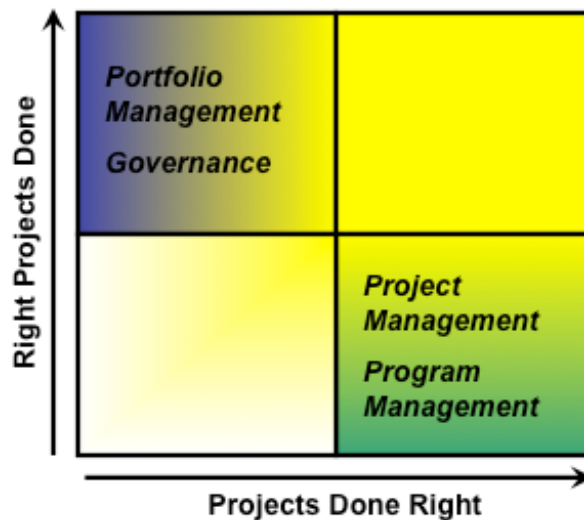
There seems to be an emerging constellation of organizations and services that, when integrated, form a standard of public sector enterprise project management (EPM). The enterprise, or agency, usually includes all organizations that fall under the auspices and authority of the most senior leader. Enterprise project management is rarely the same across different entities; however there are common denominators that collectively define the new age of EPM in the public sector . Components of the EPM suite include:



- **PM Delivery.** Individual, team and program performance. Project managers given formal authority, defined sponsor role, and a project core team.
- **Project and Program Methodologies.** Standards, templates, and common terminology for navigating a project or program.
- **Project (or Program) Management Office (PMO).** In government agencies, PMOs have adopted a wide array of configurations, including the Center of Excellence, Resource Central, and the Community of Practice. The PMO is usually either a hood ornament or the engine.
- **Portfolio Management.** As a risk management process, portfolio management ensures that the organization is working on a high priority, sustainable cohort of projects at any one time.
- **Tools.** Project-level tools like MS Project and enterprise tools like Primavera serve as the nexus of project scope and schedule development, as well as reporting.
- **Governance.** Not a project management process, but a critical management tool for alignment of projects with the enterprises strategy and resources.

While not every agency touting EPM has all of these components, there must be a critical mass of functioning components before EPM really begins to materialize and yield results. Imagine having the greatest portfolio management process and inept project managers to carry it out. The public sector agency contemplating EPM needs to recognize that the “flywheel” effect described by Jim Collins in his book “Good To Great” is relevant here. He argued that organizations could transform from a good organization to a great one by making a quantum leap known as the flywheel. The flywheel occurs when, with minimal leverage, the organization accelerates its business cycles beyond what the sum of its parts could muster. While few organizations attain the “greatness” that Collins wrote about, organization leadership should set its sights on building a sustainable program of project management.

Champions of project management have fought to bring EPM and these services into their agencies for many years. The goal of most EPM programs can be simply stated as “the right projects, done right.” That is, the right mix of projects as selected by a formal selection process, coupled with a talented project teams armed with the right tools. In many resource-constrained organizations, managers must choose the most effective investment strategy for implementing EPM. The investment involves a multi-year, multi-faceted commitment to standing up a full-fledged project management capability. An organization cannot go from disparate, unorganized project management, to EPM overnight, or even in a year. EPM champions should evaluate the two basic paths toward EPM: improving the quality of projects (projects done right) and improving the project selection processes (right projects done).



The first path, the “Competency Path” will take an organization toward standards for projects and programs, implementing training, communities of practice, lessons learned and best practices reviews, and more. The goal of getting projects done right is to have projects come in on time, on budget, and meetings all quality standards. Following this path will improve projects and programs at the singular level. With better reporting and estimating, improved project management will increase an executive’s insight into each project, making the project more transparent. This approach can be focused within one area of the agency, such as a division. This approach does not address the issues associated with solving the same business problem multiple times through multiple projects, which is where the second path is effective.

The second path, the “Alignment” Path, is about getting the right projects done. On this path organizations move toward formal project selection processes, portfolio

management, and is by nature, a top down endeavor. While this approach can be employed within a discrete part of an agency, one has to consider that enterprise project management is about . . .well . . .the enterprise. The goal of having the right projects done should address making sound project selections for the entire agency, not just a piece of it. Each major unit within the agency should have an effective project selection process that is summarized/integrated at the enterprise level. Effective project selection processes seek to understand the root business problem or opportunity and to establish a strategy for addressing the root cause. For example, if the root problem is that not enough information is available to staff to trouble shoot helpdesk tickets, developing two solutions for help desk tickets probably will not resolve the problem very effectively. Yet this happens all the time in the public sector. Adjoining divisions solve the same business problem multiple times simply because the project origination process was insufficient to cross-organizational boundaries.

Getting the right projects done involves creating effective portfolio management processes, but the portfolio should exist under the umbrella of governance. Governance is not, strictly speaking, a project management process. Governance is a management process that goes beyond projects, aligning the organization's resources and efforts against the highest-level strategic goals.

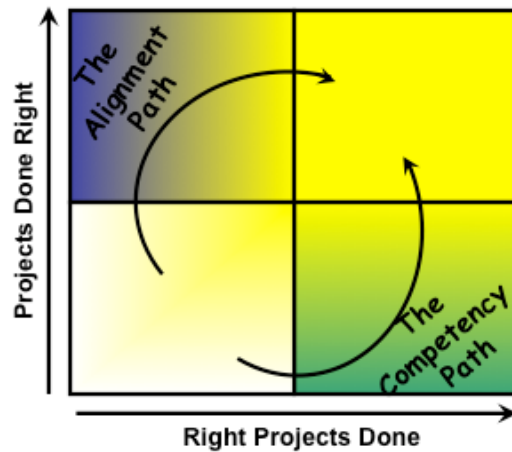
What indicators suggest a particular path? While there is no signature method for determining which the best path, look for telltale signs of pain points to help you make an informed decision. Every agency has some kind of project pain, and some effort should be given to understanding what type of pain it is. Here is a menu of the world of hurt that organizations feel every day.

1. *The Crash and Burn.* Projects are failing. They may even be high profile projects. You suspect they are not being managed well.
2. *The Double (or Triple) Dipper.* Different projects solving the same problems. Characterized by a general lack of control at the enterprise level.
3. *The Black Hole.* Projects begin and are never heard from again, yet strangely, staff time is still charged to them.
4. *The Never Ender.* Projects that go on forever. Characterized by one unlucky PM who inherited his/her project, or by a project that is scoped so large, as to solve the global water shortage.

Evaluating these pain points will suggest a path forward. For example, if projects are crashing and burning, consider improving the quality of project management. If there is little control over how many and which types of projects get started, a top down approach might be the best investment. PM champions should recognize that the two paths are not exclusive. No one is stopping an agency from implementing a portfolio management tool and doing some training. What this approach is suggesting is that those activities should be recognized for what they are: top down and bottoms up.

The two paths to implementing EPM – top down and bottoms up – are less about the direction of the change, and more about the costs and benefits that each path brings to the organization. As the graphic depicts, the path of increased *alignment* (top down) calls for

investments in portfolio management tools, resource management, executive reporting, and Governance. Investments in this arena should yield a better portfolio and improved consensus among management as to which projects rank highest and why. This path requires a high degree of executive buy-in to project management. The bottoms up path will result in improvements to the execution of projects and programs follows, hence the path of increased *competency*. This path calls for investments in training, PMO design and development, schedule and estimating tools, and methodologies.



While there are endless paths to achieving enterprise project management, this model provides a way to consciously balance the investments across alignment- and competency-building. The approach recognizes that most organizations are resource constrained and cannot build the Cadillac they all want right away, but must make choices as to which parts of EPM to invest in. The most effective sequence is an investment strategy that integrates the alignment with competency so that change is being effected at different levels of the organization.

Enterprise Project Management in the public sector, by its nature, is a long-term effort in change management. Adoption of the PM discipline comes slowly, through the successful results of projects. Hopefully, an approach like the one described here can help to manage the change and maximize the return of taxpayer dollars.