

SA organisations need a special brand of project management to see them through current chaos

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Business-focused project management can help business extract more value from their projects in tough times.

With multiple pressures being heaped on South African organisations - from erratic electricity supply to labour disputes - the need for capable and qualified project managers to take charge of business-critical projects is needed now more than ever.

At the same time, more is expected from project managers when it comes to delivering successful outcomes. According to Dennis Comminos, co-author with Enzo Frigenti of the definitive international bestseller *The Practice of Project Management, A Business Focused Approach*, increased pressure on the bottom line since the 2009 economic downturn means that project practitioners who can think strategically when executing projects are in high demand.

"The pace of change in business today is challenging the traditional boundaries of project management and project managers need to adapt their skills if they want to be able to deliver business value. A key new requirement is to be strategically savvy," he says.

"The ability to convert strategy into action is the emerging skill of our time," agrees Tim Wasserman, programme director of the Stanford University Advanced Project Management programme, Stanford, California, USA.

When project managers can grasp the larger ecosystem in which the project lives, they're able to create more agile processes that lead to improved outcomes-not just for the organisation but also for the economy.

Comminos, who runs a course on Business-focused project management at the UCT Graduate School of Business, says that to achieve 'bigger picture thinking' in today's environment, project managers have to shift from activity management (which is operational) to delivering benefits and value (which is tactical and strategic). "This requires a totally different toolbox," he says.

"Project management today is more of an art than a science - we need to teach project managers more than processes and procedures and rather give them the tools they need to add value to a business."

Having spent the past 25 years lecturing, training, consulting, and mentoring in the field of project management and working with numerous project managers across different levels, industries and geographies, Comminos has made it his life's work to equip project managers with the tools they need. He says in his interactions in the classroom he seeks to trigger a paradigm shift in project managers.

"Project management is no longer necessarily about learning specific skills, it's about developing all areas of your managerial studies, including logistics, supply chain and resourcing, in such a way that you are able to add more value to a business when managing projects," he says.

According to the Project Management Institute's 2014 talent report, demand for project managers continues to soar worldwide, especially in high-growth developing economies. But Comminos says only candidates with the right combination of knowledge and experience will be able to make the most of lucrative project management opportunities in the job market.

"In South Africa, developing the right people is key for local businesses because projects are managed and implemented by project managers, not machines and technology," he says.

The UCT GSB Business Focused Project Management programme runs from 17 to 21 August 2015 in Cape Town. For more information contact Tracy Kimberley on 021 406 1346 or visit www.gsb.uct.ac.za/projectmanagement.

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