

Is good project management software enough?



What constitutes ‘good software’? A couple of years ago, a blog by ‘Dan the Project Management Man’ reminded me of an on-line survey that looked at purchaser’s satisfaction with project management and business analysis software tools. Only 1.2% of the 270 respondents felt their software purchase had exceeded expectations and another 9.3% felt the software had met all of their requirements. Allowing for the natural bias in the survey – people complain more readily than they praise there were still useful findings.

According to the respondents, the key ingredient missing from most sales was integrated training (71%) and software specific training (36.6%). But on its own, training is not going to solve the problem. A key finding was *“The survey findings do not indicate project management and business analysis software is deficient, but rather that too often, the maturity of the organization and the skill level of its people are not effectively aligned for the tools to deliver their maximum ROI”*.

Project management software at best supports a project management methodology, at worst, just a project management process. But to paraphrase Bill Gates, *‘if you have and efficient system, automating the system will magnify the benefits, if the system is deficient, automation will magnify the problems’*.

I would suggest integrated training to align people’s skills and knowledge with an effective methodology, supported by effective project management software, is only 10% of the battle. Doing your projects ‘right’ is important but choosing the ‘right projects to do’ is far more important and this links to the capability of the organization to exploit the ‘output’ created by the project to achieve its desired ‘outcomes’¹.

The quest for an effective ROI, that delivers business benefits (ie, real value to the organization), lies in other areas including:

- Effective portfolio management to select the right projects to do².
- Effective program and business change management to achieve the maximum value from the project deliverables. This is a business management issue, not a project management issue!³
- Effective organization enablers and ‘project delivery capability’ (PDC) that supports the efficient execution of project work⁴.

These objectives require two key elements:

1. Effective Governance of the overall project delivery process. The ‘Governance of Project Management’ is an area of emerging importance in the overall governance of an organization⁵.

¹ For more on the **value chain** see: https://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1023_Benefits_and_Value.pdf

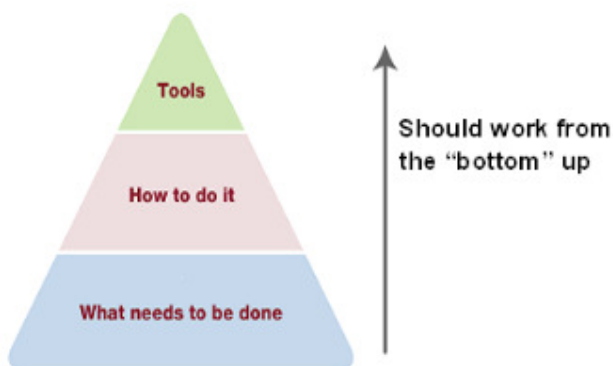
² For more on **Portfolio Management** see: https://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1017_Portfolios.pdf

³ For more on **Organizational Change Management** see: https://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1078_Change_Management.pdf

⁴ For more on project delivery capability see: https://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1079_PDC.pdf

⁵ For more on governance see: https://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1033_Governance.pdf

2. A commitment to improving the overall maturity of an organizations Portfolio, Program and Project Management capabilities. To be effective, this commitment has to be led by the CEO.



Before starting on the process of selecting a software tool, the fundamental requirement is to define what has to be done. Primarily focused on what is going to form part of the project/program/portfolio (PPP) system and what is going to be dealt with through other systems within the organization.

The next phase of development is to determine how the work included in the PPP system will be done and managed. This usually means developing or adapting an appropriate methodology⁶ for PPP delivery, control, and governance.

There are a range of standardised methodologies including PRINCE2 and others based on the *PMBOK® Guide*. Most organizations adapt one of these to meet their unique set of requirements. The level of organisational maturity is not fixed, both the methodology, and the selected tools need to be capable of operating effectively at the current level of maturity and growing as the organisation's maturity improves.

The final step is deciding on the software tools needed to support the people in the PPP delivery system, if there is a single PMO responsible for 'everything' a fully integrated system may be appropriate, if there are different elements in the organisation, a set of specialist tools may provide more effective and robust support for the work. We publish a reasonably comprehensive list of PPP tools (with links through to the supplier) at: <https://mosaicprojects.com.au/PMKI-SCH-030.php>.

The software selection process should look at fit-for-purpose features you will use, rather than the total number of features in the software – every feature adds to the complexity of the tool and the difficulty of teaching people to use it. Other key considerations include training and support – the statistics quoted at the start of this article have not changed much over time.

The paradox of PPP software selection is an organisation needs to have a level of PPP maturity to really understand what tools are needed, but most organisations in the market for PPP software are only starting on the climb up the maturity ladder - mature organisations already have processes and tools in place. Finding unbiased advice and guidance is essential (but also very difficult).

So, in conclusion, and based on 13 years mid-career running a project management software business, my view is that once an organization has good systems, then it can select good software (with proper support and training) to support its management, controls, and governance procedures – trying to reverse process does not work!

⁶ For more on *methodologies* see: https://mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1045_Methodologies.pdf



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