

# Project Intelligence – November 2010



## Chemistry

Nick Sanderson,  
Managing Practitioner, Pelicam

'Chemistry' related constraints and issues are one of the most common themes encountered during Pelicam Project Assurance engagements.

This article explores how the root causes of these issues can be identified and discusses some tools and techniques that can be deployed to resolve such constraints and optimise delivery and outcomes.

Let's start however, by understanding the 'chemistry' to which this article relates. The chemistry under discussion here is the dynamics of a unique blend or mix of stakeholders (individuals, organisations/functions, suppliers) associated with a particular project or programme delivery environment and how this blend can have a profound impact on the ultimate success or failure of a piece of work.

Chemistry related issues can manifest in many guises - I am sure we can all recall working on engagements where getting things done was more difficult than necessary - typical examples would be tensions with suppliers, office 'politics', culture clashes, inconsistent objectives/priorities between organisational functions or stakeholders... Equally I would hope that we can all recall those projects which were a delight to work on and where the desired outcomes were fully satisfied - understanding why a particular environment was so successful is one of the key techniques that can be deployed to help optimise delivery and/or understand the root causes to a specific issue in our current environment.



A very obvious component associated with optimising the delivery dynamics of an environment are the behaviours within the extended teams delivering

the work. A fundamental dependency towards achieving the right behaviours is that we continually examine and measure ourselves to ensure we are demonstrating the behaviours we seek from others. It is also important to understand that negative behaviours are often a symptom rather than the root cause (although at times it is simply necessary to remove a 'bad egg' from a team). A very common root cause to negative behaviour is an individual not feeling truly engaged or appreciated - proactively winning over the hearts and minds and developing strong interpersonal relationships across our extended teams must always be a priority for all of us.

Identifying potential chemistry shortfalls requires one to take an objective, undistorted, honest look around the work place (the

## In this issue...

Chemistry related issues can be a common theme with failing projects

Is your organisation competent at competency?

Can new graduates make effective project managers?

Pelicam and their senior clients launch Intelligent Projects Forum

The Commonwealth Games - success or failure?

Pelicam continue to drive assurance...

Support Lifelites at the Big Give at Fortnum and Mason

signs are also pretty much identical to those we would associate with issues in our personal relationships): are people speaking to one another? Do our teams look happy (can you hear occasional laughter!)? Is there a 'buzz' around the workplace? Do people regularly proffer suggestions on how to do things differently? Would I enjoy socialising with my suppliers?... if the answer to any of these questions is 'no' or 'not really' then you almost certainly have an opportunity to improve things.

Solving chemistry related issues is not always easy but the rewards associated with doing so can be enormous. We need to be incisive and bold to identify and confront issues and work with our peers to resolve them and optimise both the working experience for all and secure the desired outcomes from a piece of work.

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## Competent At Competency

**Peter Mayer, Managing Partner, Pelicam**

Many of us have responsibility for the delivery of projects. Many of us have responsibility for the people who deliver these same projects. You may have a good view of an individual's strengths due to previous dealings, be that communication skills, leadership qualities or technical ability. Instinctively we recognise who the most capable project managers are and, not surprisingly, tend to farm the more difficult, or most important projects to them. Whilst this cherry picking is inevitable, how should we manage our portfolio of projects people in a more holistic manner and raise the game for all?

In this 'age of austerity' the efficiency of our project delivery capability as a whole must be more considered.

Those organisations that have formed a strategy to eradicate 'cherry picking' and create further efficiencies have recognised the need to clearly understand (a) the complexities and challenges within a project or programme; and (b) the skills and competencies and motivations of the prospective project manager. Matching the two is the objective... in reality, gaining clarity around project requirements and people capability is the challenge.

### Assessing Capability

Various attempts have been made to standardise measurement of project management competency (e.g. IPMA/APM) to varying degrees of success. Some clients cynically observe that many assessment programmes have been developed with the sole purpose of selling additional project training courses such as Prince2.

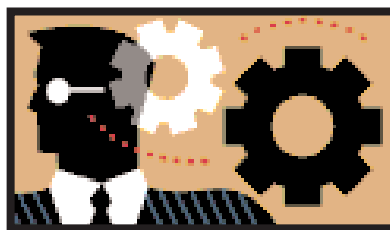
**You have passed to Level 2.** Thankfully the training world has (largely) moved away from the "1. Junior Project Manager is capable of managing small scale project risk; 2. Senior Project Manager is capable of managing large scale project risk" scoring rationale. And most competency programmes will now include some element of behavioural, contextual and technical competencies - how these are defined and measured is a matter of further debate as to their effectiveness and accuracy (see notes on Project Intelligence on the Pelicam website).

From personal experience I know I can complete a behavioural assessment and come out as the equivalent of 'Mother Teresa' or 'Attila the Hun' depending on what I want the observer to see (by changing my behaviour - not my personality). The accuracy of desktop assessments is flawed for this reason (amongst others). Also the specific need to customise the assessment according to the context and environment at the client - it appears this customisation is not often done - clients can pay a small fee for the assessment or get it free of charge in lieu of training revenues.

**One hundred and eighty!** The 180 or 360 degree review is common and has some merits for the behavioural aspects of a review. The trouble is we (often) don't know what we don't know. If those people providing feedback are not project intelligent the quality of the content will inevitably suffer.

### Assessing Project Requirements

In order to match a project manager to a project you first need to understand the many attributes of the project work to be undertaken. These considerations need to include: the context, complexity and do-ability of the



project, the business drivers, the extent of the challenge, the risks to be faced, the levels of motivation needed. All this within the context of the peculiarities of the organisational environment and culture at the time. In practice most organisations struggle to build a view of their portfolio that delivers this information.

### The Perfect Match

For this reason, to accurately measure an individual's contribution we prefer to review their actual work on site - in real time. This means working through the project definition, reviewing the content of the risk log, determining if the issues are accurate, understanding the communications process (and its effectiveness) and how stakeholders are being managed. We look at whatever the project manager is using to manage his project. Findings are shared openly with the project manager and validated with two key stakeholders.

By doing this we get a very accurate view of what he/she is currently doing, their levels of motivation, understanding of the context and project intelligence, and therefore their capability to deliver the project/programme in question. Outputs vary but can include practical risk assessment, prioritised action plans, a real focus on delivery, and ultimately project correction.

It is designed to be a positive experience for the participant. Engenders the right individual behaviours: active participation, precision, integrity, personal responsibility, problem ownership and resolution. An immediate and sustainable uplift in project performance.

We can only do this with our senior project/programme practitioners who are well versed in Pelicam's Health Check process and are Project Intelligent themselves. The Health Check is based on the premise - what is project success and how will it be achieved? Our PM Development Workshops ask a similar question of the individual - what does success look like for you and how will you achieve it?

Comment on Peter's article:

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**Peter Mayer is Pelicam's Managing Partner and can be contacted on +44(0)7974 084333.**



## Can New Graduates Make Effective Project Managers?

### Peter Mayer, Managing Partner, Pelicam

As a company that focuses on project assurance, Pelicam only recruit seasoned project managers - providing pragmatic, expert analysis and direction, using an 'invitation only' method to guarantee quality. But we were recently asked the question

**"What would you look for when recruiting a 20-something project manager?"**

We felt we were well positioned to provide views about

what companies should look for and the type of skill sets required by individuals themselves even if they may be comparatively young.

**Three project management essentials.** When we assess project management competency



and potential we focus on three key attributes:

- (1) A **balanced understanding** of the need to plan ahead and the various dimensions involved;
- (2) An **inner confidence** that enables team spirit and personal behaviours that allow interaction at all levels in an organisation;
- (3) The **innate intelligence** to work at a detailed level to recognise complexity and ensure precision and accuracy.

**Nature / Nurture.** Why do we focus on these three essentials? Because a project manager has to recognise the complexity within the tasks ahead, lead an often disparate team to a shared goal, and ensure SMART solutions are delivered to meet specific needs. Much of the project management discipline can be trained, but there are some critical attributes that are core to the individual that to a larger extent are unchangeable - they either exist, or they don't.

**Duke of Edinburgh Awards, Prince2?** Recent graduates will not easily demonstrate these attributes. Certification

gives an indication that the vocabulary of projects is understood and a demonstrable motivation to participate and progress.

Pre-graduation activities - such as around the world trips, hospice development in Rwanda and so on - are not necessarily a clear indication of compatibility or project management potential. Some project management 'instincts' are demonstrable and can be evidenced but unless we are prepared to invest in a serious career development programme (all the more unlikely in today's economic environment perhaps), significant experience in a commercial work environment has to be a pre-requisite. Having said all that, we are always interested in linking up with the brightest and best project talent in the UK. If you feel that describes you or a colleague, please let us know.

**Comment on Peter's article:**

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## Intelligent Projects Forum

**Kate Woodmansee, Marketing Manager, Pelicam**

Following many discussions with senior decision makers from large blue chip organisations the same question is posed "Projects and Programmes continue to fail - what should we do about it?" As Pelicam work to fix failing projects and help clients to successful delivery, we have formed an "Intelligent Projects Forum". As a starting point Pelicam will provide composite feedback and trends from a consolidated view of all the programme and project Health Checks that Pelicam has completed over the last six years. Our aim is to use the experience and insight of individuals who have felt the pain and success of projects to shape some recommendations for effective project delivery.

We look forward to keeping you informed of our findings...



**Kate Woodmansee is Pelicam's Marketing Manager and can be contacted on +44(0)7801 781677.**

## India's Changing Perception of the Commonwealth Games

**James Rosewell, Managing Practitioner, Pelicam**

The Commonwealth Games (CWG) are now over and Delhi can start to get back to normal. I've been working in India during October and have the benefit of both a local and foreign view. As project sponsors, managers and stakeholders we can learn a lot about perception and stakeholder management.

In the lead up to the games poor quality infrastructure was the focus of media attention. The situation was rescued in the final weeks by throwing people at the problem. Problems have been largely blamed on corrupt officials and suppliers; an investigation is now being launched by the Prime Minister.

Many questioned the relevance of the sports represented

at CWG to a nation obsessed by cricket. Surely there were better things to spend £1.5bn on?

During the games problems with the official web site delayed important information from being disseminated. Attendance was initially poor due to an unclear process to purchase tickets and unreliable transportation.

In the weeks leading up to the CWG according to a Times of India (TOI) poll "97% of the respondents believed that the Union and Delhi governments and the Games organizing committee (OC) had tarnished the image of the country". A further "71% of the respondents felt that the situation was so grave it could no longer be salvaged".

After India's success in the medal tally following the games closing ceremony "...85% of those surveyed felt the Games were a hit". What a difference a few weeks can make! In this case the public focus was directed to more positive news and a huge shift in support followed.

Problems, especially those that can be communicated in 30 seconds with a clever headline and picture such as a collapsed bridge, grab attention. No one likes to be associated with a failure and it becomes easy to find further reasons to criticise. However once popular opinion changes, everyone wants to be associated with success. Perception can be everything.

Glasgow 2014, as well as any major programme, can learn a lot.

### **Project Assurance**

But what has this all got to do with Pelicam and project assurance? If the Organising Committee had an impartial and accurate view of status (which was particularly

important given some of the cultural issues involved in the project) they would have had an opportunity to rectify risks and issue before they became major high profile problems. Project assurance would have identified unsound success criteria for different stakeholder groups and provided an opportunity to put in place plan to address.

Not all projects are on the scale of a worldwide sporting event but the basics are exactly the same as projects being run in millions of businesses today. Project assurance can ensure yours doesn't become the next Terminal 5 or CWG 2010.

**Comment on James' article:**

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## Pelicam Continue To Drive Assurance

**Peter Mayer, Managing Partner, Pelicam**

What a Summer! If we thought the world was slowing down there are no signs of it. We continue to work with our clients delivering a multitude of transformation and change programmes - either assisting clients to deliver critical programmes, or helping them increase their own capability to deliver projects.

We have just won a new energy customer - one of the growing number of utility companies we have as clients - the initial piece of work is to review an ongoing programme of work and endorse the planned spend and timeframe for completion. Work starts at the beginning of November and our submission will be completed by the end November.

We also recently completed a project and portfolio management review at another new client - a leading UK newspaper. Without compromising client confidentiality -

great people to work with and really good feedback on the value of our collaboration and report.

In other places, we are still surprised and genuinely pleased to see clients redoubling their already significant efforts in the delivery of large scale programmes. Whilst recognising their own spending limitations and cost challenges they are determined to deliver the necessary organisational and system changes to support the various business demands. Interestingly for Pelicam, whilst the risk of failure is being considered so openly within businesses, we find more clients and people who want our support.



## Support Lifelites at Fortnum & Mason Thursday 2nd December

**Helen Morgan, Office Manager, Pelicam**

The Big Give and Fortnum and Mason have joined together to host a wonderful charity Christmas party and if you attend the whole price of your ticket can be donated to Lifelites.

An opportunity to support Lifelites and celebrate the start of the festive season in style.

### **The Fortnum & Mason Charity Christmas Party**

The Big Give and Fortnum & Mason Charity Christmas Party is a fantastic opportunity for our supporters to celebrate the start of the Christmas Season.



*Giving kids with limited life unlimited possibilities*

Guests will enjoy a magical night featuring:

- **Performances from top UK arts charities, including Royal Ballet and some very festive opera singers**
- **Champagne and canapés**
- **Quintessentially English shopping experience across 5 floors**
- **Tasting and demonstrations from top suppliers**
- **A host of familiar faces**

The party will be held at Fortnum and Mason on Thursday 2nd December. From 7.00 pm to 9.30 pm. For each £50 ticket purchased, guests will receive a £50 voucher to give to Lifelites.

For further information about this event and how to order tickets please visit [www.thebiggive.co.uk](http://www.thebiggive.co.uk), call Lifelites on 0207 440 4200 or e-mail [admin@lifelites.org](mailto:admin@lifelites.org).

Understandably tickets are limited and on a first come first serve basis.

Charity No 1115655



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