

Getting under the bonnet of the managing benefits framework

Anne McGrath



Anne McGrath is based at the ILX Group, London, UK.

Many organisations are seeing a disconnection between the large amount of money they are spending on programmes and projects and the minimal benefit to the organisation. Programme and project managers are not getting the support, guidance or time they need with the right people in the business and so are delivering the capability they think is required rather than what is really needed to deliver measurable benefits to the organisation.

To address these issues, a global certification body [The APM Group](#) introduced the managing benefits guidance in 2012 to complement and build on existing best practice in portfolio, programme and project management such as [PRINCE2®](#), [MSP®](#), [P3O®](#), [MoV®](#) and [MoP®](#). Human resource (HR) professionals who deliver training in the managing benefits framework to the right job functions at the right time can drive a real and measurable difference to the benefits delivered by programmes and projects in their organisation.

The key to successful implementation of the managing benefits framework is to make sure it is not just programme and project managers that attend managing benefits training. Very often project and programme managers have received training across all the

various accreditations, but they simply cannot make a difference unless the strategic level staff and business change managers/senior users understand the role they will play in delivering the measurable benefits of the programme.

If all levels of staff work together to understand how to manage benefits, this will drive the best results. Some forward-thinking businesses have sent staff from all levels – senior staff setting the strategic direction of the programme, through to programme and project managers and business change managers – on training courses together. This allows the trainer to use the real-life change they are aiming to make together as a case study to demonstrate the use of the framework. Senior strategic level staff may not have the time or inclination to attend a five-day course with an exam at the end, so it may be necessary to adapt the training to offer these senior staff an overview.

Managing benefits – a health warning

Managing benefits training comes with a health warning. Once introduced, it could lead to a seismic shift in the organisation. Employees will start to look at work with the end in mind, i.e. “what benefits will we get?” rather than “what will we deliver?” It opens a

can of worms and may lead people to question programmes and projects already underway. It is not uncommon to uncover programmes and projects – from building work to information technology projects – that are not clearly linked to the measurable benefits that will contribute to the delivery of the strategic objectives of the organisation. This may lead to the organisation changing the programmes and projects included in their portfolio of change and all the upheaval associated with closing programmes down before starting new ones.

The HR professionals can ask themselves a number of searching questions to establish if the managing benefits framework could boost the number of benefits being delivered by their organisation's programme and projects, starting with "what is the success rate of current change programmes and projects?" This is not about how many are being delivered on time and within budget, but rather looking at how many of them are really making a difference to the strategic objectives of the organisation by delivering the correct measurable benefits to the business?

Some organisations will discover that they do not have clear strategic objectives that can be easily linked to measurable benefits. The first step is to work with the strategic staff and the business change managers to agree on clear strategic objectives and the

measurable benefits linked to these objectives. This will give them a starting point to map these benefits back to the programme outcomes, then back to the capability they will need from the programme and finally to the outputs that need to be delivered by the constituent projects.

They will need to establish the mechanisms to measure these benefits and take some baseline measurements so that it will be possible to measure progress and improvement later on. Tools like the balanced scorecard could be used to facilitate this work.

Training is just the start of the managing benefits journey

The time and cost needed to identify the benefits, set up the mechanisms to measure these benefits and then measure them is often underestimated by organisations. Once mechanisms are in place to measure the benefits, data can be collected to show that programmes and projects are contributing to the measurable benefits linked to the strategic objectives of the organisation. Programmes and projects that are not contributing can be stopped and resources can be diverted to programmes and projects will deliver these strategic objectives.

Training staff in managing benefits is just the first step. To embed benefits management, employees will need ongoing support to map the changing strategic objectives of the organisation to measurable

benefits, and to continue measuring and reporting to show that the organisation is moving in the correct direction and that the expected benefits are starting to be delivered – or if this is not happening, why not? In today's economic climate, organisations no longer have the resources to waste on activities delivering no measurable benefit and that are not linked to the current strategic objectives of the organisation.

References

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About the author

Anne McGrath, MEng, is an experienced management consultant and trainer with 22 years' of experience. Over this time, Anne has developed a range of business and technical skills in client-facing environments, gaining project management experience while working with Shell International and Accenture. Anne now works with the ILX Group as a trainer and consultant. Anne is an accredited trainer for Projects In a Controlled Environment (PRINCE2®), Managing Successful Programmes (MSP®), Management of Portfolios (MoP®), Portfolio, Programme and Project Office (P3O®), Managing Benefits® and is Association for Project Management (APMP) – qualified. Anne McGrath can be contacted at: lana@technologypr.eu