

Training for Project Control Professionals

By

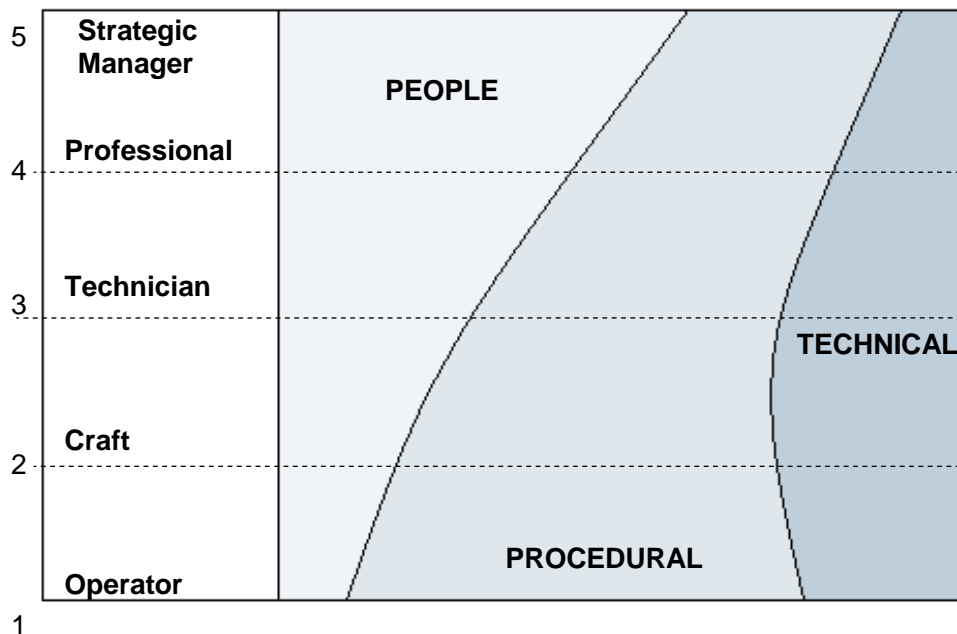
Richard Plumb. C.Eng; MIStructE; FACostE.

The Project Controllers Job.

During recent meetings concerned with Project Control NVQ Standards development and subsequently at competence assessment interviews, I was prompted to think about the occupation of the project control specialist and what it is that enables him/her contribute so successfully to the life and effectiveness of the project team.

Also these thoughts have confirmed my belief in the on-the job competence assessment programmes as being the only realistic way to identify training for individuals and measure achievement, particularly with regards to the content of the project controllers occupation.

The five different levels of occupation supported by the Qualification and Curriculum Authority are shown below



These five levels of occupation are shown against the mix of occupational standards used in the vocational qualifications and briefly show at

Level 1 some 70% of the job is concerned with the application of the procedure, with say 10% as people skills and 20% technical.

Level 2 has 60% procedure and 25% technology with 15% people skills.

Level 3 shows further development of the personal skills to about 30% and 20% technical knowledge, coupled with now 50% procedural activity.

Level 4 has possibly 50% of the job scope as personnel interaction with procedural application and technology making up the remainder

Level 5 is mostly people skills at 60% and the remainder is procedure and technical. Hopefully the reader will agree because senior management is all about getting others to do the work, coupled with some supervision.

The Project Controls profession is mostly composed of practitioners at Level 3 and 4 with the project control managers operating at Level 5. The vocational qualifications at Level 3 Intermediate and Level 4 Professional very correctly identify with the pattern of activity shown above.

On the Job training Technical

Using the concept above for the make up of a project control professional's job explains why it is not possible to attend college to learn all our skills. The college can only teach the technical part of the job, i.e. critical path analysis, risk analysis, earned value, cash flow etc and most of our practitioners become quite adept at these technical activities.

A problem here is that a manager does not usually send his employee to a training course until he/she has enough knowledge to understand what is being taught. This further reduces the benefit of the college training, thus enhancing the value of planned in-house job related development

People Skills

People skills are generally those a person is born with. They may have been improved or roughened by years of grooming or unfortunate experience, however it is possible to ensure that matters of communication, care, consideration, confidentiality and correctness are fully learnt and implemented. Because of a project controllers position with much contact between departments, clients and contractors, they need to become very good at gaining trust and at getting their point across in diplomatic terms. These skills are transferable from company to company or project to project and are equally as important as the technical matters everyone concentrates on.

These skills are detailed on the following project controls occupational standards :-

PC10 Provide advice and support to maintain progress	L4
PC11 Manage the project control team – objectives	L4

PC12 Manage the project control team - allocate work	L4
PC13 Manage the continuing development of personal and prof'nal skills	L4
PC14 Develop yourself in the project control work role	L3
PC15 Develop the skills of your project control team members	L4
PC16 Develop and maintain effective working relationships	L4
PC 17 Contribute to effective project working relationships	L3
PC 18 Observe and apply professional ethics and values	L3 & L4

An issue I observed during the recent assessment interviews is the difference in personal behaviour when under interview by an unknown assessor, thus illustrating the confidence level of the candidate. Some are completely normal, some over and others under confident. Our occupation needs persons to be able to relate comfortably with others of all stations in employment, particularly as they progress through the profession and the skills become increasingly important.

Particular skill omissions identified in these notes are to be found in the professional ethics and duty of care subjects (PC18). It appears that many practitioners consider confidentiality of information to be the main requirement on this subject and tend to ignore the skills of visitor care, managing a meeting, sorting conflicts of interest, where to obtain information on ethics and values, health, safety and emergency requirements.

Procedural Skills

Procedural application skills are peculiar to each companies own practice and have either been introduced to be consistent with other parts of an international organisation, or developed in-house over many years. Some in-house training programmes introduce these along with the technical aspects in their syllabus.

Particular items included within this area of the work are

- procedure for authorisation of expenditure,
- change management procedure,
- reporting procedure,
- commitment and expenditure recording
- estimate preparation
- schedule preparation
- risk control procedure
- contingency management
- contract award procedure
- procurement procedure
- security of information

However, should the candidate eventually change employment he/she will need to relearn that part of the job to suit the new company's requirements.

Proprietary Software Training Programmes

These are examples of training which include both procedural application and the technology required to understand the process included within the

software programme. Too often the candidate knows what to do with the resultant output the programme produces, but has no idea of the process included within the software. This of course will limit the judgement which can be applied to the output.

This coupling of procedure and technical background is fine if the company have bought the systems and operate them for the client's requirements. However, further learning is necessary for any change of employer or change of software for a different project.

Conclusion

From our recent experiences and In the interest of raising the game for the project control profession, the items noted below may be considered by the skills development managers for any project control personnel. Especially now that we have identified that the technical and procedural parts of the work are only at best some 60% of the whole scope, with people skills the remaining 40% and more, become increasingly important as the employee rises up the ladder of success.

In summary, the object of this short paper is to assist in the development of a fully qualified practitioner. I have extracted the following points as the most commonly identified omissions in our candidates experience and knowledge.

People Skills

- **Communications**
 - report writing
 - presentations
- **Duty of care subjects including**
 - health and safety,
 - conflicts of interest
 - emergency requirements
- **Sources of information on professional ethics and values,**
- **Managing a meeting to ensure the full understanding of all company and business requirements and to gain full value from the meeting**
- **Demonstration of commitment to the profession through membership of the ACostE..**

Technical Skills

- **Proprietary software – how does the programme work e.g. earned value, how is the calculation made.**
- **Data retrieval from past projects e.g. how are material and labour rates gathered and organised for future information.**

Procedural Application Skills

- **Company procedure for managements financial approval values**
- **Security of information.**

Probably the most convenient way to pass on knowledge within the office is by twinning. I.e. the allocation of a junior to work with a senior person or

mentor for the duration of a project, thus over time the junior person will witness and practice all the requirements of the entire job.

And Finally

All the requirements of a fully qualified project control engineer can be found on the occupational standards. These may be viewed on www.acoste.org.uk they can be downloaded or you may enquire from TASC administration at Sandbach for any assistance.