

Believability and Timeliness – The key to trusting your Project data

Introduction

Management often find themselves in the position of being a passenger on the project bus rather than being there to advise the driver on the best route. Poor data integrity, accuracy, completeness and timeliness of reporting directly impact trust and therefore the quality of decision-making. In this case management are largely in the dark and cannot provide effective support and guidance, increasing the risks to successful project delivery.

Data integrity and timeliness are the key factors in project reporting that will reduce management's confidence in the reporting. The basic requirement for consuming project data is that it's believable and timely. Believable in terms of it being an accurate reflection of the current state of the project and timely in that any direction or decisions that need to be given or made are still relevant when the reporting is received.

Most organisations suffer from the believability and timeliness problem in various degrees. This is reflected in project failure rates, project budget and timeline overruns, project staff turnover and problems experienced when handing the product over to the business for implementation.

This white paper explores three factors that will help organisations overcome issues with project data integrity and timeliness.

#1: Support your Project Manager with Efficient Systems and Practices

Let's face it; being a project manager is a tough assignment. Not only are there a multiple of constantly changing variables to keep across there are also many organisational and systemic hurdles to jump over such as:

- An organisational culture that is naturally resistant to change
- a political environment where internal politics gets in the way of making the correct decisions
- complex and convoluted change management processes that constrain and delay effective change implementation
- Excessive governance adopted as the only practical way to reduce project management risk, and
- Finding an engaged, supportive business owner or sponsor for the project

Do you expect to be at your Monday morning meeting at 9:00am when there is a traffic jam? No, probably not, maybe you build some contingency into your journey but leaving 10 minutes earlier will only get you through a light traffic jam to be just on time.

Project delivery can be like driving down a highway, you have a good trip with some traffic issues, or you have major works causing major delays. Organisations can do many things to help keep the highway clear of major works and keep the traffic flowing.

These include:

- **Simplifying reporting requirements**, a project manager should be able to produce a project status report each week in 30 minutes or less.
- **Remove copy and paste of data** as this is wasted time and introduces risk. Project information should be entered once and reused. Project managers are usually highly paid resources so reducing them to highly paid 'copy and paste' resources will do nothing to improve project delivery
- **Use a centralised PPM tool**. Having all project information in one system will reduce the data 'hunting and gathering' undertaken by most Project Management Offices (PMO's) for periodic reporting.
- **Identify strong business owners for projects** and set up governance that can support project decisions and guidance in a timely fashion.
- **Automate project reporting** and ensure it draws from centralised and managed data. Ideally it should be push button, formatted and repeatable. Consistent format of critical information on reports really improves management's ability to pick up on key messaging
- **Use the 80 / 20 rule as a guideline**. 80% of a project manager's time should be on managing the project activities, risks, issues, actions & stakeholder management. 20% on reporting and project administrative tasks.

#2: Effective Project Governance

The role of a project governance body is to govern; to advise, steer and make decisions. There is little point in providing members with information about a project event or activity that happened four weeks ago. In this case the body is little more than an information receiver with little to no opportunity to supply any meaningful advice or guidance or action. It is also important to help governing bodies help you. Information required to support decisions should be underpinned by quality project data and metrics that are easily extracted, collated, and presented. This preparation of data can be greatly accelerated by:

- **Producing Project Packs directly from the centralised PPM tool** and distributed a maximum of 3 business days before to governance body meets. Ideally this is push button reporting and does not require hours of data massaging, copy and pasting, and formatting.
- **Standardised project packs** enabling governance body members to understand the reports faster due to familiar 'look and feel' rather than packs of differing formats and differing timeframes.
- **Set governance meetings between a repeating 2-4 week schedule**. Meeting more often will allow for management to keep in touch with the projects and taken actions that will improve the outcomes the trade-off is less time spent by the Project Manager on managing project as opposed to reporting unless there is an effective project management solution in place to assist the process.
- **Be clear whether you need control or advice**. Sometimes with lower complexity projects and more empowered project teams, an advisory board with less formal decisioning can lessen project reporting overheads

- **Similarly, governance does not always mean a high powered executive group** for every project. You can hold meetings with less senior stakeholders or SMEs and get a good result.
- **Group smaller similar projects into a 20 minute ‘speed dating’ governance format**, this will keep Project Managers honest and ensure focus remains on key outcomes

#3: Trust Your Project Data

There are many factors that improve project data believability but in the end, trust wins out. Trust can take weeks to build and minutes to lose. Trust is built on data integrity. Accuracy, completeness, and quality are the hallmarks of trustworthy data.

Without trust in the data, an organisation severely impairs effective governance and introduces significant risk in decision making. There are many factors that will enable an organisation to improve project data believability. It should be stressed that building layers of process is not the answer here. Working smart and lean can really accelerate the quality of project data and this can be achieved by:

- **Making it easy for Project Managers or Project Administrators to enter data** and then report project information. This will encourage them to work within the chosen tool rather than flipping between tools risking human error
- **Providing a centralised PPM** tool and setting this up as a powerful addition to the Project Managers arsenal of tools, rather than ‘another reporting system’. As in the previous point, we want to avoid Project Managers or Project Administrators keeping separate spreadsheets or MS PowerPoint presentations to manage their project data.
- **Providing the PMO with the ability to run simple system reports** that check expected data quality markers, due dates and easily shown exceptions.
- **Giving the PMO the ability to zero in effectively on projects that require additional assistance** to bring up the data quality, and/or can identify Project Managers that require additional training or support
- **Allowing easy access to various dashboards and reports** at project, program, portfolio and PMO levels in real-time on PCs, laptops, and tablets for general consumption at relevant levels of management
- **Providing transparency**; using this to your advantage by exposing project information to the broader organisation allowing a broader audience to review and call out anomalies or inconsistencies. This is quite powerful in ensuring different views and perspectives inform the ‘truthfulness’ of data entered by project staff as well as potentially identifying dependencies and impact outside the project’s immediate field of view
- **Using Artificial Intelligence and cognitive analysis** to help identify problem areas and see what traditional project reporting may miss. In large organisations, it is almost impossible for a PMO to read hundreds of status reports each week. The emergence of AI allows for analysis that helps pin point problems and anomalies with reporting data.

Conclusion

Project data believability and timeliness is a product of a cohesive joining of People, Process and Technology. At Level35 we are experts in the project management field and have delivered hundreds of high profile projects, working through all the areas described in this whitepaper to successfully achieve client outcomes.

A key component to delivery success is our OneView PPM Cloud application, which has been specifically designed to overcome the problems described in this whitepaper and deliver capability that supports:

- General project activity such as data entry and push button report delivery
- Governance and better decision making
- Timely delivery of project reports and data
- Reporting at project, program, portfolio and PMO levels
- Artificial Intelligence backed status report review and assessment

OneView PPM is an enterprise grade, low cost, low risk system that will work in conjunction with your people and processes to achieve better project outcomes.



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