

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT TRAINING: BIG PICTURE THINKING

In the face of global business challenges, training current and future program managers is more critical than ever. Professionals in today's global marketplace are rarely blessed with just one project. More often, employees have their hands in dozens of projects—each with different budgets, teams of employees and deadlines. The emerging discipline of program management gives professionals the knowledge and skills necessary to think big picture and understand the benefits of leveraging the interdependencies between projects.

What may surprise you about program management is that the vast majority of skills essential for success as a program manager are actually business skills.

Managing large, multifaceted initiatives requires nuances that go well beyond technical or hard skills into “softer” areas such as communication, critical thinking and the ability to work successfully with others.

Make sure your program management training develops these four key skill areas.

1. A head for business

Many of your organization's employees, particularly IT staff, weren't hired for their business savvy. Instead, they were hired for their specific skill in information technology. However, according to Gartner's 2005 report on the IT professional outlook, 60 per cent of IT employees will assume business-facing roles by 2010. And, as you've likely already seen, many of your non-technical staff will inevitably be moving into management roles sooner rather than later.

By helping your employees acquire a business mindset, they'll better understand how your organization and its competitors work and how individuals contribute to organizational success.

2. Communication

If knowledge is half the battle, communication may very well be the other half. Once your employees understand your business's objectives and begin to develop ideas for improvement, they must be able to communicate those objectives and ideas to stakeholders, co-workers and bosses. Often, these stakeholders are located across the country—or even the globe. If you've ever tried to present a business case to stakeholders from different countries and cultures, you know it isn't easy.

3. Critical thinking

A recent report from the U.S. Society of Human Resource Management—*Workplace Visions: Exploring the Future of Work*—surveyed corporate leaders on the skills they consider most important over the next five years and critical thinking/problem solving finished first, at 77.8 per cent.

These corporate leaders understand that global organizations are faced with complex challenges every day—most notably, change management initiatives. How employees handle these challenges is often the difference between program success and failure. By learning to think critically, your employees will be able to analyze challenges from every angle and understand how each potential solution affects the team and the organization.

4. Collaborating

Finally, to be successful, your employees must think outside their silos and work effectively with others. This is particularly essential in a global company where projects and programs aren't just cross-departmental—they're often cross-continental.

Business skills training will arm your employees with valuable tools and techniques for maximizing their work with teams, suppliers and business partners. **HR**

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