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A COMPLEX CHALLENGE

New data has identified key challenges to successful project management in the IT sector, suggesting that greater attention to skills assessment and development is needed

Managing complex projects is the most pressing issue for project managers in the information technology industry, with 56% of participants choosing this response, according to new data from ESI International.

The figures have been released from the company's 'Business Challenges and Hot Topics' survey, which covered various levels of government, as well as several other industries, including financial services, aerospace and defence, insurance, manufacturing, pharmaceutical and healthcare.

Shortfalls in programme management and business analysis skills highlight many of the survey respondents' concerns.

Among the overall findings to emerge are the following:

When managing projects, the most pressing issue is managing the most complex, with 44% of participants choosing this response. Close behind this come 'adapting to changing requirements' (42%) and 'developing

proper metrics to effectively track progress and outcomes' (41%).

When managing programmes or project portfolios, the most pressing issue, cited by 53% of participants, is responding to organisational and environmental changes that impact the programme. Next to this came 'prioritising projects within a programme or portfolio' (45%).

When managing business or project requirements, the most pressing issue (38%) is communicating effectively with team members and stakeholders. A similar number (36%) selected both 'developing and improving business analysis competencies' and 'integrating project management and business analysis roles/functions'.

"The survey findings are important for all organisations, because of the essential role projects play in driving organisations forward - from organisational change to new product development," says J. LeRoy Ward, ESI executive vice president.

"Good project management drives success and, very important at this economic juncture, helps organisations do more with less," .

"The saying 'knowing you have a problem is half the battle' comes to mind. The project manager and senior executive survey respondents know where the trouble spots lie. Now they need to accurately assess their people's skills and implement initiatives to close the gaps," he comments.

The survey also showed differences in project management challenges between the government and commercial sectors. Managing global projects or dealing with cultural issues was cited as a greater concern to commercial organisations (17%) than to government entities (5%).

Managing risk of high-profile projects is regarded as a pressing issue for 36% of government sector respondents, but only for 26% of commercial sector respondents.

When defining requirements, the implementation of a solution development methodology - or determining which one best fits the organisation - was cited as a more immediate issue to government sector respondents (33%) than it was to respondents from the commercial sector (22%).