

Complex Project Management  
Global Perspectives and  
the Strategic Agenda to 2025

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE TASK FORCE REPORT**



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# THE CHALLENGE OF COMPLEXITY



Many of the easy projects have already been done. We have learned from them, and we can now manage much more complicated tasks, using robust, tried and tested processes, methods and tools. When we know what we have to deal with, these tools work.

Unfortunately, the problems we increasingly face are beyond complicated – they have to be executed in an uncertain environment that is subject to uncontrollable external influences and continuous change, against an ill-defined and often mutually-incompatible stakeholder requirement. When we don't know with what we shall have to deal – in leading complex, rather than merely complicated projects - existing processes aren't enough. Doing things the way we have always done them will produce the same results we have always got - as we have

found all too often in one failed project after another.

Complex projects demand outcome-focused leadership that possesses a broad enough repertoire to face the unknown and deliver against a real-world need – which, irritatingly, may not actually be what we thought was wanted in the first place.

We must radically change our way of thinking about project delivery; and that demands leadership that is strong enough to think about leadership itself, has the courage to adopt innovative approaches, and possesses the tenacity to deliver no matter what.

The world's most forward-thinking organisations understand this, which is why a number of them have come together as partners in ICCPM, using it as the independent vehicle

for sharing experience and wisdom across market-sector and geographical boundaries. Senior representatives from over 35 public and private sector organisations, reinforced by contributions from subject matter experts from Australia, the UK, US and Canada constituted an ICCPM and Global Access Partners-facilitated task force to address the issue. They realised that it is collaboration, not competition, that will drive the research, innovation and change needed to move beyond the litany of stalled development, blown budgets and unfit-for-purpose deliverables.

The report - *“Complex Project Management: Global Perspectives and the Strategic Agenda to 2025”* - is the outcome of that collaboration.

The document set includes this executive summary, a comprehensive in-depth report and a compendium of working papers supporting both strategic and tactical recommendations for organisational approaches to complex project delivery:

- ▶ Recommendations for Policy – the strategic level - what needs to be debated, discussed and localised.
- ▶ Recommendations for Action – the tactical level - what can (and should be) done now to improve current practice.

These recommendations are positioned within six themes, as shown in Figure 1; they collectively inform the proposed research programme and action plan.

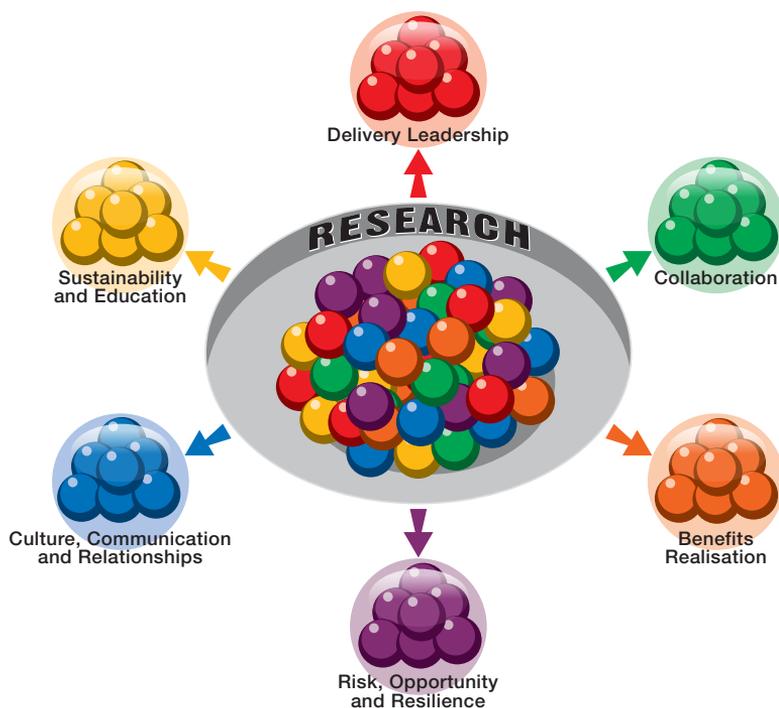


Figure 1: CPM Report Themes



# RECOMMENDATIONS

**DELIVERY LEADERSHIP – the ability to navigate through uncertainty and ambiguity to achieve the desired outcome.**

## Policy

- ▶ Maintain delivery leadership capability appropriate to the degree of project complexity.
- ▶ Operate to global CPM standards of good practice, methods and tools.

## Action

- ▶ Define, agree and initiate CPM delivery leader development as a project in itself with appropriately senior leadership.
- ▶ Implement continuous review of capability against project complexity.
- ▶ Implement continuous experiential learning.
- ▶ Assess current CPM process and capability against global CPM standards.
- ▶ Institutionalise a tailored set of global CPM standards supported by a system of contemporary periodic reviews and updates.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

**COLLABORATION – working as one team to a mutually agreed goal and equitable reward.**

## Policy

- ▶ Operate the entire supply chain as a single entity delivering against mutually agreed outcomes with equitable risk and reward sharing.

## Action

- ▶ Define, agree and institutionalise collaboration strategies across and between all stakeholder and supply chain groupings, recognising the degree of uncertainty inherent in complex projects and adjusting contractual vehicles accordingly.
- ▶ Review the appropriateness of procurement, supply chain management and contracting processes according to the degree of project complexity.

**BENEFITS REALISATION – understanding and delivering through-life product value.**

## Policy

- ▶ Ensure that investment and risk management processes balance short-term expenditure and risk, in the context of through-life benefit.

## Action

- ▶ Identify and institutionalise through-life product/ project benefit measures that are suitable for informing risk and investment management strategies appropriate to the degree of project complexity and deliverable operational life (including disposal).



# RECOMMENDATIONS

**RISK, OPPORTUNITY & RESILIENCE – taking good risk, seizing emergent opportunity, and successfully responding to the unexpected.**

## Policy

- ▶ Implement Risk and Opportunity management processes which are appropriate to the degree of project complexity and adaptable to changes in the external environment.

## Action

- ▶ Implement a complexity assessment process at the earliest possible lifecycle phase and review at subsequent phase boundaries.
- ▶ Implement continuous monitoring of both the development and future operational environments.
- ▶ Define, agree and institutionalise risk and opportunity management process that is tailorable to the degree of project complexity, accepting as axiomatic that the success of a risk averse approach will be inversely proportional to the degree of project complexity.
- ▶ Locate risk and opportunity management responsibility according to supply chain domain knowledge, experience and specialisations.
- ▶ Ensure consistency of risk management policy across the supply chain.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

**CULTURE, COMMUNICATION AND RELATIONSHIPS – maximising the effectiveness of the human asset by understanding and responding to human behavioural need.**

## **Policy**

- ▶ Address human behavioural aspects across all major stakeholders who are required both to adapt to changes in both project and future operational environments, and to share their experience, knowledge and wisdom.

## **Action**

- ▶ Accept and admit that cultures and behaviours in a global project environment will differ across regional and sector boundaries, and provide for this aspect in change and leadership programmes.
- ▶ Embed a culture in which people feel secure in the face of continuous change and high risk, allowing transparency, a willingness to share knowledge, and adaptability in dealing with ambiguity and uncertainty. Open, timely and truthful communication is key.
- ▶ Identify individual behavioural preference and align those preferences to the degree of project complexity.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

**SUSTAINABILITY AND EDUCATION – continuous learning, maintaining currency in leadership capability and knowledge transfer across generational boundaries in order to sustain through-life capability.**

## **Policy**

- ▶ Establish systems to manage the interconnectedness and interdependencies that affect project success and build in long-term sustainability.
- ▶ Offer specialist CPM Education programmes according to the degree of project complexity and required capability and ensure that knowledge, skill and wisdom, once captured, is preserved.

## **Action**

- ▶ Implement collaborative decision making and governance frameworks across the entire supply chain supported by common, accessible, communication mechanisms.
- ▶ Review structures and systems to ensure appropriate subsidiarity.
- ▶ Implement a Systems-based approach to CPM, providing the necessary education and training in CPM methods and tools appropriate to multiple levels of seniority.
- ▶ Implement experiential learning as a core activity.



# RESEARCH

## Policy

Establish and support a permanent, co-ordinated global specialist research agenda for CPM.

## Action

In the light of all the above, research activity must address both the evolution and enhancement of existing knowledge (addressing the known unknowns) and create new knowledge (addressing the unknown unknowns). Enabling action – needed immediately - is the establishment and global recognition of a central body to sponsor and lead prioritised research activity and support the application of such research findings into practice. On the basis of the breadth and constitution of its membership and work to date, we believe ICCPM is the natural location for this.

The research topics must address all six themes describe above; a suggested set of research questions are described in more detail in the main report.

Much debate and discussion has already taken place, both within the task force and across a wider network of experts, and this dialogue will (and must) continue as the research proceeds – the disciplines and issues of Complex Project Management are still at an early stage of development and understanding. But it is unacceptable for the project leadership profession to wait until the research results are complete and the talking all done.

Complex projects are pressing all around us, and we must act now to implement what we know so far. In addition to setting the research agenda, the recommendations in this report are intended as a stimulus and guide for such action, and on behalf of the whole CPM Task Force, we commend it to you.



Stephen Hayes MBE  
**Chairman CPM Task Force**



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