

FUTURE SKILLS NEEDS - What Role for Project Management Imperative?

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Ireland has a population of just over 4.2 million persons. During the period 2001-2006, the average annual employment growth was 3.2% and an estimated additional 300,000 jobs were created in the economy.

Following a strong economic performance in 2006, with GNP growth of 7.4% and employment growth of 4.4%, the economy is expected to revert to a more sustainable growth path.

The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs – a government established body - conducts research, hosts conferences and publishes reports on skills and occupational trends in Ireland. Part of its remit is to:

- Identify the skills required for Ireland to make the transition to a competitive, innovation-driven, knowledge-based, participative and inclusive economy by 2020;
- Provide projections of the labour force’s skills profile required to make the transition to such an economy and compare that profile to the profile which the current projected output will yield;
- Provide training and education objectives where gaps and deficiencies are evident between the desirable situation and the likely supply; and
- Examine the underpinning arguments for investment in skills development in Ireland to achieve the stated objectives of enterprise policy.

Ed Naughton, representing the Institute of Project Management of Ireland, attended a recent conference in Dublin **“Future Skills Needs - Comparing *International Perspectives*”**

Opening the conference, Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Micheál Martin, T.D. stated “the development of management skills is a key issue for Ireland, as in all countries, and SME’s are the key drivers of innovation and economic growth.”

Experts from the USA, UK and Ireland presented their domestic perspectives on future skills needs. A clear message was issued by these international skills experts regarding

the future of the Irish, UK and US economies, emphasising that future economic success and competitiveness is reliant upon raising skills levels throughout the workforce.

Dr. Ray Marshall, former Secretary of Labor under President Carter, stated that “all routine jobs in America are under threat as they may be replaced by machines or cheaper labour from low-cost debate was subsequently opened to the approximately 150 attendees, the author asked the following question:

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When presented in this manner there was unanimous agreement on its importance. However, whenever one reads any government sponsored reports on competitiveness or productivity, statements such as “Science, Engineering, ICT and R&D skills are an integral part of a knowledge based economy and their promotion remains important”.

Project management competency is rarely mentioned and never highlighted as a critical issue.

This suggests that the project management community at the highest level ie organizations like PMI and IPMA are not very successful at highlighting to the appropriate influencers, particularly government departments, the significant contribution of project management to national competitiveness.

Considering the impact that successful project management has on productivity, the discipline should get the recognition it deserves in helping to make organisations more innovative and successful. International evidence points to a strong link between business process innovation and productivity growth, which is delivered through project management. Joseph Juran the “Quality Guru” stated that “all improvements take place project by project, and in no other way.”

Globalisation requires a flexible workforce. A country such as Ireland, with a small open economy, must be able to respond rapidly to changes in the world economic and technological environment; only a well educated population is able to respond in this way.

World class skills, education and training in the discipline can provide Ireland with a unique competitive advantage which will allow us to remain ahead of the curve economically, while improving living standards in a participative and truly inclusive society.

In the years immediately ahead, labour productivity will be the key determinant of economic growth in Ireland, and increasing productivity will depend to a large extent on our maturity as a nation in the practice of project management. We cannot afford to ignore its real value.