



Where the US Federal Government leads others will have to follow

What's going on and why it matters internationally

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The trickle-down effect, as international companies participate in business opportunities with the US Government, has a considerable impact on project practice

The United States federal government spends more money annually than any other entity in the country. It's not uncommon to find US federal government projects of a size, scale and complexity undertaken by few others around the world. Policy aside, its actions are hugely influential, and the manner in which it conducts itself as a business, over time, tends to be adopted by others. This is true for many of the government's business actions, including project and programme management (PM).

Many of the world's largest companies who win US federal government contracts, and thus who work closely with government counterparts, tend, eventually, to adopt the government's PM tools, techniques and approaches.

As those practices bleed out to other parts – and global locations – of a company's operations, one can see the trail of influence left behind by working with such an influential organization. Thus programme management experts around the world would be smart to

check out what the federal government is doing in the PM arena to anticipate trends and prepare for the future.

Most noteworthy: workforce professionalisation

Although the US federal government influences several trends among the project and programme management community, there is one current initiative that undoubtedly has the largest impact. Currently, there is an enormous effort underway to professionalize the project management workforce.

In 2003, the US Services Acquisition Reform Act (SARA) expanded the federal government's definition of acquisition – government purchase of goods or services – to include activities performed by programme and project managers. As a result, the US Office of Federal Procurement Policy (OFPP) issued a 2005 policy letter that built on that new acquisition workforce definition and required the US Federal Acquisition Institute (FAI) to make recommendations

for a PM certification programme. Thus, the US FAI, in concert with 20, mostly civilian, US federal government agencies offering recommendations for a competency framework, announced the US Federal Acquisition Certification for Programme and Project Managers. Popularly referred to as **FAC-P/PM**, it provides details about what a project manager in the US federal government looks like. Then in 2007, OFPP issued a memo – 'The Federal Acquisition Certification for Program and Project Managers' – that established the certification programme's requirements.

In non-governmental terms, the FAC-P/PM is a policy initiative to improve project management within the US federal government ecosystem, specifically among the US federal government's civilian agencies.

The credential emphasises quintessential skills and competencies and it provides appropriate training and continuous learning requirements to adequately certify PMs for the tasks-at-hand.



The FAC-P/PM programme names three levels of project managers: entry level, mid level and senior level. Each level has identified associated competencies and includes other complementary certifications, such as the Project Management Professional (PMP), offered by the Project Management Institute (PMI). For 'major acquisitions or investments', it is mandatory for the PM to be certified in the FAC-P/PM at the senior level to run the projects.

A long history but troubled projects

Project management has been a part of the US federal government environment for some time. In fact, the US Department of Defense (DOD) has had its own training programme for almost two decades. So why is there now a push for a structured, public sector PM certification programme? Two words: troubled projects.

When the OFPP reviewed historical projects – particularly major IT systems implementations – it asserted that the civilian side of the US federal government needed to improve upon the training, education and professional experience of project managers to, in turn, advance the quality of projects and final outcomes.

According to the FAI, 'the quality and effectiveness of the federal acquisition process depends on the development of a capable and competent workforce.' With this structured initiative now well underway, it is delivering an influential message to the project management community-at-large: certify the PM to be certain the project is successful.

Other trends

While the FAC-P/PM is significant, it's certainly not the only action the US federal government is taking to improve project

management quality. Other key trends include:

- **Post-Project Measurement**

Increasingly, decision makers and PMs are more regularly analyzing projects upon completion. Questions are asked such as: Did we meet the objectives? To what extent did we realize the planned ROI? Could the project be called successful?

There will often exist a business case to conduct a given project. Once a project is complete, it is prudent to conduct a post-project review to determine if that business case was met. There is an enormous US federal government emphasis in this area today, one that has relevance across the globe and throughout the private and public sectors.

In the government, measuring ROI is less about revenue earned and more about dollars saved, productivity gained, or costs deferred.

The driving force behind analysis is certainly monetary, but it is measured here in a less traditional way. Moreover, in some US government civilian agency-based projects, ROI might be measured by 'convenience to the citizen', or other calculations of citizen satisfaction. Regardless of measurement form, the government is spending time and energy on the analysis of post-project results...a strong tenet of comprehensive programmes, regardless of sector or global location.

- **Discipline blending: PM and acquisition**

Today, the once omnipresent separation between project management and acquisition no longer exists. Those earning the FAC-P/PM, are primarily PMs who also execute major systems acquisitions. They are responsible for all lifecycle phases

of implementing large systems, which includes – but is not limited to – project management detail.

For large federal government initiatives, contractors are typically hired. This process of contract coordination is a huge and often complex initiative in and of itself. In the past, PMs went about their business while contractors went about theirs, sometimes crossing paths, but not consciously or in a coordinated manner. Now, PMs are trained to effectively run cross-functional teams with contract specialists, lawyers, technical specialists and multiple contractors.

In order to successfully accomplish large acquisition projects, functional Integrated Project Teams (IPT) are created, which typically include a range of professionals including programme managers, business analysts, acquisition specialists and others as required by the nature of the contract.

IPTs have proven to be an effective means of accomplishing US federal government projects because of the early blending of disciplines. While this practice isn't necessarily a new trend, it has recently adopted a new emphasis. Global PMs can learn from this trend by creating an IPT for all professionals who touch the project and making sure to do so quite early in the project life cycle.

- **Beyond the PMP**

For project managers working in the US federal government, possession of the PMP credential is equal to satisfying one required course of the US DOD's Defense Acquisition University's (DAU) curriculum. In other words, the PMP alone isn't enough. It's definitely respected and important, but it is also viewed as one in a series of stepping-stones to complete the required knowledge base, not the platform itself. The DAU – providing mandatory, assignment specific and continuing education courses for military and civilian personnel – has built out the competencies PMs need to be successful and the checklist is more comprehensive than just the PMP designation. While the PMP is critical, it is not the terminal credential.

This trend can be described as the US federal government's push to require both hard and soft skills of their programme and project managers; to 'round them out'. This trend is already being seen among many large global companies in the private sector as well. One of ESI International's IT clients has an internal programme that requires both the PMP credential as well as leadership training to qualify for particular job levels. The take-away for other global companies and PMs? The need for comprehensive skills... an element that creates sharp PMs who deliver successful projects.

● Visibility matters

Today more than ever, there is concern and awareness over the visibility of large US federal government programmes and the associated public judgment on their success, or failure. Highly scrutinized projects such as the US government's response to Hurricane Katrina, or the recent Gulf Coast oil spill come to mind as relevant examples.

Combined with the speed and nature of today's media landscape, the US federal government knows the impact of noticeable projects and acquisitions. The US Office of Management and Budget (OMB), through its Capital Planning and Investment Control (CPIC) Process, requires US federal government agencies to provide certain specific planning information about large projects.

The intent is improved and successful project execution. This example is leading US government federal agencies to make structured, conscious decisions about how to build reputable projects that will be surely analysed.

Such analysis starts internally. One example is the US Army and US Air Force Workforce Exchange Service, which recently launched a programme using a Business Analysis (BA) certification track to improve the quality of its acquisitions. In doing so, it recognized that large acquisitions need to better identify their requirements. It also learned that IPTs have room for improvement and now it is hiring professionals with more diverse and qualified backgrounds to fill gaps.

Available courses aimed toward BAs teach professionals – both public and private sector alike – how to translate requirements into understandable language for others on the IPT. Assimilation of this skill brings all the before mentioned trends full circle and is a critical asset in the effective communication of visible initiatives.

Adoption of Trends

With a European vantage point across the pond, it's easy to say, 'So what? So this is what the US federal government is doing. That doesn't mean these trends hold relevance for me. Does it?' I would argue that it does, due to the reasons I've cited here, but perhaps most simply by nature of the trickle-down effect.

For instance, many state and global companies participate in the business opportunities afforded by US federal government contracts. For example, consider the worldwide giant BAE Systems. When a company like BAE gets involved with an agency such as the US DOD, they need to align their PMs with the agency's – the client's – expectations. Behaviour and performance on one contract eventually find its way onto others, so PMs begin to adopt the US federal government's project management trends almost unwittingly.

Companies in the UK doing business with the US federal government will begin to see the effects of these trends and programmes over time, if they have not yet already.

Don't be surprised if the expectations of a more professionalized certified workforce –

demonstrated by requirements similar to the FAC-P/PM – are imposed upon your PMs very shortly. How will your team stack up? Study, plan and anticipate the adoption of the US federal government's project management trends and you will be suitably prepared.



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