

Project Delivery PREview

At Continuum Performance we are periodically called upon to review projects that are not meeting their delivery objectives and recommend improvements that might be made to improve upon project performance. These reviews are always done with an eye toward project delivery execution rather than as an audit of project management processes. As a result, much of the focus is on production management and the interaction of project management techniques with the day-to-day execution of work. By necessity this means that our reviews are based on where the project is at currently and where the opportunities lie to make it conform to a desired future state (e.g., time, cost, delivery certainty, etc). Historical information is used as a basis for improvement rather than a point of criticism. Unfortunately, these reviews were all undertaken after delivery outcomes had been significantly compromised. Although significant improvements to delivery performance were achieved on a number of projects, much of the damage had been done. In other words, by waiting until projects are on fire to take effective action means that much will already be burned. It is out of a desire to move upstram and help projects achieve success that the Project Delivery PREview program was developed.

What We've Learned...

“By waiting until projects are on fire to take effective action means that much will already be burned.”

In project delivery reviews we have performed and the improvements that have resulted from them have created a number of key learnings:

- 1. Rigorous management of work execution always improves delivery results – even if done badly.** We have consistently seen that where the day-to-day execution of work is managed in way that ensures all of the tasks required to do the work are identified and properly sequenced, constraints to successfully completing tasks are removed prior to starting and work is prioritised based on a delivery strategy, then delivery results are measurably improved. This has been true even in cases where the rigour and discipline in applying these management processes was suboptimal.
- 2. The key to successfully implementing production management improvements is effective leadership.** In all cases, the difference between teams that have successfully taken on board recommendations to improve the management of production and those that have not is the presence of effective leadership. Although it is desirable for this leadership to come from the project’s management, there are times where it has come from within the team.

“Many of the things that adversely affect delivery performance are artefacts of traditional project controls approaches.”

- 3. Many of the things that adversely affect delivery performance are artefacts of traditional project controls approaches.** The need to demonstrate progress (or earned value) drives the propensity to start a great deal of work rather than complete work in a strategic sequence. Also, as CPM scheduling methodologies generally assume unlimited resources and unconstrained access we tend to use capacity as the main lever to address performance issues – the only certainty around this remedial approach is that ensures that costs will go up. Finally, the size and scale completions activities are a direct reflection of the delivery team’s ability to complete their work – often this is a direct consequence of the two points above.
- 4. Most importantly, had a few delivery management techniques been put in place at the start, these projects would not have been nearly so troubled.** In nearly every case, the performance issues with the projects we have reviewed were foreseeable and could have been addressed at outset through a production management focus with minimal investment of time and money. Interestingly, the initial remediation measures that the teams out in place for most of these projects actually made matters worse.

The Program

The Project Delivery PREview program is an on-site project delivery review that aimed at the early stages of project to ensure that effective project delivery processes are put in place from the outset. The approach is one of facilitation and coaching rather than audit and report – the goal is to conduct an interactive review with the project team such that observations and recommendations are discussed and passed on for them to consider/ action progressively. Reporting should largely consist of the things that the team is putting in place as a result of the review rather than a laundry list of items that need to be fixed.

The Project Delivery PREview is focused on the execution of the work in a manner that efficiently, effectively delivers the project objectives for both the owner and the delivery organisation(s). It is not intended as a traditional project management review with a heavy focus on project controls processes.

Who is it for?

The program is applicable to any design and construction or construction-only project where certainty and/or efficiency of delivery against project outcomes is of paramount importance or is perceived to be a greater than normal risk.

When should it be done?

The program is design to be initiated as early as possible in the delivery phase of the project. If it is a design and construction project then it should be done early in the design phase and certainly before entering detailed design. If it is a construction-only project then it should be undertaken as the team is mobilising. Although this timing is meant to maximise the value added to delivery of the project, experience has shown that potential improvements can be realised at any stage of project development.

How is the PREview structured?

The PREview comprises the following stages:

Project background review and familiarisation.

This consists of reviewing some basic project background documentation and conducting teleconference interviews with key project personnel. This not only allows us to gather basic background information about the project and become familiar with the current status of project development, it also allows us to set the stage for the onsite process so that we efficiently use people's time and create a framework for what we are trying to accomplish.

Onsite review.

The primary bases for this review are observation of team activities, analysis of project delivery processes and documentation, interviews with a cross-section of project team members and facilitated sessions where the team outline their proposed approach to managing work execution. Although various forms of documentation are reviewed for their developmental process, detail and completeness, they are not subjected to detailed audits for voracity and quality (e.g., arithmetic accuracy, logic links, etc). For the typical small-to-medium size project, 3 to 4 days of review in the project office(s) is required. Every effort is made to conclude the onsite visit with a discussion of the initial findings and recommendations with the project delivery leadership.

Report of findings and recommendations.

After concluding the onsite review, the findings, actions put in place during the review and recommended follow-up activities will be documented in a report for both the project team and project preview sponsor. It is highly desirable for this findings and recommendations report to be accompanied by a presentation – either via teleconference or in person.

Recommendations follow-up and mentoring.

As the ultimate goal of this program is to take actions that lead to project delivery success, it includes three monthly follow-up sessions via a mentoring webinar. It's an opportunity to connect once a month to ask questions, share challenges and get conceptual blocks removed. The mentoring webinars help to maintain clarity, boost motivation and remind the project team to stay focused on positively impacting the production environment.

Given the framework outlined above, the approach that is used to undertake this review includes assessment of a range of key questions in the following critical areas of delivery performance.

- **Delivery Strategy.** Is there broad-based understanding and alignment on how the project is to be delivered to meet the overall objectives?
- **Design Optimisation.** Is it a design that the team is happy to build, procure and commission?
- **Work Execution Planning and Control.** Are day-to-day activities in service of your strategy and how will you ensure their reliable execution?
- **Supply Chain Optimisation.** Is there a clear procurement strategy and defined supply chain management processes in place?
- **Integration of Project Controls with Work Execution.** How is status and forecasting information to be made an accurate reflection of the work that has been completed and is yet to be done?
- **Risk Management.** Do the team understand their delivery risks and are there measures in place to proactively transform risks into defined mitigation activities?
- **Continuous Improvement.** Are there structured processes in place to identify and action opportunities for delivery performance improvement?
- **Team Effectiveness.** Is the team organised and operating in a manner that will foster collaboration and efficiency?
- **Operational Efficiency.** What is the observed efficiency and effectiveness of the team's delivery performance?

About Us...



Jeff Schwisow is a project delivery professional with nearly 30 years of project management experience. As a “student of the project management game,” he rigorously studied and applied traditional project management practices and over that period, he learned those practices were not enough to ensure success. He saw those approaches were focusing on what was “happening in the coaches box and on the scoreboard” but there wasn’t enough attention on “how the game was being played on the field”...and it is on the field where games are won and lost.

It was in further developing his “principles of exceptional performance” and his passion for helping teams deliver truly exceptional outcomes that led Jeff to found Continuum Performance in 2010.

We are focused on increasing returns on capital investment through more efficient, effective project delivery performance. The thing that sets the Continuum Performance programs and services apart is that we bring an extensive capital project management background together with a highly developed understanding of production management and industrial engineering. This includes not only a theoretical understanding, but also firsthand experience in how this theory impacts on capital project performance.

To Learn More...

For more information about the Project Delivery PREview program or any of Continuum Performance’s programs and services, contact us at info@continuumperformance.com.au or +61 414 829 070.