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Project **Health** Check

By Terry Deacon*



Who is accountable for health and safety on projects? Most people would say it's the project manager. Is there a difference between health and safety? Yes there is, but they are closely related.

Health is influenced by our genes, diet, exercise, mental attitude, stress and lifestyle, all of which determine our physical and mental well being. The Oxford Dictionary defines health as the state of being well and free from illness.

The project manager can have some influence on health aspects of other team members, perhaps pertaining to mental attitude and stress. I was interested to read about a South African company called *Wellness Project Management*. They assist organizations to manage the total cost of ill health as well as enhancing the "wellness" of their employees and thus their productivity and competitive advantage. Of course, the project manager must also look after the health of the project in terms of its ability to achieve the objectives. A regular health check in the form of a project review meeting between the project manager, sponsor and key stakeholders is advisable.

Safety is defined as freedom from risk or danger. Clearly, the project manager has a major role to play in this regard. He/she cannot guarantee that the project will be risk free, but should ensure that safety risks are reduced to acceptable levels through applying a risk management process.

Are project managers paying enough attention to safety and risk aspects? Generally, I'd say no. Overall project risk management does not receive the attention it should, so the risks pertaining to health and safety certainly do not. Antonie de Klerk has written an excellent series of practical articles on risk for ProjectPro magazine, which is a useful guide to mitigating your exposure to threats... and helping you to exploit any opportunities.

ProjectPro has taken the matter of health and safety seriously in that we have published seven articles on the subject over the past two years. Perusing three overseas PM magazines surprisingly produced only one article on the subject.

A letter to the editor appearing in ProjectPro magazine poses the question, "Is health and safety included in the criteria used to evaluate projects competing for the Project Management Excellence (PME) Award?" The question is relevant as people are the most important resource used on projects.

The short answer is – not specifically. The PME Award criteria are based on the Project Management Institute's internationally recognised Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK™) 1996. There is no specific section of the PMBOK that deals with health and safety matters, however, it is mentioned briefly under Chapter 9:

Project Human Resource Management. The adjudication criteria do thus not have specific points allocated to health and safety. However, a submission would score significant points if it describes how the successful management of health and safety contributed towards developing and motivating the project team, meeting the client and regulatory requirements, managing risks and achieving project objectives. A shining example is the 2001 winner of the Project Management Excellence (PME) Award, the Mozal Smelter Project in Mozambique. The project management was committed to a continuous improvement in achieving the highest standards of Occupational Health and Safety performance during the construction period. A health programme was launched at its inception focusing on occupational injuries, malaria prevention and HIV/Aids awareness. ([Read the full story in the Project Parade section of our website.](#))

The Association of Project Management's Body of Knowledge (based in the UK) does include *Safety*. It is defined as, "*Determining standards and methods that minimise to a level considered acceptable by the lay public, the legal system, the operators and others, the likelihood of accident or damage to people or equipment. Ensuring that these standards are respected in operation, and reviewing them to ensure their continued validity.*"

Even their definition of project management includes a mention of safety, "*Project management is the planning, organizing, monitoring, and controlling of all aspects of a project and the motivation of all involved to achieve the project objectives safely and within agreed time, cost and performance criteria.*"

The recent collapse of a tunnel during construction at Heathrow, London has triggered a "Health Warning" being published in the New Civil Engineer magazine. It was alleged that the use of the NEC (New Engineering Contract) form of contract was a contributory factor leading to the disaster. South African experts on contract matters, Philip Loots and Andrew Baird, express their divergent views on the NEC "Health Warning" in the July 1999 issue (Vol 9 No 4) of ProjectPro magazine.

Herbert Spencer, an English philosopher, summed up the importance of both personal and project health when he wrote, "*The preservation of health is a duty. Few seem conscious that there is such a thing as physical morality.*" Ralph Waldo Emerson, USA philosopher, emphasized the need to get the job done quickly and safely when he said, "*In skating over thin ice, our safety is in our speed.*"

Let's turn our visions into reality speedily, safely and healthily.

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