

APMG EVALUATION SERVICE FOR PROJECT MANAGEMENT PRODUCTS**SILVER REPORT**

Number 8

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This report covers the Silver Stage assessment of Pcubed DeliveryHub, an application from Programme Planning Professionals Ltd. (trading as Pcubed), that I conducted on Tuesday, 15 December 2009

Pcubed is a programme management consultancy and the Pcubed DeliveryHub, an enhancement of the Microsoft EPM suite, is their own toolkit which they promote as part of their overall service package, working with clients to apply skills transfer and improve their ability. Consequently, Pcubed expects to install this toolkit as part of their wider 'building delivery capability' process which involves their consultancy services. They would, however, supply the toolkit without the consultancy services if asked to do so.

Pcubed DeliveryHub can be installed on a client's own platform but Pcubed could also supply it on a software-as-a-service basis, hosting it for a client if asked to do so. Pcubed assure me that their system will work with MS Project 2010. They inform me, however, that it is MS Project independent and could be made to work with other scheduling.

In operation, it imports data from MS Project Server, SharePoint and Portfolio Server. It can also import information from other systems such as financial information from SAP, data from external HR system and from Excel, provided that the data is correctly structured.

Upon logging in to the system, you see a home screen showing details of all the projects that you have the security clearance to view. On the left is a navigation toolbar and a set of reminders fills the main part of the screen.

Moving to the 'Project Centre', you can see an overview of your programme with traffic light indicators signalling the health of individual projects. The data in this overview can be drilled down to task level.

When a new project plan is created, a SharePoint project site (which can be templated to assure standardisation) is automatically set up. On opening such a site, you see a set of project health indicators and lists of documents, risks and issues. These lists are configurable.

The logs included in the project site include risks, issues, a change register, financial benefits and lessons learned. Data from these configurable logs can be output as separate reports, or incorporated into a single project report

Budgeted costs for enterprise and programme levels can be set and these can be compared with actuals coming up from MS Project. If no costs have been entered into MS Project, accommodation for them can be provided in DeliveryHub.

A resource management system is built in to the system. This can be used to replace or complement MS Project's own system. If resources are allocated in MS Project, this information is copied across.

One of DeliveryHub's principal features is its built-in project lifecycle system. The out-of-the-box lifecycle provided merges PRINCE2® and OGC Best Practice stages and guidelines and Pcubed's Best Practices are also incorporated. These are tailorable to the clients' requirements and the tool can also accommodate clients' own lifecycles. The process is a straight-line process and circular iterations are not catered for.

Ready-made Best Practice and PRINCE2 help and guidance is included.

At each level in the lifecycle there is a summary of the actions and requirements at that stage in the form of a to-do list. If an activity on this list involves a document, the activity can be linked to the completed document. Each document template is separate so completion of one part of a document will not automatically complete part of another.

Pcubed normally includes all of their document templates, held in a document library within the system. Their client then decides which ones to use, modify, etc. This includes full sets of PRINCE2 and Best Practice templates.

The system can be set up so that on creation of a new project, a predefined set of template documents is copied for use in that project. However, the full set of templates can be made available for use if required.

Although the system is very configurable, there's no configuration help built in. Documentary help is normally provided as part of the system set-up process.

Version control and quality review of project documentation can be managed. A workflow can be connected to a document so that it can be sent to a standard list of people to see or review. The workflow can be set up manually or can be attached to the document as an attribute to be initiated automatically and tracked. A copy of the document itself, or a link to a central copy, may be sent. Comments and documentary edits may then be managed.

An alert can also be attached to a document so that someone can be advised if there is any activity on it. Workflows and alerts can also be attached to risks, issues and changes.

As well as a project site, it is also the possibility to display a programme site using the same approach. Programme risks and issues can be recorded or project risks and issues can be brought into this place and prioritised. Programme documents for all projects within the programme can also be displayed and reviewed here.

Reports can be output in almost any format required and can be automated to be produced on a regular basis or output on an ad hoc basis. The standard selection of out-of-the box reports, including exception reports, trend and forecast reports, can be tailored for clients and Pcubed can train clients to write their own reports. Drill down screen reports can be produced.

A RAG programme/project dashboard can be displayed. Some of the indicators are automatically based on measured activities and some are subjective - for completion by the project managers. Arrows against each indicator indicate the trend of that measurement.

A comprehensive set of tabular and graphic trend and performance reports is available. A 'Baseball Bat' report shows areas in projects where necessary actions don't appear to have been taken.

The administration function is, as far as possible, all drag and drop and menu driven and no coding is required. About two days training is normally given, covering the configuration of MS Project and DeliveryHub environments, of which about a half to one day is devoted to DeliveryHub.

I examined Pcubed's Web site (www.pcubed.com) and Pcubed also supplied me with copies of their other publicity material featuring this product. This comprised some brochures and a PowerPoint presentation. This presentation, which can be tailored for specific clients, was viewed in the form in which it is delivered to a typical client.

I examined this material to establish that Pcubed had made no unsubstantiated claims for their product. I found that the PowerPoint presentation included the claim that the DeliveryHub enhancement to Microsoft's EPM Suite considerably improved its Gartner 'Magic Quadrant 2009' rating. However, as this claim has not been ratified by Gartner, I consider that this claim could mislead potential customers. Pcubed has now removed the claim from their presentation and I do not think that any further action on this point is required. No other specific claims of a misleading nature had been made and I found that the product had been presented, for the most part, in a professional manner. However, in several of the pieces of publicity material examined, variations of the words 'quick' and 'easy' have been used to describe product attributes. These words are subjective and the impression they convey is not sustainable in all circumstances for all users and potential users.

The use of these words is frequently encountered in the project management software industry and is commonly taken as little more than advertising puff. In the circumstances, although I would prefer that these claims were not made, I don't expect that anyone will be misled by them. I therefore propose that no further action is required in these instances.

The document 'Pcubed DeliveryHub' quotes, under the heading of 'Customer Results' three quotations from customers about the excellent results they have achieved using this product. These comments have been quoted, by Pcubed, in all good faith. However, despite considerable efforts to contact the customers concerned in order to verify these statements, I was unable to obtain such verification. The applicant has therefore agreed to either remove these quotations from the document, or will withdraw the entire document.

Pcubed has indicated that, in their opinion, the design and use of this product falls within the field of guidance offered by the OGC's MSP® and Best Practice documentation covering both programme and project management and that their product complies with this guidance in all respects. I confirm that this is the case.

Pcubed also states that their tool is fully PRINCE2 compliant and I also confirm that this is so.

Consequently, I recommend that Pcubed DeliveryHub be given the Silver Award and suggest that this assessment should now proceed to the Gold Stage. I suggest that Programme Planning Professionals Ltd. be invited to supply details of up to two clients who have been using this application during the course of their business for a sufficient period to become well versed in the way it works. My intention is to interview the people who use this software and discover whether they are of the opinion that it works as it should.

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