

Cabinet Office & Saïd Business School University of Oxford & Deloitte

Major projects leadership academy

An innovative programme is allowing major UK government projects to deliver on time and budget

The Situation

Government Major Projects in the UK have a scale, complexity and ambition unmatched in the private sector and must be run effectively in order to boost the UK's international standing, deliver the government's reform programme, and meet taxpayer expectations of prudence and efficiency.

However, despite their critical nature, only around a third of Major Projects have historically been delivered on time and to budget. With an annual spend on Major Projects of £400 billion; slight cost over-runs can have enormous knock-on impact. Furthermore, extensive use of consultants in the leadership of Major Projects has, in the past, meant that expert capability built up through the delivery of these projects remained within the private sector.

The Major Projects Authority (MPA) was tasked with tackling these pressing issues and responded by creating the Major Projects Leadership Academy (MPLA) in partnership with the Saïd Business School, University of Oxford, and consultants Deloitte.



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The Programme

The programme begins with a bespoke psychometric evaluation and 360-degree feedback process to identify and understand each participant's individual strengths and weaknesses and to establish a development plan to show how focus and intensity can be sustained over a project lifecycle.

MPLA participants then undertake three intensive residential modules at Saïd, interspersed with preparation, assignments, master-classes and a review of a Major Project they are leading.

Senior Responsible Officers (SROs) and Project Directors are tutored to operate as chief executives of temporary organisations formed specifically to run a project rather than simply acting as large-scale project managers.

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Enhancing these sessions was the requirement that MPLA participants simultaneously work on Major Projects. This allowed the immediate practical application of learning from modules and the high-impact master-classes and subsequently to bring the challenges they faced back into the programme.

This mutual sharing of challenges bonded participants through the programme's "action-learning sets", building networks of common experiences and skills across departments.



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The Results

Savings of £147 million have been seen so far and the MPLA will continue to contribute to this figure as more managers complete the programme.

The MPLA provides its graduates with the confidence to assume authority, accountability and stewardship over the implementation of government policy. Its success has provided a model for further professional capability building across government, with the tier below Project Directors now being considered for a revised format of the programme to help address their developmental needs.

The Future

Whereas two years ago only 30% of Major Projects were expected to deliver on time and on budget, as a result of the MPLA an 85% success rate is now realistic.

The MPLA enables project leaders to apply the right skills, experience and review processes to be able to act decisively when intervention is needed, and further allows the UK Government to build the necessary professional capability to successfully lead its portfolio of Major Projects.



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