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Transpower surges ahead with PMI's standards and credentials

Newtown Square, Pa., 22 June 2010 — New Zealand's largest electricity provider, Transpower, has improved its ability to manage project information and keep projects on track by certifying its project managers through the Project Management Institute (PMI).

Transpower is a State-Owned Enterprise operating New Zealand's high-voltage electricity transmission grid, which provides bulk electricity to towns, cities and major industries across the country. Typical projects Transpower works on includes large, high voltage electrical capital construction projects, which include elements of civil, mechanical and technology works.

Transpower recently undertook a significant switching project which was completed almost 12 months early and delivered under budget.

"The project was a major switching station south of Auckland," says Mark McKenzie, Director, Capital Works Programme, Grid Projects, Transpower New Zealand Limited. "We need project management expertise, in the form of credentialed project managers, to deliver value for money to the public on projects like this, and the earlier we can deliver them, the cheaper they are."

McKenzie currently has 107 projects under his management. His team includes six program managers and 26 project managers. Transpower has had 27 of its project and program managers gain PMI's Project Management Professional (PMP®) certification since it began working with the organisation in 2008; six more of the company's project managers are due to complete the certification this year.

"When I joined Transpower in 2007 I had a strong desire for my project teams to get PMI certifications, not only so we could complete our day-to-day work more effectively, but also so they would have a qualification that was transferable and recognised on a global scale," says McKenzie.

In certifying its project managers with PMI credentials, Transpower wanted to increase its understanding of project management best-practices and technology, and be able to deliver consistently across its portfolio of projects.

McKenzie describes the impact PMI certification has had within Transpower: "About two and a half years ago Transpower progressed from maintaining the network to building an enhanced network and we had to ask ourselves: 'How are we going to do this?' Senior management and the CEO were very supportive of our decision to certify our project managers through PMI and the role of executive sponsorship was crucial to our project plans and completion.

“External stakeholders have also been particularly complimentary about the level of professionalism of our project managers and our contractors are even now asking us to make our training program available to them.”

McKenzie says there is a synergy between PMI and Transpower. Transpower’s project management systems were already based on PMI’s *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide)* - Fourth Edition, so it was a natural choice for the company’s certification program.

“When the initial decision was being made we did an audit of our staff too see where the shortfalls were,” says McKenzie. “Several of my staff already had a PMI certification and, after tendering two or three service providers, we felt the *PMBOK® Guide* based program was more applicable to our needs as it is more aligned to construction activity.”

Transpower has found the risk management framework and common language approach of the PMI standards the most useful. McKenzie says there are currently 1,387 risk items within the company’s project portfolio. This is a considerable amount, however the skills Transpower’s project managers have acquired enable them to look at the hierarchy of those risks and make sure they are addressing the right ones.

Transpower’s staff has also found the study groups PMI New Zealand chapter to be of value, and the company encourages its project managers to attend these groups when studying for their certifications.

“I also like the way PMI encourages businesses to continue learning,” says McKenzie. “We have since prepared our own ‘Lessons Learned’ framework which has accentuated the knowledge we can bring to the profession..”

“PMI’s presence in our region can only serve to help the project management industry. A local office makes it easier for organisations to understand the value PMI can bring, not only to projects and project managers, but also to the bottom line.”

Transpower also benefits from the global nature of PMI’s standards and qualifications, which mean that staff can acquire skills to help develop their careers.

“Giving staff the opportunity to obtain skills that will serve them well into the future not only makes Transpower an attractive employer but also bolsters its in house skills,” says Anwar Benjamin, head of PMI’s Australasian office. “It is also important to understand the needs of different departments and offices within an organisation, which complement the value derived from an effective internal project management strategy and ensures the benefits of project management cascade across the organisation.”

Another benefit of the PMI standards McKenzie praises is the ability to improve communication and visibility of all projects throughout the organisation and to wider stakeholders. McKenzie says the consistency of approach ensures Transpower’s executives are kept abreast of any major risks and the common language and process has made it possible for him to report on successes and issues.

McKenzie is also able to prove the results of investing in project management standards on a monthly basis when presenting to Transpower’s board.

“We have seen the results,” he says. “I have a monthly report that I present to the board that shows a trend line on the success of our projects. As more people get certified we can see visible improvements.”

About Project Management Institute (PMI)

The world's leading professional membership organization for project managers, PMI shares knowledge with more than one half million members and credential holders in over 180 countries. Since 1969, PMI has impacted more than one million practitioners, businesses, governments, students and training organizations. Today, PMI's products and services range from world-class standards for project, program and portfolio management to five professional credentials, including the gold standard Project Management Professional (PMP)[®]. PMI's exclusive Global Corporate Council and European Corporate Networking Group engage large multinationals and government organizations in endorsing the value of project management. The only project management association with an established academic research program, PMI has invested more than US\$14 million in support of dozens of research projects since 1997. Learn more at PMI.org.

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