

# ACCREDITATION

## CASE STUDY



### Introduction

The Clarkson Alliance (TCA) is a construction project management consultancy. It manages capital investment projects in the specialist sectors of health and leisure, education, heritage, housing and industrial.

The company provides an integrated project management service – including cost management – and its success is founded on the ability to mitigate risk, maximise opportunity and work collaboratively with clients and supply chain to deliver outcomes on time and within budget.

The company believes that project management is a simple two-step process:

- defining the benefits that the facility should deliver (the purpose of the project)

- managing risks to ensure benefits are delivered

TCA was founded 10 years ago by Graham Clarkson, who recognised that in order to stand out in a competitive market, a different approach was needed to project management.

The philosophy underpinning TCA is change through innovation and it has adopted a unique approach to its business by working collaboratively with customers, suppliers and partners to bring about continuous improvement on the outcome of projects. It has also introduced a High Performing Teams initiative of which Corporate Accreditation by APM is an integral part.



## Leading by example

As the owner and manager of the business, Graham Clarkson is proactively involved in championing the adoption of truly professional project management both within TCA and in the wider project management community.

Through his commitment to effective project management the company only employs professionally qualified project managers who subscribe to and maintain the standards, ethics and professionalism of their individual professional institutions.

TCA adopted the APM Body of Knowledge as a core reference in its project management activities and all project managers must be APM, MRICS or MCIQB qualified.

"When I conduct our employee performance reviews and somebody recognises the need to build knowledge in a certain subject, the reference point we use is the APM

Body of Knowledge. It's a perfect summary of best practice and a reference for other publications on that subject too. I see it as the great and the good of project management," said Graham.

"Julie Warriner, Principal Risk and Value Manager at Network Rail, wrote a section of the book on value management and I was inspired enough to invite her to run a workshop here for the staff on the subject. I believe that if you are going to learn about value management, this is the Body of Knowledge you should do it by."

## Focus on development

TCA strongly believes that it is people who deliver projects, not just processes and contracts. The focus on staff development is a critical component in its continuing success, with employee performance reviews carried out every six months and regular on-the-job coaching.

Employee performance reviews (EPRs) are designed to identify the career aspirations of individuals and align these with the strategic direction of the organisation.

To help achieve this, the company has adopted APM's Competence Framework and selected 35 of the 47 competencies. These include seven behavioural competencies and seven contextual competencies to identify knowledge, experience and development needs. Personal development plans are then created with a view to helping employees achieve their goals in line with the business environment.

Every six months employees assess their own knowledge and experience against each of the 35 competencies and then review or update their personal development plans accordingly. Where formal training is identified, the outcomes of EPRs are shared with an APM accredited training provider who can then advise, create and deliver training material, courses and workshops that meet the needs of each individual. Most recently Parallel Projects ran a workshop at TCA on the areas of conflict and value management.

In addition to this and as part of its High Performing Teams initiative, the organisation has engaged with Brenda Hales of Montydog Consulting to help integrate the fundamentals of the programme into the everyday working environment.

Using the principles of neuroscience, the programme focuses on human behaviour when people are assembled into a team, sometimes halfway through a project (which can lead to threat of status and other issues) and establishes some common values and principles.

Brenda helped the team agree key values and principles by which they will abide when working with different stakeholders. The ultimate goal is for TCA's project managers to achieve a 'leader' rather than 'manager' status within a project. The results are directly passed on to customers because individuals feel their contribution matters and are motivated to willingly offer discretionary effort.

"In order to succeed sustainably in the future, I believe the secret lies in developing project leaders rather than project managers," said Graham.

"We are increasingly seeing the adoption of tools like building information modelling in the industry which are automatically tightening up the construction process and mitigating risk. By focusing on the human element and developing a strong leadership dynamic, we will address the people risk whilst keeping teams motivated and empowered to achieve their best."

All employees have a training log stored in the quality management system database, which helps them log and assess any training they have received. They are required to input data such as development objectives, subject and method of training as well as rating its perceived effectiveness. This information helps the organisation assess the amount of time dedicated to training and which training is deemed relevant and of an acceptable standard.

Additionally, all employees log and assess external suppliers on the company's supplier database. Training companies are included within this scope and ratings are given along with comments on whether they should be used again.

TCA believes it is imperative that employees are appropriately qualified and experienced to provide advice, guidance and support in the management of its client

projects. This starts at the top with Graham, who has an MBA in Project Management and is qualified into the RICS through the RICS's Project Management pathway.

"We believe our clients should expect that the advice, support and management of their projects is backed up by the appropriate qualification," he said "It's vital that the experience of the project manager in delivering similar projects can ensure risks are eliminated or significantly reduced and expected outcomes are achieved."

Each employee is obliged to maintain their own Continuing Professional Development (CPD) records, not only as a member of their own professional institute but also as an employee of TCA. CPD records are reviewed at each employee's six monthly EPR.

The CPD programme is broken down into four steps:

#### **Step 1 – Appraisal**

#### **Step 2 – Planning**

#### **Step 3 – Actions taken**

#### **Step 4 – Results and reflection**

When an employee encounters an unusual situation, problem or opportunity they are encouraged to share this with Graham and have open discussions on how to solve the problem or harness the opportunity. Together they look



|| I am very impressed with the way The Clarkson Alliance is applying the people principles of high performing teams to its projects. Their focus is both refreshing and in my experience, rare. I have no doubt they, and their customers, will continue to benefit hugely from their people focused approach. "

**Brenda Hales**, Montydog Consulting

at possible solutions and 'what if' scenarios drawing on Graham's own experience. This approach helps stimulate analysis and ownership, promoting best practice for practical solutions as well as individual development.

"The CPD programme empowers individuals to achieve and maintain the highest levels of professionalism. Instead of prescribing outcomes to situations, I strongly believe that by giving people the time to analyse all the influencing factors and discuss potential scenarios, a more effective solution is reached. This in turn has directly and positively influenced the quality of the work we are delivering and the efficiency of projects."

## Client testimonial

"TCA understands our business, understands the objectives and what we are trying to achieve and deliver, from the business perspective, rather than from a simple building or construction perspective, which is unique from our experience.

They are approachable and collaborative. Everyone we have met and had involvement with from TCA has immersed themselves in the projects with real enthusiasm and interest. It feels like it is more than just going through the motions and doing the job. It feels as though they really take ownership.

Because of the nature of the service we are operating – the buildings belong to the local authority and the project is financed by them – it is important to bring them along with us on the journey and the TCA project teams have been very effective at presenting a professional, credible position to make this a relatively easy process.

I really like their Client Review process. They make it very easy to have an open, honest discussion. We have subsequently used this to review and improve aspects of the project. It is much more than paying lip service or ticking a box and has tangible outcomes."

**Ivan Horsfall-Turner**,  
Managing Director, Freedom Leisure



## Personal story

Derryn Cope is a project leader with The Clarkson Alliance and has achieved APM Registered Project Professional status.

"Our Professional Development Programme is broad and forward-looking and in some areas particularly innovative, for example our work with the High Performing Teams initiative.

I think it's been incredibly useful, particularly for me coming from a strong process background. It focuses on the people management side, something which I've really benefited from and learnt new skills.

This is reflected in the fact that as an organisation we focus on how we do things as well as what we do. It makes all of us in the business think about the 'how'. It is very people focused and encourages a working environment that is positive and constructive.

I think the company looks at the future challenges that the industry is likely to face and helps our stakeholders to consider and prepare for them. We're at the leading edge of project management. We understand the importance of a fundamental process balanced with the courage to innovate and work differently.

The programme has encouraged me to measure my own development. As a result I applied for APM's Registered Project Professional in 2012 which expanded my knowledge and abilities, I was really pleased to achieve it in July 2012."

## Association for Project Management and The Clarkson Alliance

The Clarkson Alliance is a corporate member of APM and has fully adopted APM's five dimensions of professionalism under the direction of managing director, Graham Clarkson, who has an MBA in Project Management gained from Henley Management College under course tutor Professor Rodney Turner, an Honorary Fellow and vice president of APM.

The company has adopted the *APM Body of Knowledge* and Competence Framework to map and develop training and skills for project managers and all have been issued with a copy of the *APM Body of Knowledge*.

It is a mandatory requirement of The Clarkson Alliance that all project management staff become members of APM.

|| As an SME organisation, APM accreditation gives us the endorsement and credibility of an independent assessment of our project management development programme. It's good to pioneer a strategy of differentiation but it's imperative that there is no compromise on quality, standards and professionalism. With APM recognition we know that whilst we are innovating, the core of what we do rests within an approved standard – the *APM Body of Knowledge*."

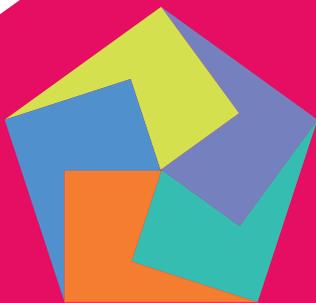
**Graham Clarkson,**  
Managing Director, The Clarkson Alliance



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### **FIVE**Dimensions of Professionalism

#### **APM Corporate Accreditation**

APM Corporate Accreditation will help you stand out as an exemplar in the development of project management professionals. It provides assurances to your customers and suppliers and allows you to attract and retain the best project management talent in the country.

APM Corporate Accreditation recognises the commitment of organisations and professional development services to the defined APM Five Dimensions of Professionalism, each of which is supported by an APM standard:

#### **Breadth**

The APM Body of Knowledge defines the knowledge needed to manage any kind of project. It underpins many project management standards and methods including the National Occupational Standard in Project Management.

#### **Depth**

The APM Competence Framework provides a guide to project management competences. It is part of your professional toolkit; mapping levels of knowledge and experience to help you progress your skills and abilities.

#### **Achievement**

APM qualifications take your career in new and exciting directions. They are recognised across the profession and aligned with IPMA's 4 level Certification Program.

#### **Commitment**

Continuing Professional Development helps develop your project management practice. A targeted development plan will enhance your project management career.

#### **Accountability**

The APM Code of Professional Conduct outlines the ethical practice expected of a professional. Becoming an APM member shows your commitment to the Code and sets you apart from others.