

# PCs Enhance Corporate Project Management Techniques

By Darren Edwards

Computers are playing an increasing and important role in project management methodology, according to a recent survey conducted by Melbourne-based Paul Steinfort and Associates (PSA).

The survey on the use of project management techniques over a wide range of industries concluded that, with the advent of the microcomputer and its general accessibility, personal improvement could occur rapidly. Calculations, projections and repetitive tasks that would have been considered too lengthy or impossible ten years ago can now be done very quickly.

However, in the summary of the survey's results, PSA says the perception of a computer's role in project management methodology can at times be unclear and should be treated with some caution.

In some cases, users see the computer as supplying project management. In fact, some of the respondents actually said they considered computer project management as being the nucleus of project management.

With project management being such a widespread and important factor in business today — more than 95 per cent of the first 100 respondents said they use project management techniques, while 90 per cent would advise a colleague to use it — the role of the computer needs to be clarified in some cases.

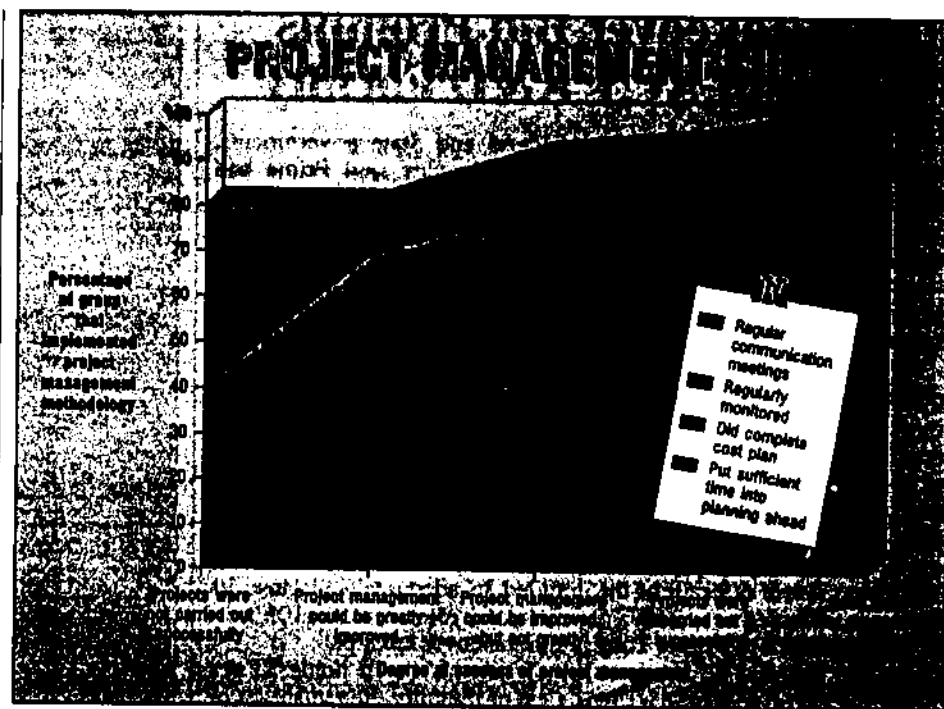
Of those that had used project management techniques, 84 per cent received improved results, however, an executive of a large bank claimed: "Skilled project managers for multi-million dollar projects are a rare commodity." According to the PSA report, this points to the need for our educational institutions to address project management training and methodology issues.

Of those surveyed who volunteered comments, not one raised the matter of risk as an element of a project. Risk, according to PSA, is a very real factor in most projects and the more the project deviates from the norm the larger the risk.

It is relevant to note that checking a project's feasibility (which involves the assessment of risk) did not rate as a high priority for survey respondents, and neither did planning sufficiently ahead. Both of these points work to obviate risk. A tool which helps to address these needs is the personal computer.

However, there is a saying in the computer industry that is something like "garbage in, garbage out," and this, according to PSA, is also true for project management systems. While computers can assist with data analysis, they are no substitute for hard-won experience — at best, they enhance it.

There is also a plethora of project management software packages available. Careful selection is necessary to obtain



the most suitable and cost efficient, said the PSA report. Purchasing an off-the-shelf project management package will not help to solve project management problems overnight.

According to PSA, an obvious point arising from the survey is that the quality of the methodology used in project management varies from poor to reasonably good. As indicated in the accompanying chart, good methodology is essential to good project management.

Personnel is also an important aspect to be considered, according to the PSA report. If a company has good personnel,

it should let them utilise good project methodology. When working on complicated and demanding projects, a good manager without the necessary methodology and tools — notably, effective project management software and the required number of personal computers — could quickly get swamped in irrelevant matters that would be to the detriment of the project.

With the right planning and the correct tools, project management is a beneficial discipline which offers better control, smoother operation, better results and better working relationships. ■