BUILDING ORGANISATIONAL CAPABILITY

INTERVIEW **LIBBY HAKIM**

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The installation of bus priority lanes, car park upgrades and improvements to transport-network resilience are just some of the projects Keith Chidley, MAIPM, has recently led in his role with the Public Transport Authority. He also contributes to the ongoing strategy and activities of the AIPM in Western Australia as Chapter President. The thing that drives him in his work is seeing people enjoy their jobs and helping them to improve. By focusing on people and teams, entire organisational capability also gets a boost, he says, allowing the delivery of better-quality projects and more projects on time and on budget.

▶ What is organisational capability?
It's about taking a team of people, both internal staff and external contractors, and bringing them all on the same journey so they understand where you need to get to in order to meet organisational objectives. It's also about building a cohesive team, where you've got people of different capabilities learning from each other and being willing to openly share knowledge—both successes and, more importantly, failures.

▶ Why focus on it?
It's very hard to grow an organisation without it, because what you've then got is people working in isolation and they are not following standard methodologies. Projects aren't simple. They often tend to go down the wrong path towards failure. It's important to have trust within the team, at peer level and management level, so that if things aren't going well, people can stand up and say they need help.

▶ How have you built organisational capability in your current role?
When I moved into the branch there was very limited combined reporting at different levels—it was just at the project level. There was a strong focus on project delivery and very detailed monthly reports. Given there are 70 projects on the go at any one time, there was this huge file that no one ever read. All of the project managers were independent of each other so there was no team atmosphere and no collaboration. A lot of the backbone behind the changes is fortnightly stand-up meetings. All of the project managers present their own projects and performance on visual boards, with a focus on the areas of concern and the actions required. When we set down our concerns and actions, we hold each other to account for achieving those actions. We do that not as managers, we all do it. We take the expertise of the group and ask challenging questions, but it's all done in a positive light. We have very rapidly built up the capability of the staff and contractors to a consistent level. It also helps me understand the projects out there and the challenges and budget implications.

▶ What changes have you seen as a result?
There is now a real team environment. It wasn't really a nice area to walk into before but now there's almost a buzz. People know each other and they socialise. We all went on a cultural Indigenous tour and learnt about Aboriginal heritage together. Doing things outside of the norm for project managers has helped to bring us together. Staff engagement is better and it has built capability in networking and core management and leadership skills.

TIPS FOR BUILDING BETTER TEAMS

- Encourage open and frank conversation.
- Give people the opportunity to undertake training.
- Find time for yourself and step out of the day-to-day so you can sit back and strategise.
- Think about what doesn't work then get a team around you and talk about it—you don't have to come up with the answer alone.
- Allow workers to act in more senior management roles when managers take leave.