

A GUIDE TO PROJECT PHASES AND SOME REFLECTIONS ON EACH

INTRODUCTION

There are lots of models and theories out there. Here are some of the ones I like. There is so much information on the internet that it is simply foolish to think that I can add value beyond what is already available so the purpose is provide a mini compendium, some comments and some links and you can find out more for yourself.

PURPOSE

According to a report by the Project Management Institute there is demand for 88 million roles by the end of 2021. This is a collection short posts about project management which I have collated into one document.

The idea is to share some interesting models, theories and ideas as well as some personal experience. This is not a training manual or a guide to project management but instead a reflection on the key stages and thoughts on each.

STEP 1 THE BIG IDEA

WHAT SHOULD THE PROJECT TEAM PROVIDE

Idea / Objective(s)

Strategy Link

Operations Link

Proposal

Outline Plan

Outline Budget

Outline Resources

Outline Rewards

Supporting Documents

(eg Feasibility Analysis)

WHAT SHOULD THE PROJECT OFFICE CHECK

Is there a Sponsor/Owner?

Is there a clear output & outcome?

Is there a clear link to SOAP or Strategy?

Is there a feasibility or market analysis to support the proposal?

Are there defined products?

Are there measurable benefits?

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A JOURNEY OF 1000 MILES BEGINS WITH A SINGLE STEP

Most people know the Chinese proverb, but fewer a phrase I learned as a Commonwealth Games Triathlete: There is no point in going fast if it is in the wrong direction. Too many projects somehow come into being without adequate assessment of their merit and necessary ranking and prioritisation of other efforts which may be more important, timely or sequentially necessary.

Fail fast is a philosophy that values extensive testing and incremental development to determine whether an idea has value. An important goal of the philosophy is to cut losses when testing reveals something isn't working and quickly try something else, a concept known as pivoting.

The BIG IDEA phase is the opportunity to fail fast and avoid the time, cost, risk incurred by an idea that is not suitable, feasible, acceptable or timely.

STEP 2 THE BUSINESS CASE

WHAT SHOULD THE PROJECT TEAM PROVIDE

Executive Summary

Reasons

Business Options

Do the minimum

Do something

Expected Benefits

Expected Dis-Benefits

Timescales

Costs

Investment Appraisal

Major Risks

WHAT SHOULD THE PROJECT OFFICE CHECK

Is there a business case?

Does this link to Dept/Corp Objectives?

Is there a Sponsor / Owner?

Is there a high-level plan?

Is there income/expenditure plan?

Is there an agreed Capex?

REMIND ME AGAIN, WHY ARE WE DOING THIS?

Business Cases are often emotion dressed up as logic. People have pet projects or ideas to enhance their profile or prestige which they justify as being critical to the business as much to indicate their own value as to actually make things faster, cheaper or better. This may be a little cynical, but a Business Case is a great tool for weeding out the ego-based ideas from those that add value to people, products, profits or planet.

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Moreover, if done properly, the Business Case should look at the whole project, including consideration of resources, and post-implementation running, maintenance and benefits. A second-hand Ferrari may look great value until you consider the cost of insurance and maintenance. A surprising number of projects neglect to consider that "A dog is not for Christmas, it may be with you 14 years".

Not all Business Case decisions need to be financial. I like Do Bono's Six Thinking Hats as a means to consider all angles.

BLUE "The Big Picture" & Managing

WHITE "Facts & Information"

RED "Feelings & Emotions"

BLACK "Negative"

YELLOW "Positive"

GREEN "New Ideas"

Essentially if you cannot clearly articulate the Business Case (why as we doing this, as opposed to something else) then perhaps you should not be doing the project.

STEP 3 THE PROJECT INTIATION DOC

WHAT SHOULD THE PROJECT TEAM PROVIDE

Project Brief (Aim, Scope, Objective)

Project Start-Up (Roles & Controls)

Risks & Issues Register

Deliverables Register

Stakeholder Plan

Communications Plan

Budget

WHAT SHOULD THE PROJECT OFFICE CHECK

Is there a Sponsor ?

Is there a Project Manager?

Are Roles and Responsibilities clear?

Is there a clear objective & plan?

Is the budget sufficient & approved?

WHICH IS THE GO TO DOCUMENT IF IT ALL GOES WRONG?

I have done a fair few 'Project Rescues' in my time. You know it is a Project Rescue when they are 18 months into a 24 month project and they phone and say we need some help. Nobody phones if it isn't a problem, and the later they phone the bigger the problem, which until now they have tried to hide, ignore or wish away!

The PROJECT INTIATION DOC (PID) is a great document (or sometimes series of documents) which explain the purpose, aims and scope, as well as the roles,

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goals and controls. It is very often the best document to compare where you are now and where you expected to be, and is a critical tool for setting direction at the beginning or diagnosing a problem part-way through.

The PID is generally associated with Waterfall Projects (projects planned up-front) rather than Agile (projects worked-out as you progress incrementally) but there is always some form of document that is effectively a Road Map or Project Charter which is used to guide, communicate, and coordinate action. This PID and the Business Case (discussed in previous post) effectively cover the key questions: Why, What, Who, When, Where and How Much.

STEP 4 THE APPROVAL

WHAT SHOULD THE PROJECT TEAM PROVIDE

Strategy Fit

Operations Fit

OK from each key stakeholder / gatekeeper

OK for HR

OK for Marketing

OK for Finance

OK for Governance

OK for IT

OK for Operations

Confirmed Approval

WHAT SHOULD THE PROJECT OFFICE CHECK

Houston, are we go for launch?

Are all stakeholders aligned and supportive?

OK re Resources/Schedule?

Is there anything top team should know before they make a decision?

SO WHO LET THAT HAPPEN?

All projects should be approved following a process and conscious decision to commit time, money, effort and resources to a task. And yet so many projects seem to just evolve a life of their own and career forwards like a driverless car going downhill. Approval is simple in theory, but can be complex since it isn't just about those at the top voting but also everyone else endorsing, supporting and committing.

RACI is an acronym derived from the four key responsibilities most typically used: responsible, accountable, consulted, and informed. It is really important to speak to the gatekeepers and technical experts to ensure that what is proposed is suitable, feasible and acceptable before approval. You really want to avoid the "If you asked me, I would have told you" effect.

The Approval may happen twice: The first time approve to a pilot, demo, test, feasibility study or scoping exercise and the second time to approval the full-project based on the feedback, appraisal, assessment of the "pilot" or "feasibility

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study". This is generally the case if the "pilot" or "feasibility study" itself is a big commitment. For example the pilot may be £1m and 100 days of work to assess the cost of a project which might be £30m and 3 years to implement.

Approval is also a 'were all in this together moment' endorsing, supporting and committing. I have sometimes referred to this as "Houston are we go for launch" if everyone says "Yes - go for launch" you should be OK but if someone is unsure you are better to pause and get it right than plough ahead putting time, money, effort and resources at risk.

STEP 5 THE PLANNING

WHAT SHOULD THE PROJECT TEAM PROVIDE

Note "as-is" (what happens now)

Note "to-be" (what should happen)

Agree User Requirements

Agree Technical Spec

Agree Plans for Testing/Checking

Agree Training Plans

Routine Update Report: What's done, Any Issues, What's Next, Key Decisions

WHAT SHOULD THE PROJECT OFFICE CHECK

Are there clear outputs and outcomes?

Is there a plan for time, money, resources?

Do we have the right skills or partners?

Have we a plan for execution?

Have we a supporting people change plan?

Is there a customer change plan?

Is the plan realistic?

PLANNING IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN PLANS

The German field marshal, known as Moltke the Elder, believed in developing a series of options for battle instead of a single plan, saying "No plan of operations extends with certainty beyond the first encounter with the enemy's main strength." Today, "no plan survives contact with the enemy" is the popular

Planning is about thinking of scenarios and what to do. It is about sequences and patterns. It is about order, logic and anticipating chaos and uncertainty. Planning makes us prepared for the unknown, by making as much as possible (but not everything) known.

Reports that say that something hasn't happened are always interesting to me, because as we know, there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns—the

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ones we don't know we don't know. [Rumsfeld during a Pentagon news briefing in February 2002]

The point is that PLANS (destination) are a best guess and PLANNING (direction of travel) is the thinking that gets us there. It is the thinking that is important. This is true of Waterfall (up-front planning) and Agile (step-by-step incremental) approaches to project management.

STEP 6 THE PURCHASE OR BUILD

WHAT SHOULD THE PROJECT TEAM PROVIDE

Specification

Proposals

Quote / Tender

Budget Approval

Contract

Purchase Order

Routine Update Report: What's done, Any Issues, What's Next, Key Decisions

WHAT SHOULD THE PROJECT OFFICE CHECK

Is this the right vendor?

Is this the best contract?

Are there plans for risk or change management?

Have we made the right purchase?

The right product?

The right price?

The right time?

TO BUY OR TO BUILD?

There are two schools of thought and each have their place.

Option1: Be really clear about your unique product or service and arrange your people, process and systems to emphasis and add value to that uniqueness so that it is the very best it can be, and hard to replicate to compete against because it isn't about simple branding or price but about the alignment of everything within the organisation to that goal. In this case bespoke systems, processes, technology and training may be the way to go.

Option2: Accept that what you do is not unique and follows a recognised standard eg Accounting or perhaps ITIL (Information Technology Infrastructure Library) which is a framework designed to standardize the selection, planning, delivery, maintenance, and overall lifecycle of services within a business. In this case off-the-shelf systems, processes, technology and training may be the way to go.

Either option requires clarity the organisational and functional requirements and in some cases different elements of the organisation may require different tools. A retailer for example may take a unique approach to procurement, stock,

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distribution and sales which merits something different and bespoke but at the same time has 'industry standard' approach to Accounting and Information Technology which merits off-the-shelf software.

Both will require change: Option1 changing the systems, processes, technology to align with the organisational model and for Option2 changing (or ensuring) the organisational model aligns with the system 'industry standard'. Where you are 100% clear you might invite suppliers to bid against a tender (which clearly states requirements). Where you are not 100% you might invite suppliers to offer proposals (which indicate intended outcomes).

Both will have business relationship implications. For Option1 it is likely that the customer will take the lead in explaining to the supplier what is required, whereas for Option2 the opposite is likely to be true. The different emphasis will have implications for ownership and control, as well as management and cost.

STEP 7 THE TEST AND ACCEPT

WHAT SHOULD THE PROJECT TEAM PROVIDE

Hardware delivery sign-off

Software delivery sign-off

First Fix /Second Fix-Sign-off

Building Regs Sign-Off

Installation sign-off

Unit testing sign-off

System testing sign-off

User Acceptance testing sign-off

Routine Update Report: What's done, Any Issues, What's Next, Key Decisions

WHAT SHOULD THE PROJECT OFFICE CHECK

Does this meet with the specification?

Have all the deliverables been provided?

Documentation

Training

Configuration

Support

Manuals

Is this within quote/price agreed?

Should payment be made?

TESTING IS A KEY TO DELIVERY, QUALITY ASSURANCE, AND PAYMENT

Testing that the product or service is suitable, feasible and acceptable is a critical part of Project Delivery. It is made more objective and rapid if you have a set of Business Requirements against which to check and some Test Scripts that are designed to check the the product or service input, process, output and outcomes are what is expected.

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inevitably things are rarely 100% perfect first time, so you need a process for escalating problems or bugs and having them fixed and re-tested. Moreover you need to differentiate between minor cosmetic problems (which can be addressed later) and major functional problems (which stop progress).

Problems may be because the client failed to specify a need, so the resolution needs to be agreed and paid for. Or they may be that the supplier failed to satisfy a need, so the resolution need to be agreed, but the cost falls to the supplier. What is included or excluded in the price and what is acceptable or not can be contentious issues. However a well written Business Requirements document, or Contract, and a collaborative approach to problem solving should resolve.

What is important is to link payment to successful outcomes. For this reason there should be clear agreement on what constitutes a successful outcome (eg no more than 5 minor issues and zero major issues) against which payment can be approved (subject to a resolution plan and timetable). You may retain final payment until all matters concluded to a satisfactory (previously agreed) standard.

What is important about testing is that it need to be clear what is in the work package to be tested: Is it just the software. hardware or component, or is it also the training, documentation, support and other ancillary arrangements. Make sure you involve all the right stakeholders in testing because their engagement and participation will make hand-over from project to business-as-usual much easier.

STEP 8 TRAIN AND ENGAGE

WHAT SHOULD THE PROJECT TEAM PROVIDE

Documentation

Communications

Training

Pilot

Roll-Out

Routine Update Report: What's done, Any Issues, What's Next, Key Decisions

WHAT SHOULD THE PROJECT OFFICE CHECK

Is there a clear communication plan?

Is there clear benefits explained?

Is there a clear delivery / training plan?

Are our people prepared and ready?

Are our customers prepared and ready?

YOU HAVE A CAR, BUT CAN YOU DRIVE?

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One of the biggest challenges of projects for the delivery of the "thing" (machine, technology, widget, or car) can be if nobody knows how to use it, either from a daily operational perspective (drive from a to b) or a systems management and maintenance perspective (add fuel, pump tyres and occasionally service). Fully training the people who will use the product or service is essential, and yet somehow often overlooked.

Training is too often superficial basics, sometimes just a demo. As an analogy: There is nothing wrong with taking a car for a demo drive, but the assumption is that you already know how to drive. You would not take a demonstration car out for a quick spin having never driven before (if indeed they would ever allow you!) and you are hardly likely to return 60 minutes later as a contender to beat Lewis Hamilton.

Training needs to be comprehensive and immersive, for different scenarios and circumstances. Think for example of the training pilots have in a simulator before, and as well as the training that they have in specific aircraft. Even an experienced pilot will have a manual and follow pre-flight checks. Training is what turns your new expensive "thing" from an dormant asset into an income stream.

Engagement comes from ownership, you'll always treat a hire car differently from you own. So even if you are trained it doesn't quite focus the mind as much as if you own the input, process, output or outcome. Train people as if they are owners, and make them eager to learn by explaining the benefits of ownership.

STEP 9 HANDOVER AND CLOSE

WHAT SHOULD THE PROJECT TEAM PROVIDE

Project Handover Report

Project Closure Report

Lessons Learned Log

Routine Update Report: What's done, Any Issues, What's Next, Key Decisions

WHAT SHOULD THE PROJECT OFFICE CHECK

Have we delivered to the Business Case?

Have we delivered to the Contract?

Have we delivered to the Specification?

Is all training complete?

Are post-go live arrangements in place?

HANDOVER AND CLOSE OR DUMP AND RUN

Private Eye magazine used to refer to a fictitious legal firm: Sue, Grabbit and Runne. Playing on sue, grab it and run, suggesting a greedy law firm to which Private Eye would usually attribute frivolous libel cases.

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The handover phase of a project is often rushed through, many times so that the organisation can get on with the next pressing priority. This is always a mistake because all the benefits of a project are not in the delivery but in operationalising the product or service. To rush through this damages the relationship with the business and like our fictitious law firm, shows a callous disregard.

It is rare that everything is perfect and there maybe major issues that will delay acceptance, handover and final payment. Or there may be minor issues that allow progress into operation with a commitment for outstanding items (and payment) to be complete by a certain date. The handover must include everything to be complete before the project team is disbanded and the delivery team exits. If the knowledge and paperwork is not properly complete now the opportunity may be lost forever.

Handover should also be a point of celebration and thanks for the project team and the delivery team. It is all too easy to forget the human side of handover, but for many this is the accumulation and reward for all their efforts and thanks is the fuel that will encourage them onto the next project, and feedback will be what makes them better each time. All handover's should be a point of reflection and reward.

STEP 10 BENEFITS REVIEW

WHAT SHOULD THE PROJECT TEAM PROVIDE

Lessons Learned Log
Benefits Review Report

WHAT SHOULD THE PROJECT OFFICE CHECK

Did we achieve the aims in the Business Case?
Did we deliver according to the Plan?
Did we achieve within the Budget?
Were the people happy?
Were the customers happy?
Did we achieve our strategic goals?
What can we learn for next time?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

There is an optimum combination of factors or qualities which help people and organisations transform. It is a blend of listening, challenging and sharing and comes from expertise, experience, curiosity and a passion to perform. We deliver projects and change, and improve the confidence, capacity, drive and desire of the people we work with.

Tim Rogers is a highly qualified and experienced individual who led the transformation 'privatisation' of the Post Office and Ports of Jersey. Supported 4 businesses whose CEO subsequently won IoD Director of the Year. A government advisor, former Public Accounts Committee, and former Chair of the

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Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee. Participant in Jersey Policy Forum and lead consultant for Adapt Consulting.

Credentials include.

- MBA Qualified Management Consultant
- PRINCE2 Project Manager
- APMG Qualified Change Practitioner
- Tutor / Lecturer for the Chartered Management Institute
- ICF Trained Coach, IoD Business Mentor, NLP Practitioner
- Retained Data Protection Officer & Data Protection Support

MORE INFORMATION

The two key approaches to project management are waterfall (plan everything up-front) and agile (work it out as you go). The two key schools or methods are PRINCE2 and Scrum.

Purists will disagree, indeed there is a lot of different and blended approaches to project management. The most important thing is to do work works for the client, the circumstances and the project, be flexible!

However below are some links that may be useful to find out more, particularly about PRINCE2 and Scrum.

<https://prince2.wiki/>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scrum_\(software_development\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scrum_(software_development))

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