Project Management

This document is designed for managers who wish to gain a better understanding of the elements and benefits of effective project management. It briefly outlines how the key aspects, when applied appropriately, can benefit all areas of business.

The Project Management Process Overview:

A. The Benefits

Project management is often only identified as a need for use with large “physical” change initiatives such as facility expansions, equipment or system installations, etc. However, effectiveness project management can be exploited for many smaller projects, and other process, people and change initiatives.

But what are the benefits of project management?

Amongst many, it provides:

- A clear definition & understanding of objectives
- A contact point, providing accountability and focus on achieving the goal
- The proactive assessment & anticipation of risk, providing an opportunity to plan contingency
- Appropriate, temporary authority to the Project Manager by Project sponsor
- Control - objectives and scope cannot be altered without sponsor’s agreement
- Visibility of progress through effective reporting. This builds trust & confidence, allowing management to concentrate on other issues
- Alignment and understanding throughout the organisation
- Accountability and activities based on achieving an objective, not driven by job functions or historical influence
- Improved teamwork & morale due to the discreet, tangible progress & success it generates
- Increased efficiency, focus on customers and objectives, all leading to greater profitability

B. Striking the Balance

It's not rocket science, it needn't be resource hungry, nor should it be an end in itself. Put simply, good project management is about turning strategic business objectives into reality - efficiently and effectively.

Information on project management is abundant – type it into Google and you'll get many hundreds of millions of results back. There are many associations & institutes, plus formal, highly detailed approaches and systems. You can spend your money an array of software packages, courses, accreditations and consultancies specialising in project management. The problem is not getting finding out about project management, it's making it relevant to you & your business.

Though large, complex projects may need the detailed structure of some of these approaches, the vast majority of small to medium sized projects do not. That said, just because a change initiative isn't highly complex, does not mean its implementation doesn't need managing effectively. Often balancing a number of smaller, concurrent projects needs a lot of careful management.

It's about getting the balance right, ensuring you have the discipline in place to ensure the project is well defined, organised, controlled and completed, without resorting to using a sledgehammer to crack a nut! In introducing too many controls, systems, reporting and red tape, you run the risk of reducing efficiency, demoralising the project team, confusing the work force and frustrating the management. Ultimately, the project will fail.

Like with many things, a bit of common sense counts for a lot, but you do need an awareness of the tools, their use and benefits, to be in a position to select them effectively. The skill of the project manager will therefore be critical to ensure the approach taken is that most appropriate to the given circumstances.

C. The Process

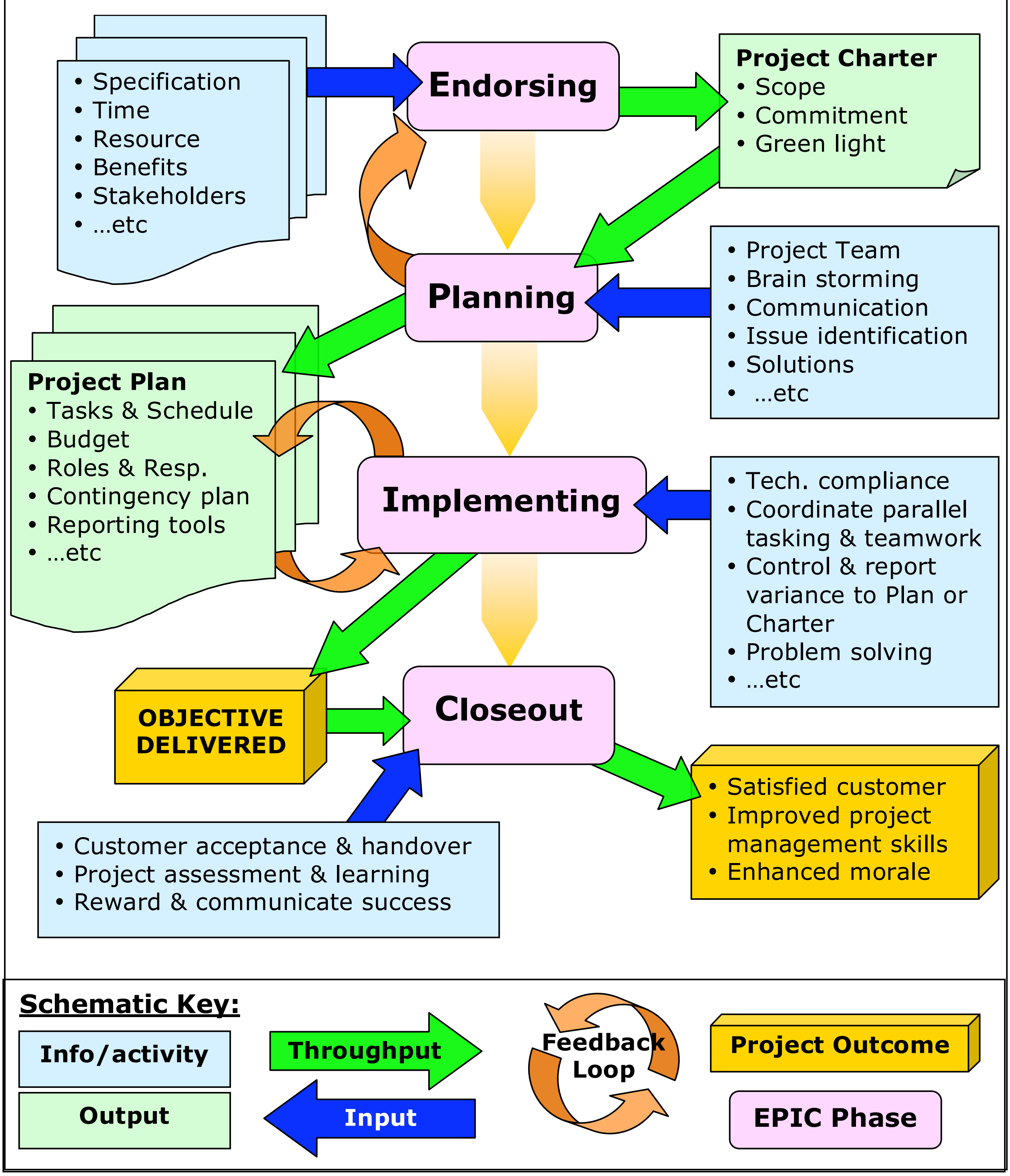
Regardless of the size & complexity of a project, there will likely be at least four main phases to its management process, namely:

1. **E**ndorse
2. **P**lan
3. **I**mplement (or Control)
4. **C**loseout

Conveniently spelling out the word "EPIC" for those who find acronyms help them remember things.

Figure 1 is a schematic illustrating these four "EPIC" project management phases, plus some typical attributable elements. Naturally, depending on the needs & complexity of the project, there will be a varying number of elements contained within each phase.

Figure 1: The "EPIC" Project Management Model



D. Phase 1: Project Endorsement

A project can only be endorsed once it has been adequately defined and justified. To achieve this it is necessary to establish and understand three key issues, or constraints on the proposal, namely, the:

1. **Specification**; what needs to be achieved & why
2. **Time**; how long do you have to achieve it
3. **Resource**; the amount of money, people, etc available to achieve it

What falls between these constraints is the Project Scope, as is illustrated below in Figure 2:

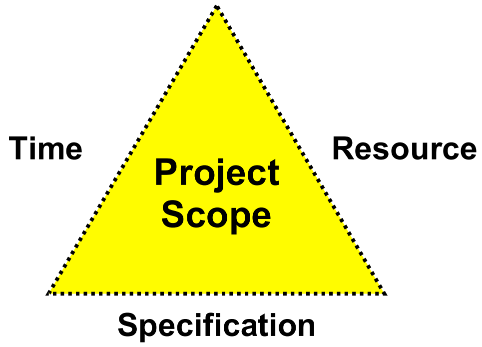


Figure 2: Triple Constraint

The scope is documented within the **Project Charter**, which can be a simple one-pager, detailing the project's key resources, stakeholders, sponsors, timelines, deliverables etc.

The Charter is produced & endorsed by the Project Manager and Sponsor, before proceeding with any detailed planning.

The endorsement phase is important to ensure the objective, resource and priority of the project are realistic and appropriate when put in light of the overall strategy and activities of the business. It is a green light from the senior management to allow the Project Manager to engage the involvement of the wider organisation.

E. Phase 2: Project Planning

The planning phase is critical to success and often the bit that is glanced over when a Project Management approach isn't adopted. All too often, there is a tendency to jump straight into the doing, either because it makes us feel good to believe we're making progress, or due to urgency, there is no time for "fancy plans". However, later in the project, this leads to inefficient use of resource, fire fighting, uncoordinated effort, being blind-sided, or forgetting something important. To avoid this, the assertiveness & experience of the Project Manager is critical to allow for the appropriate level of planning. This phase also brings the project team together, introducing it to the challenge, and getting involved in establishing the issues and solutions. It promotes buy-in, a critical aspect to any change programme.

The plan will contain levels of details appropriate to the project. It may include such items as:

- Task List
- Schedule & Milestones
- Budget Breakdown
- Reporting Mechanisms
- Roles & Responsibilities
- Risk Assessment
- Contingency Plan

To develop the project plan, a common approach is for the Project Team to come together to brainstorm key aspects, using the Charter as the principal input. The resultant draft plan is discussed with the Sponsor, amended as required and agreed. Communication of the final plan to the team and wider organisation ensures general understanding, awareness and commitment.

The plan is the route map to the project objective, and is the key reference point in reporting progress during the Implementation phase.

F. Phase 3: Implementation or Control

Now for the tough bit – making it happen as defined in the Charter. Once into the implementing phase - normally the bulk of any project - variances, workload, conflict and interactions can make the picture very complex. The key to success is keeping in control and on-track with the plan. A number of fundamental issues need managing, to achieve this:

- Ensuring technical compliance to the objective
- Preventing or mitigating any deviation from the plan in the cost, schedule or resource
- Coordinating parallel processes and tasks
- Effective use of meetings
- Controlling any changes to Plan or Charter
- Maintaining good team dynamics & motivation
- Dealing with the unexpected
- Progress/variance communication and reporting

As well of the disciplines of checking adherence to the plan, many of the issues faced in this phase involve conflict resolution and problem solving - keeping your head whilst other may lose theirs. It calls upon a combination of skills and behaviours, such as organisation, empathy, assertiveness and a “can do” attitude. Though some of these personal traits may be learned and improved with experience, there is no excuse for missing one key element to successful implementation… having a robust Plan.

G. Phase 4: Closeout

So, you've delivered the agreed objective. Congratulations! But the process isn't quite finished. This final stage of a project is again often overlooked in a rush to get on with the next priority.

The Closeout phase has a number of critical elements to it:

- Verifying all aspects of the objective have been satisfied
- Handing over responsibility to the customer (whether that be internal or external), and formally releasing the implementation resource
- Reviewing the implementation process; what went well, what didn't, and what learning can be taken forward
- Celebrating the accomplishment as an organisation, plus acknowledging & rewarding the contribution of the team & individuals responsible for the success.

The benefits of this phase are the:

- Effective transfer of ownership to a satisfied customer
- Improved management of future projects
- Awareness & appreciation by the entire organisation that a successful implementation has been achieved
- Increased motivation of individuals to get involved in the next project

H. Summary:

As has been previously stated, Project Management needn't be a highly complex or technically difficult process. Rather, it must be appropriately tailored to the needs of the objective and situation at hand. Regardless of how simple the approach may be, it is still critical to making any change happen efficiently & effectively. The process has merits for all functions and aspects in any business, providing focus, accountability, and a targeted, action-driven culture. The proactive discipline will help to deliver goals and performance improvement.

I. Explore further

To learn more about project management, or how the Consulting Works could help you through a specific change, whilst developing the awareness and skills of your people, please take a look at www.theconsultingworks.com or contact us:

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