

## **Project management**

In day-to-day work, projects are always underway. For example, whether it is initiating a new service or recruiting more staff, it is vital that someone is managing that project to secure its success from the beginning through to the end — someone who knows exactly what needs to be achieved, what is involved, and how long it should take, and can communicate this effectively to other members of the team.

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The formal definition of project management is: 'The application of processes, methods, knowledge, skills and experience to achieve the project objectives'.

In more down to earth language, project management is the way a person organises and manages resources that are necessary to complete a project. A project is simply a piece of work that has a start, an end, and goals. Projects can be very simple, like organising a party, or very complex, like building a space rocket. After all, it's not rocket science, is it

A middle ground way to explain project management, is 'an individual or collaborative enterprise that is carefully planned to achieve a particular aim, and measured by outputs, outcomes or benefits'.

Success in a project is usually agreed to be achieving the set objectives, on time and within budget. Some projects have to achieve specific defined outcomes, others may be completed within agreed tolerances.

Project management has a set of deliverables over a set time span, rather than simple management, which is an ongoing process. Project managers need to exhibit a range of skills to ensure that the project delivers the required outcomes.

In reality, we all project manage in our day-to-day work. Planning your route to work to ensure you get bus or train connections, planning routes to avoid traffic, arranging your social schedule to be at certain places at certain times all take the same skills as more formal project management.

In a working environment, project management can become more complex, as you have to bring together people with different ideas of the overall objective, who have their own agendas, goals or priorities. You also need to ensure that they conform with the requirements of the overall project.

Like many other subjects, project management has its own language, and terms like tolerances, outputs, outcomes and stages can mystify what is a relatively simple process, although of course some project management tasks will naturally be more complex than others.

## Core components of project management

- Define the project, including justifying why it is needed and its benefits
- Define the project resources, timescales of each phase and the overall timescale, including the quality required for the stages and the end of the project
- Prepare a business case to identify costs and justify the required investment
- Gain sign off for the project. This will probably need to be at different levels according to the size/cost/complexity of each pProject to sign off funding levels and timescales
- Develop an overall management plan for the project and oversee implementation
- Lead the project team. Sub team leaders may be required for larger projects, or for example where the project has some highly technical aspects that need specialist knowledge.
- Manage any known risk, make plans to deal with risks that were not anticipated, handle issues and maintain appropriate logs.
- Monitor the project plan and ensure all activities are documented and reports raised.
- Manage the project budget and highlight any deviations from the agreed tolerances, highlighting at an early stage if a project is going over budget.
- Maintain communications with all members of the project to ensure everyone is aligned.
- Close the project when completed, or if it is abandoned, and complete appropriate documentation.

## When to use project management

Projects are separate from standard business activities, as they usually require a group of people, often cross function, to work together on a temporary basis to focus on a particular activity with a specific set of objectives. Teamwork is vital to achieve a successful project.

Project management will focus on an identified objective and resources need to be allocated to maximise the chance of achieving the project objectives. Remember, managing those resources effectively is key to success.

The scale and complexity of the project will define the level of resource required, but also define the skills required by the allocated project manager.

Objectives may be expressed in terms of:

- **Outputs** — what the project aims to achieve (e.g. reorganising your department)
- **Outcomes** (e.g. staff working in the new structure)
- **Benefits** (e.g. more efficient way of working, however that is measured)
- **Strategic objectives** (e.g. improving productivity as a result of the reorganisation).

## **Project management processes**

### **Monitoring**

Planning is naturally part of the early phase of any project. Monitoring, therefore, needs to start from the very start of the planning process. This can be later used to review the process from start to finish to identify learnings and adapt for future projects. Issues such as timescales, budget and resource allocation should be monitored, as this can give early indications of a project that may be moving away from the plan. Once any issues are identified, any required alterations to bring the Project back on track can be made, or, in project management speak, back within tolerances.

### **Control**

Project managers will need to exercise a degree of control to address any problems or issues. Lack of control will most definitely affect the Project outcomes. Control also includes Risk Management to oversee the Project tolerances.

### **Communication**

As in most things effective communication is key to success. Often problems can be avoided completely, or dealt with early, by open and honest communication. Verbal communications are key and effective in the correct circumstances, but written documented communication is often required to be part of the project plan, especially in identifying areas where a project failed, or was particularly successful.

### **People management**

The project manager has responsibility for managing the inputs from individuals working on the project. They are also responsible for managing the tasks and overseeing the risks. In a complex project, there will be multiple layers of people management, which will need to be managed in a consistent and transparent manner.

## **Project management phases**

### **Initiation**

The first stage of a project needs to define the project, including developing a business case to justify the running of the project. This will remain at the heart of the project to ensure that it remains on track to deliver the identified outcomes. The business case should clearly state what the project aims to achieve, by when, within what budget, and lay out the agreed tolerances. This is then used as a baseline for any future change requests. The business case should also define who will be involved in the project, at what stage, for how long, and what their duties and responsibilities will be.

### **Requirements**

This documentation describes the aims of the project in more detail and will include timescales and any constraints. It should also define how you will judge if the project has been successful to the requirements of all stakeholders.

### **Planning**

The project plan should include details of how any project work will be conducted, as well as how to monitor it, and levels of control and communication.

All project related tasks should be scheduled to ensure that there is no duplication of effort. You also need to ensure that the phases of the project are in correct sequence. For example, if the project were to build a fish pond in a garden you cannot schedule delivery of the fish before the pond is full of water!

### **Execution**

The people involved in the project should be given sufficient information to fulfil their part of the project. This should include timescales, deadlines and how success will be gauged and measured.

### **Closure**

Projects are generally closed when their objectives have been successfully achieved. They can also be closed if the overall plan changes, or by loss of funding, or at the point when it becomes clear that the project is no longer viable. Formal projects will maintain Learning logs, which can be used to evaluate all lessons learned during the project — both good and

bad. Mistakes made are a key part of the learnings, which can be considered for future projects.