

**Managing projects
to a successful conclusion
– an introductory guide**

Managing Projects to a Successful Conclusion

This workbook is based on projects managed by the Office for Public Management and also by the VFM Unit, NHS Wales, using the modified PRINCE approach. This approach is described in *Benchmarking for best value in the NHS*, by John Bullivant, especially Chapter 3, 'Making it happen' pp 91–105 (FT Healthcare, 1998; ISBN 1 860673 53 8).

Readers may also wish to consult some of the many project management books and papers available, such as the following:

The Complete Idiot's Guide to Project Management by Sunny Baker and Kim Baker, (MacMillan1998; ISBN:-0-028617-45-2)

Managing Successful Projects with PRINCE2 (CCTA, 1996; ISBN-0-113306-85-7)

PRINCE2: An Outline (CCTA, 1996; ISBN 0 113306 54 X)

The Fast Forward MBA in Project Management by Eric Versuh (in the 'Fast Forward MBA' Series) (John Wiley & Sons, 1999; ISBN: 0 471325 46 5)

30 minutes to Plan a Project by Trevor Young (Kogan Page, 1997; ISBN-0-749423-65-X)

The Essentials of Project Management by Dennis Lock (Gower, 1996; ISBN-0-566077-45-0)

Project Management Guidelines (VFM Unit, NHS Wales, 1998)

Project Management for Benchmarking (Benchmarking Institute, 1999)

Introduction

A project may be defined as:

a responsibility to produce a defined result by an agreed date and time, within the available resources with the necessary actions broken down into clear, manageable steps.

It is important from the start to distinguish between the *outputs* or products of a project, and the *outcomes* or benefits to be realised.

A successful conclusion to a project will be the delivery of products which are capable of realising the benefits required. The implementation and use of those products then becomes operational management or sometimes a separate project. For example, a bridge may be required across a major river. The project specification will define the bridge's design and its expected use and life. The planned *outcomes* – the benefits – may be to improve access, develop the local economy and reduce pollution but the immediate *output* of the bridge building project is a structure which meets its design specification. This is the product of the project and must be controlled by

quality specification and appreciation of risk.

Examples of projects in the public sector might be: service reviews, information and communication projects, service improvements, seeking sources of funding or organising major events.

This booklet sets out guidelines which have been developed to ensure the effective use of time and resources in the management of projects. These guidelines are intended for those people, at all levels of an organisation, who are responsible for commissioning, managing or participating in projects. Those with no formal project management experience may also use the guidelines to build up initial expertise and confidence in project management. The guidelines are applicable to all organisations, whatever their business and size, and for all types of projects.

The Checklists at the end can also be used to review projects which have already been started.

The guidelines are based on reviews of projects managed using the PRINCE

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(PRojects **IN** Controlled **E**nvironments) project management methodology. PRINCE was originally developed for information technology projects and aimed to offer a practical and structured approach to project management. These guidelines bring together the best elements of PRINCE with the practical knowledge and experience that staff at the Office for Public Management have gained through the management of a wide portfolio of projects. The great advantage of this approach is that it is based on successful projects which, by definition, should never fail to deliver what has been agreed, on time and at the agreed costs, although these can be changed by agreement with the project sponsor. There should be no surprises.

Local standards & plans

You may already have a variety of standards for managing projects. Some organisations may use the full PRINCE standards while others may have developed local approaches to the reporting and monitoring of projects.

The guidelines have therefore been designed to account for local needs as much as possible. They can also form the basis for the further development of existing local standards.

The guidelines should also be seen in the context of local business planning and improvement cycles, providing a support, for example, to the use of the Service Excellence Model.

Why use these guidelines?

The benefits of using these guidelines are that:

- **They will help people to be clear about their roles.**
- **An agreed level of quality can be planned for from the start**
- **Delivery can be achieved on time and within budget.**
- **There will be an appropriate amount of control, at all levels.**
- **The right people will be involved at the right time.**
- **Dependence on individuals will be reduced.**
- **Clear communication channels will be put in place.**
- **Priorities and the best work sequence will be identified.**
- **Projects can be stopped or restarted when circumstances change.**
- **The total costs of project management will be reduced.**
- **Projects will be managed to a successful conclusion.**

Structure of the booklet

The guidelines are presented in six sections, followed at the end by a set of checklists which can be used to ensure that all the main points have been covered.

The Business Case or Defining the Project: How to make sure (through the business case) that you are convinced the project is realistic and how to check that the project has been defined so that it is clear what, when and why things should be done.

Project Organisation: How to identify who should be involved and when.

Project Planning: How to reach agreement on priorities, the sequence of events and responsibilities.

Project Controls: How to make sure that problems are highlighted as early as possible, so that the cost of resolving them is minimised.

Quality Review: How to ensure that the agreed level of quality is planned in and achieved.

Benefits Realisation: How to ensure that the project achieves what it sets out to do and that lessons are learnt for further projects.

Glossary of Terms

We have tried, as far as possible, to avoid using technical terms and jargon. However, in the interests of brevity, we felt it better to include some commonly used terms. This list defines some of the terms not otherwise explained within the text.

Stakeholders: Everyone, both inside and outside the organisation, with an interest in the success of the project or who will be affected by the quality of the outcome.

Users: Those who will be using whatever is produced and delivered by the project.

Products: These are the results of the project activities; they should be made tangible so that they can be recognised and managed.

Derivation: A description of what the required product will be based upon. For example, it may be based on information from: current literature and reports; interviews with key professionals; published standards; questionnaire responses, etc.

Configuration: 'Configuration management' is the commercial exploitation or sharing of products or services that arise from the project. These may be specifications, surveys, plans, assessment criteria, designs, training, software, etc., which may have a wider application than the immediate project.

Composition: An identified set of criteria against which the product will be assessed.

1. The Business Case

It is tempting to launch into a project without proper preparation and planning. This is a great mistake. Time taken to define the project – ideally through a business case and a project initiation document – will be rewarded later.

The ‘business case’ is the justification for undertaking and for continuing a project. It defines the financial and other benefits which the project is expected to deliver and the cost, timescale and other constraints within which the project is required to operate and against which its performance will be evaluated. A project manager should construct a simple business case (see the example on page 8) whether specifically required to or not. This will ensure that the project manager is convinced of the value of the project.

All projects, however small, should have an initial written statement which defines and supports the project. For larger projects, it is essential before the project starts to confirm the full cost of the project compared to the benefits to be realised from it. It is not unusual, however, to find projects which are

under way or even complete without a business case having been prepared.

Only after the business case has been produced and accepted by those authorising the expenditure should the project commence.

Producing a business case gives stakeholders an opportunity to comment on the likely value of the project and allows problems to be anticipated at the start.

Defining the project

The difference between a task and a project lies in how it is defined. Almost any task can become a project by writing down what, when and why things should be done.

A clear definition can be the most important factor in determining the success or failure of a project. The time to do this is before anything has happened. This may seem obvious; however, many projects suffer because the requirements were not clearly stated at the start. Even with smaller projects,

where normal project management controls may not seem relevant, it is still essential to define the project before you begin.

A business case should, at the very least, include: the project title; the sponsor; the project's value and opportunity; a set of 'SMART' (Specific, Measurable, Action-oriented, Realistic, Time-related) objectives, each followed by a simple, plain English justification; a list of stakeholders; the assumptions being made; the consequences or risks of undertaking the project; the implications and/or risks of not doing the project, and the resources that will be required. The business case should also include, as enclosures, a high level map of the current processes being used and the project plan, showing milestones.

The above will apply to all projects. However, certain projects will require more specific justification. For example, if a new product is to be introduced, market analysis, income projections, promotional costs, etc., will all need to be included.

The process

1. Establish the views of stakeholders and managers, so that the purpose of the project is clear.
2. Write down those views in simple terms and modify them until you can agree a statement or 'purpose' for the project that meets everyone's requirements.
3. Develop a set of objectives that are 'SMART', i.e.:

Specific: not capable of misinterpretation;

Measurable: possible to tell if they have been achieved or not;

Action-oriented: probably ending with 'in order to achieve...';

Realistic: achievable using the available resources;

Time related: with a target date for completion.

Finish each SMART objective with 'in order to-...' followed by a plain English justification drawn from the statement in (2) above.

When the business case is completed and you have satisfied yourself (and where necessary others) that the project is justified, produce the more formal project initiation document – often referred to as a PID. This is the document

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that will be formally approved by the project board. Each revision of the PID should be numbered and dated. The example on the opposite page shows the

types of headings that should be included in the PID.

Project Business Case	
Project title:	
Sponsor:	
	Decision: Has the case been made? Y/N
Value and Opportunity	
.....	
S.M.A.R.T. objectives	
in order to	
(write a simple, plain English	
justification for each objective)	
.....	
Stakeholders and method of	
engagement	
.....	
Assumptions made	
.....	
Consequences/risks of undertaking	
the project	
.....	
Implications/risks of not doing the	
project	
.....	
Resource requirements	
.....	
<hr/>	
Enclosures:	
• The high level process map	
• The project plan showing milestones	

Template for a Project Business Case document

2. Project Organisation

At the start of a project, you will need to consider the roles and responsibilities that will be required of people for the project to be completed successfully. You will probably need:

The Project Executive or Sponsor who is responsible for the realisation of the benefits of the project and who can represent the project at meetings of senior officers or members. If decisions are being made which may affect the project, it is vital to have someone there.

The Project Board who will provide overall guidance to the project. The board's responsibilities include reviewing and approving all project documentation and products. They will also appoint the **project manager** and, for larger projects, the **stage managers**.

The board should be chaired by the project executive who, being a senior officer with the authority to allocate resources and make decisions, should also have influence with other senior colleagues. The chair should be supported by a **key user**, representing the stakeholders, and by a **key supplier**, representing providers of technical or

professional services from within or outside the organisation. It may be necessary to exclude the key supplier from bidding for or assessing contracts resulting from the project.

The Project Manager is responsible for ensuring that the project achieves the required products, to the agreed standards of quality and within specified constraints of time and cost. The project manager should agree standards with the project board and prepare the project plans. It is also important that the project manager liaises with the managers of any related projects to identify common areas or conflicts. The project manager should be supported by a member of the Project Assurance Team (PAT) who also has the responsibility to report any possible delays to the project sponsor. This member of the PAT is invaluable to ensure that the project does not become too dependent on a single officer such as the project manager. The formal nature of this reporting role also means the reporting officer can sometimes get the message across that more resources are needed when no-one is listening to the

pleas of the project manager. The role requires tact and diplomacy.

Stage Managers can be appointed where a project has a number of stages and it is appropriate to identify additional people to manage these.

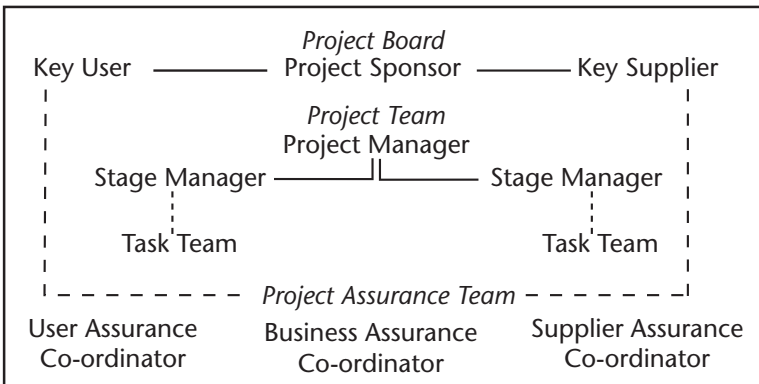
Task Teams are the people who, under the direction of the project manager or specific stage managers, do the detailed project work. They should be encouraged to participate as much as possible in the planning of their activities.

Quality Reviewers should be identified at the start of the project. Their purpose is to review all documentation, plans and products against predetermined quality criteria. They may usefully be brought in from outside the organisation when they have special knowledge.

Project Assurance Teams (PAT) can be invaluable in ensuring continuity within a project. A **business assurance coordinator**

can administer the project, document meetings and monitor plans. A **supplier assurance coordinator** may also be needed to prepare technical plans and ensure that technical plans are matched to resources. Finally, a user assurance coordinator can represent the interests of stakeholders and coordinate users' assessments of the project work.

It may not be necessary to fill every role we have mentioned. Each project will be different and who you need will depend on a number of factors including scope, available resources and timescale.



3. Project Planning

Project planning delivers the responsibility to produce a defined result – or ‘product’ – by an agreed date and time, within the available resources and with the necessary actions broken down into clear, manageable steps. It is a team activity, led by the project manager who is supported by stage managers, the project assurance team and other stakeholders. It translates the PID into a practical plan.

Product description

Identify the product(s) of your proposed project, clarifying the following:

- the purpose;
- the derivation;
- the composition;
- the standards;
- the quality review criteria
- configuration management opportunities.

Steps in planning

- **Do not start the project until the project board has approved the project plan.**
- **Identify the product and develop product descriptions. Each stage of the project should have its own definable output (its own product). These are the ‘milestones’ of the project. Products are the results of the project activities and must be tangible, visible things that can be shared with others. The final stage involves matching the project outputs against agreed quality specifications.**
- **Establish the relationships or order between products – this is known as the ‘product flow’ and can be drawn as a simple diagram or flow chart.**
- **Identify the work to be done – the activities, which come from defining what will be delivered during a stage.**
- **Estimate the resources required and the likely duration of each stage’s activities.**
- **Identify and define the control points, that is, the meetings at which products can be signed off as acceptable.**
- **Ensure that project plans are always reviewed by the quality review team to identify any areas of weakness.**

The format of plans

Plans are used for communication, for monitoring and coordination. It is important that project plans are clear and succinct. They should provide:

- a brief description of the project to explain its purpose and scope;
- a graphical summary, showing the sequence of events and how resources will be used;
- a list of the main assumptions or prerequisites, and any external factors that may affect the project;
- an analysis of the risk that the project may not be completed as planned, and the consequences.

Tolerance

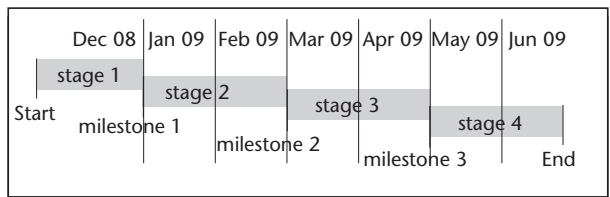
Not everything will go to plan. You will need to agree what are acceptable variations in time and cost for the overall project and for each stage. This will allow stage managers some flexibility within the plan. Stages which are likely to drift outside agreed tolerances should prompt the appropriate control process and possibly an exceptional meeting of the project board.

Planning tools

There are a number of tools that can be used to plan and control a project. Two that are commonly used are Gantt charts and Critical Path Analysis charts. These are useful analytical tools but, in practice, they often serve only as presentation tools in the early stages of a project and are not subsequently updated.

These tools are summarised here and more information can be found in the recommended texts or from software suppliers.

Gantt Charts show time marked out in columns across the chart, with individual tasks represented by bars or arrows. The length and positions of the tasks show the start date and duration of the tasks.



Simple Gantt chart

Critical Path Analysis is a method used to analyse a complex project. It helps to calculate the minimum length of time in which the project can be completed, and which activities should be prioritised to complete it by that date.

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The essential concept behind Critical Path Analysis is that some activities in the plan will depend on other activities being completed first. For example, you should not start building a bridge before you have designed it.

Other activities are not dependent on the completion of any other tasks, or may be done at any time before or after a particular stage is reached. Using our bridge example again, the frame of the bridge can be painted in the factory or in position; the white lines in the roadway, on the other hand, are dependent on the tarmac being laid first.

The Critical Path is the longest sequence of dependent activities that lead to the completion of the plan. Any delay of a stage in the critical path will delay the completion of the whole plan unless future sequential activities are speeded up.

Critical Path Analysis is a useful method for assessing:

- the tasks which must be carried out
- where in the project plan non-dependent activities can be carried out
- the shortest time in which a project can be completed
- the resources needed to achieve a project
- the sequence of activities, scheduling and timings involved
- task priorities.

4. Project Controls

The purpose of project control is to make sure that the project is carried out on time and within the agreed resources. Control can be exercised by comparing what you have actually done against what you planned to do. The aim is to detect problems as early as possible, initiate corrective action and produce products that meet an agreed standard of quality.

The key controls will be project initiation, checkpoint meetings, change control and document control.

Features of controls

- Controls should include a formal process to establish the status of the project, by comparing the actual situation against what was planned.
- An analysis of current or expected problems should be undertaken, so decisions on any corrective action can be made as early as possible.
- The outcome of the process should be reported to the project board.

Project initiation

Begin the control process before the project gets under way by ensuring that you get authorisation for the project to proceed. Get agreement on the formal project brief and approval for all project plans. This should be done at the project initiation meeting held with the project board.

Checkpoint meetings

At agreed intervals – which should be built into the plan – ‘checkpoint’ meetings need to be held by the project managers or stage managers to review actual progress against the plan.

From these meetings ‘highlight reports’ should be prepared and presented to the project board, showing the project status, resources used, achievements so far, and any problems forecast for the next stage.

Change control

All changes to the project definition or plan must be formally agreed by the project board. A process for this needs to be agreed at the start of the project. Also, it is important to put in place a system to keep track of different versions of the products and of important documents.

Project files

Managing the documentation associated with a project is very important. Experience suggests that project documents need to be organised into at least the following types: management, technical and quality files.

The management file includes the project definition and all planning and control information;

The technical file includes all documents relating to products;

The quality file includes the originals of all quality criteria as well as quality review, error and follow-up documents.

Project closure or handover

It is important to close the project, or your involvement in it, with a handover of responsibilities and documented acceptance of deliverables. Handover does not mean just giving your replacement officer a file as you leave for pastures new. The style should be similar to climbers handing over responsibility for taking the strain of a rope or a parent handing over responsibility for a child in a busy store. 'You take over'... 'I have taken over'. i.e. the project must be formally received by the new officer and responsibility acknowledged.

5. Quality Review

Quality review is a simple and effective technique to control the quality of all the products of the project. It is also an invaluable process for assuring that project plans and other documents meet agreed local standards. The project manager will take the primary responsibility for the quality of products but involving an external 'expert' can provide a fresh pair of eyes to enhance quality specification and review.

Quality review consists of a formal meeting to inspect the products and examine them against a predefined set of criteria (composition) and to identify any actions that may be needed to improve their quality. Properly chaired and managed, the meeting can involve any suitably experienced users or stakeholders.

To set up a quality review team:

- Select reviewers to represent interested parties such as users and specialists.
- Keep the team small.
- Appoint a chairperson with the skills to ensure that meetings achieve their

objectives and that any points raised at the review are included in a list of follow-up actions.

- Appoint a presenter from the project team to explain at the quality review meeting the background and purpose of the product. The presenter may also be able to answer questions and take any follow up actions back to the project team. *The role of presenter may be viewed as a useful communication channel between the producers of products and the users, and should not be underestimated.*
- The project assurance team (PAT) should provide administrative support to the quality review process.

The quality review process

The process can be managed as follows:

1. Prior to the meeting, the quality review team needs to be provided with the product, the product description and the composition of quality criteria or specifications to be met.
2. Each person involved in the review should study the information or product independently and complete their own list of 'quality review errors'.
3. At the formal meeting, the quality review team members, and the presenter from the project team, will systematically work through any errors and ensure that the need for follow-up action is noted.
4. Following the meeting, the presenter will evaluate, discuss and, if necessary, correct any errors.
5. A formal 'signing-off' for the product must be obtained from a nominated member of the quality review team. The product can only be considered complete and 'signed off' when it has passed quality review and there are no outstanding actions..

6. Benefits Realisation

Benefit realisation must be anticipated by the project sponsor at the beginning of the project. Formally constructed SMART objectives should have clarified the purpose of the initiative in terms of both quality of products and eventual benefits and outcomes. A post implementation review should also take place after the completion of the project as an integral part of the control of a project. The purpose of such an exercise is:

- to check that the implementation has met the desired project outcomes;
- to check that the products or benefits meet users needs; and
- to make improvements in future initiatives both in the way we do things and perhaps to further stretch the desired outcomes.

The project manager and the project team are probably the least appropriate people to undertake the exercise. Being so close to the project they will be aware of every problem or failure within the project and this can cloud the evaluation of success. Better practice is to involve someone who has not had close

involvement in the project, or users or external auditors.

Inevitably, everything will not always go exactly to plan. Product specifications or quality criteria may change during the project. It is important that these changes are documented and taken into account when establishing the true benefit of the project.

As part of the benefits realisation exercise it is also worth noting any lessons learned from the project. These can be put to good use in the planning of future projects.

It is worthwhile including the benefits realisation exercise as a commitment within the overall project plan. The scheduling of this exercise will however, vary depending on the project and the timescales for implementation.

Checklists

1. Business Case and Project Definition Checklist

- Does the business case support the commencement of the project?
- Does the business case take into account the likely consequences of action (or inaction)?
- Has the business case been tested on key stakeholders?
- Do the objectives state how they will benefit the users of the products?
- Is it clear who will do what?
- Are all the objectives measurable?
- Are you satisfied that all the main objectives have been identified?

2. Project Organisation Checklist

- Does the Project Sponsor / Project Executive have the authority to make all decisions on the project and allocate resources?
- Does the organisation have the necessary in-house skills and experience appropriate for the scale and complexity of the project?
- Have suitably qualified and experienced quality reviewers been identified?
- Have the possibilities for creating an internal Project Assurance Team been investigated?

3. Project Plan Checklist

- Have all the deliverables of the project (milestones and outputs) been defined, with product descriptions which include how quality is to be measured?
- Does the plan identify the critical path of activities which must start and end on specific dates?
- Has a risk analysis been carried out and included in the plan?
- Is it possible for someone who is unfamiliar with the plan to understand quickly the purpose, range and scope of the project?
- Have realistic tolerances been agreed and documented for each stage of the project?

4. Project Controls Checklist

- Have checkpoint meetings been built in to the project plan?
- Will the control points in the project enable any problems to be detected early enough?
- Has the Project Initiation process followed agreed standards?
- Is there an effective method of change control for all products of the project?
- Have arrangements been agreed for handover of responsibilities and deliverables when an officer changes or at the end of the project?

5. Quality Review Checklist

- Have the quality criteria for the project been documented and agreed by the Project Board?
- Have a range of appropriate reviewers been identified for all the products of the project and any documents such as plans?
- Have suitable 'presenters' been identified from the project for all products?
- Have you built time into your project plan to allow errors or defects to be sorted out?
- Have 'template' documents been developed for use as error and follow up lists?

6. Review and Benefits Realisation Checklist

- Has the final project budget been accepted?
- Have all the products been completed and formally agreed by the Project Board?
- Have the proposed benefits been clearly articulated allowing formal review?
- Has the organisation learned any lessons which will improve future projects?

For further advice and information on project management, please contact the Office for Public Management, 252B Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8JT

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Notes

