

Our Approach to Project Management - Ensuring Projects Deliver

PROJECT MANGEMENT NEEDS:

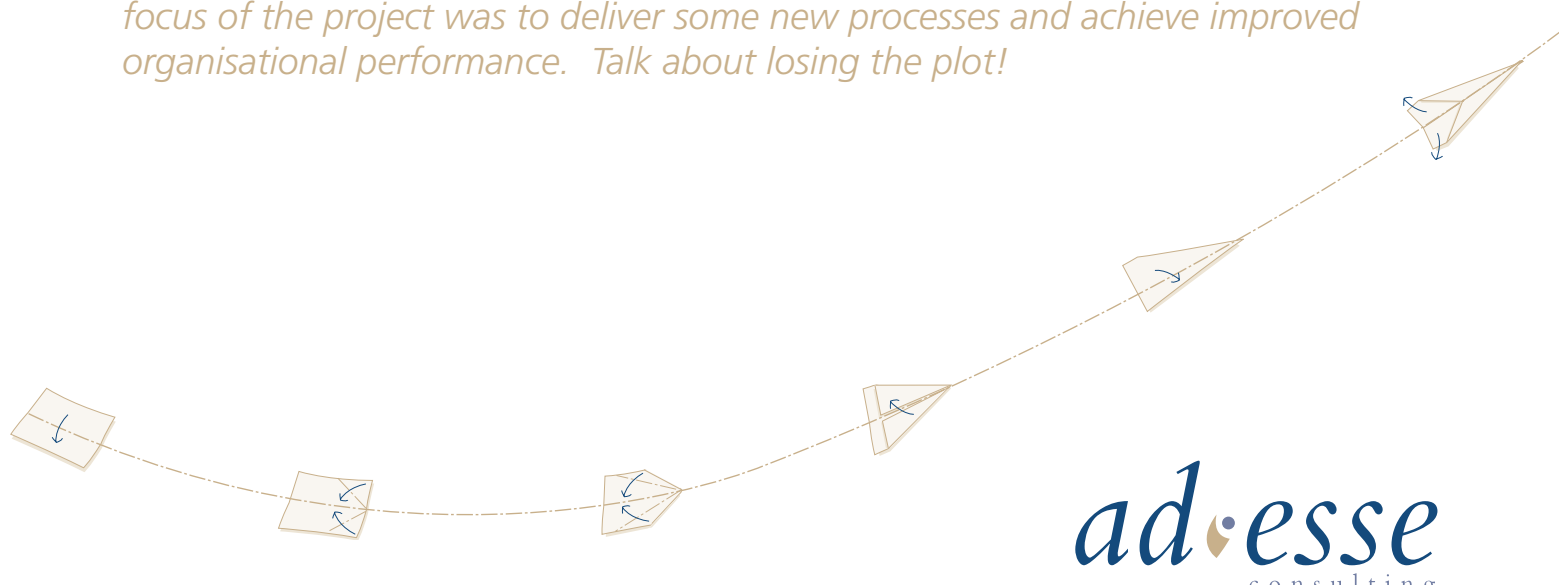
As consultants, we've been providing project support to a wide range of public and private sector clients for many years, and this has included:

- Training and coaching for those involved in leading, or sponsoring, projects
- Team member training
- Facilitation of project teams (e.g. working alongside Project Managers and teams)
- Acting as Project Managers for client projects
- Designing bespoke Project Management processes and resources to meet particular client needs

The majority of our clients have needed simple, but effective, project management tools and techniques and we have developed a 5 Stage Project Approach to meet those needs. We are also happy to work with any existing project management methodologies that clients may be using. If you need a more "heavy duty" approach for large-scale projects we can provide PRINCE2 support.

There is often a lot of hype and mystique associated with projects. It can become a secret language that is only understood by "project professionals". All too often, for these people, the methodology becomes more important than delivering any benefits.

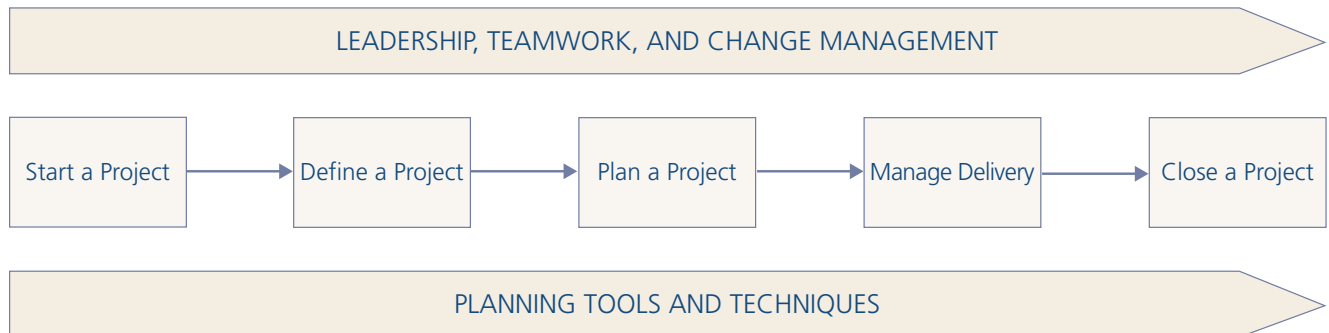
I was shown part of a Project Initiation Document recently where the main deliverable was identified as being "A Project Plan". In some projects this might be reasonable (produce a plan for doing something else), but in this case the main focus of the project was to deliver some new processes and achieve improved organisational performance. Talk about losing the plot!



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OUR APPROACH

We have a 5 Stage Project Approach which can be tailored to meet a variety of project needs:



The key elements of this approach are summarised in the Table below.

| PROJECT STAGES | COMPONENTS |
|-----------------------|--|
| STARTING UP A PROJECT | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ What is a project? ■ The Quality, Cost, Time relationship ■ Project structures and key roles ■ Capturing project ideas into a “do-able” format ■ “Go/No-Go” Gates |
| DEFINING A PROJECT | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Writing effective descriptions of objectives, deliverables and scope ■ Identifying critical milestones and reporting points ■ Assessing stakeholder requirements and influences ■ Assessing risks ■ Forming a project team |
| PLANNING A PROJECT | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Establishing the work packages ■ Developing a timed plan, with dependencies ■ Associating budgets with time plans ■ Setting up change controls ■ Establishing communication and reporting systems ■ Establishing requirements with Procurement and Contractors (inc. negotiation) |
| MANAGING DELIVERY | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Monitoring implementation (against Q, C, T requirements) ■ Managing changes ■ Dealing with problems ■ Managing contractual relationships (inc. feedback, influence and persuasion) ■ Reporting progress |
| CLOSING A PROJECT | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Handing over the final outputs ■ Confirming achievement of objectives (with stakeholders) ■ Managing contract completion (final reviews) ■ Reviewing the project and identifying learning points |

We emphasise the importance of Leadership, Teamwork and Change Management being embedded throughout the project lifecycle. They should not be “bolt-ons”.

We also believe that a “fit for purpose” approach should be taken to the choice and use of tools and techniques. There are some projects where a simple “To Do List” would be a suitable plan, and in other cases, Critical Path Analysis would be required. There is no “one size fits all” set of tools.

MAKING IT SIMPLE

Understanding the basic terminology of project management is critical. Time after time, we meet people who don’t know the difference between “Deliverables” and “Objectives”. You might want to substitute your own particular brand of jargon (e.g. Outputs and Outcomes), but we’re talking about:

- Do you know what the project has to produce (deliver)?
- Do you know what **measurable** performance improvement the project must achieve (objective)?

All projects have deliverables, but not all necessarily aim to achieve performance improvements. For example, you may have a scoping project which simply comes up with a set of recommendations for some new technology to be used. However, I would fully expect those recommendations to state the performance improvement that should be achieved and how that would be measured once the technology is implemented.

The majority of our work in supporting clients’ projects is focussed on achieving some level of performance improvement. And, most of these projects can be scoped out on one side of A4 paper (or at most, two if you really push me!). We try to keep it simple:

- *What’s the problem you’re trying to solve?*
- *What’s the measurable improvement you’re trying to achieve?*
- *What must the project deliver?*
- *Who is going to sponsor the project?*
- *Who will lead it and who will be on the team?*
- *What are the main steps in the project and when must they be completed?*
- *What resources are available, or allocated?*
- *Are there any particular constraints the team needs to be aware of?*

If you can’t answer these basic questions, you really shouldn’t be setting up a project at all. All the other “good stuff” like Stakeholder Analysis and Risk Analysis can be worked out as part of the overall project planning (our Stage 2: Define the Project, above).

THE BENEFITS

The main benefits are time savings and focus.

Using our approach, we've had clients say that they have made more progress defining a project in two hours spent with us, than they had achieved in weeks of previous discussion and confusion.

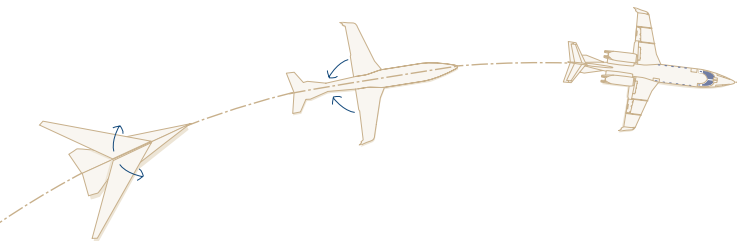
The approach also challenges those people who "dream up" projects to clarify what they expect the projects to achieve. One organisation was able to filter out a whole raft of "projects" that simply could not be expressed in a format with clear deliverables and objectives. The time and frustration this avoided was immense.

A further benefit is the ability to get agreement from senior managers right at the start of a project as to what they want and what they are prepared to resource. They are forced to confront the resourcing implications of their request to "set up a project" and confirm what it is that they actually want the project team to do. Senior managers can cope with one side of A4!

Finally, because we work hard to keep the project approach practical, it is easy to tailor it to an individual client's needs and to include only those tools that are likely to be relevant to their business and their projects.

*"Planning is an unnatural process...
It is much more fun to do something, and the nicest thing
about not planning is that failure comes as a complete surprise,
rather than being preceded by a period of worry and depression."*

Sir John Harvey-Jones



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