

Objectives Vs. Deliverables

DO YOU KNOW YOUR OBJECTIVES FROM YOUR DELIVERABLES?

We had a really interesting discussion recently with some senior managers from an organisation that has responsibility for managing some of the biggest construction projects in Europe. One manager said, something along the lines of "If you asked 20 managers involved in the XYZ Project what its objective was, you'd probably get 20 different answers". Interestingly, most of those answers would actually be about deliverables, not objectives. They'd tell you they were building a "new, bigger, better ABC facility".

So often, when people think about the projects they are involved in, they muddle their deliverables and their objectives.

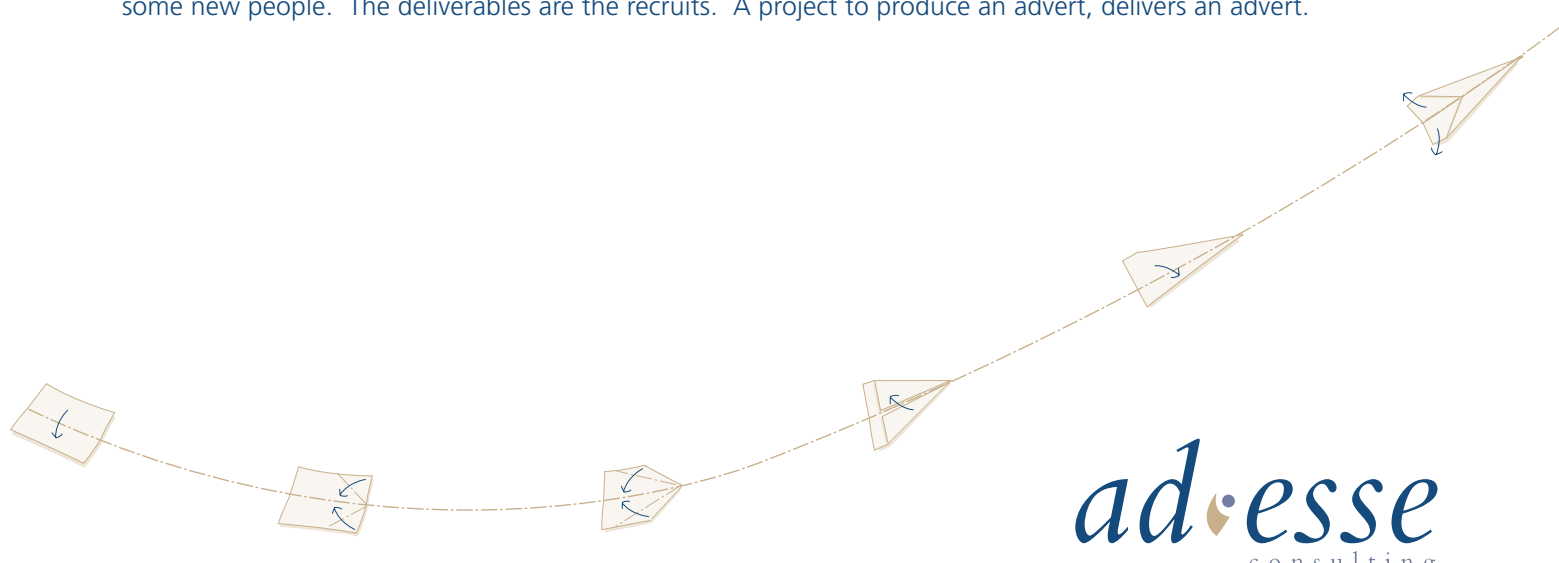
If you think you know the difference, or just want to remind yourself about why it might be important, read on...

Let's start with some definitions.

Projects produce DELIVERABLES (sometimes called Products, or Outputs). In other words, what pops out of the end of a project is a Deliverable.

Project Example	Deliverable
Eurofighter/Typhoon	An aeroplane
New Wembley Stadium	A Stadium
London Cross-Rail	A railway line, in a tunnel

As you can see, Deliverables can usually be seen, touched, or moved about. If you can get your hands on it, it's probably a Deliverable from some project. At a more organisational level, you might have a project to recruit some new people. The deliverables are the recruits. A project to produce an advert, delivers an advert.



Now, the important thing is, Deliverables are only produced (or should only be produced) because there is a project that is trying to achieve some performance improvement for the organisation (often actually for a Sponsor, or key Stakeholder representing the organisation).

That's where Objectives fit in.

An OBJECTIVE is a level of performance, or achievement. Objectives imply quantification of performance.

In the recruitment project example, the objectives may be to:

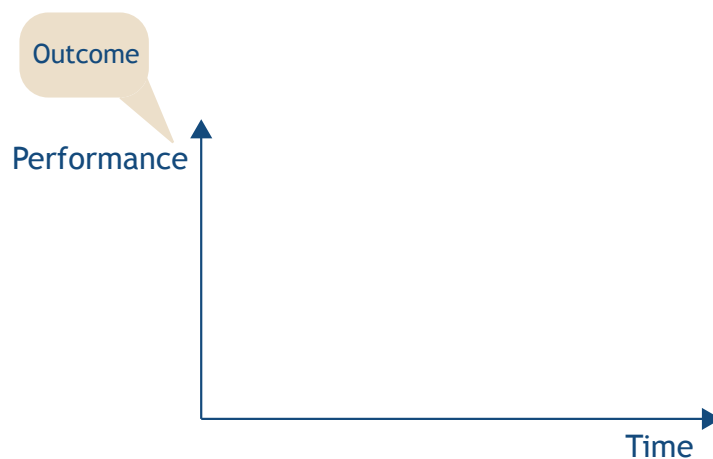
- increase capacity to perform particular tasks
- add new levels of skills and capabilities, to sell more products or services
- reduce customers' waiting time at the point of sale

In our Advertising example it is even easier to identify the objective(s). They may be to:

- generate an additional volume of sales
- create more, new customers
- raise awareness of our brand in the marketplace, or in a particular sector

In both these cases, it's more important to know what the Objectives are, than to start by defining Deliverables. So, saying you have a project to produce an Advert, or to recruit some more people, potentially misses the point.

Because they're about performance levels, you can't get your hands on an Objective! But, you can draw it on a graph.



You can express Objectives, quantitatively, on a Line Graph, showing how performance changes, over time. And, if you're really serious about continuous improvement, you'll also be showing target performance levels and relevant benchmark comparators on your trend graphs.

So, if you can draw it on a graph, it's probably an Objective. If you can touch it, it's probably a Deliverable.

OBJECTIVES COME FIRST

It need not be much more complicated than we've just described. Projects should only exist because there is a need to achieve, or change, a level of performance. In order to do that, one or more, deliverables will no doubt be required.

Deliverables are not an end in themselves. They are the physical outputs that enable the Objectives to be achieved.

Objectives come first. They should be expressed quantitatively, wherever possible; e.g.:

- to grow sales by 15%, by the end of the year
- to reduce customer waiting time to less than 2 minutes, by the end of June
- to double our capacity to deliver XYZ widgets, by January 1st

There are more clues that it's an Objective:

- it's likely to start with "To..."
- it contains words like "increase", "decrease", "reduce"
- it has a number, defining a desired level of performance
- it has an end date
- it doesn't have words like "optimise", "maximise", "minimise", or "ongoing"

If you start with Objectives, you can then decide what Deliverables will be required in order to help achieve each objective.

DOES IT MATTER?

Why do you need to know the difference?

Well, if you are trying to improve your organisation's performance, you need to be able to describe the Objectives you want to achieve (or have to achieve if a Stakeholder such as the Government is driving you). You need to be able to express these quantitatively, so you can track progress over time. Then, and only then, you can decide what Deliverables you will need that will enable the Objective to be achieved.

Anyone who says the objective of their project is to produce an XYZ, or to create a new ABC, should be challenged. Project Sponsors should not be accepting Project Proposals and Initiation Documents where the objective is to produce a deliverable. You need to ask what performance will change as a result of carrying out the project. Ideally, you want to know what Line Graph they will show you at the end of the project to demonstrate a change (improvement, presumably!) in performance.

If you start a project by defining the Deliverables, you risk producing things that don't give you the performance changes you need. You may indeed produce lots of "things", some more useful than others. You will also be likely to consume resources (time and money) that might have been better spent on other Deliverables that would actually enable you to achieve your Objectives.

TEST YOURSELF...

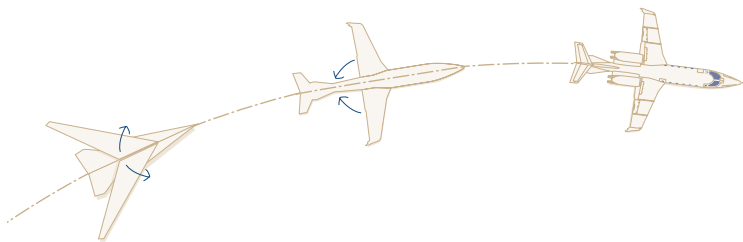
Each of these is either an Objective (maybe not very well written) or a Deliverable. Which is which?

- Reduce customer complaints
- A training programme
- Save time
- Reduce errors
- Software installed
- Eliminated delays
- New operating procedures
- Re-designed Appraisal Forms
- CD-ROM User Guide
- Reduce cost per hour by 15%

CONTACT US

If you want to discuss how to improve the start-up and definition of your projects, whatever their size, give us a call on 0870 458 6162, or e-mail us at seriousfun@ad-esse.com

You'll also find more articles about our approach to Project Management on our website: www.ad-esse.com



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