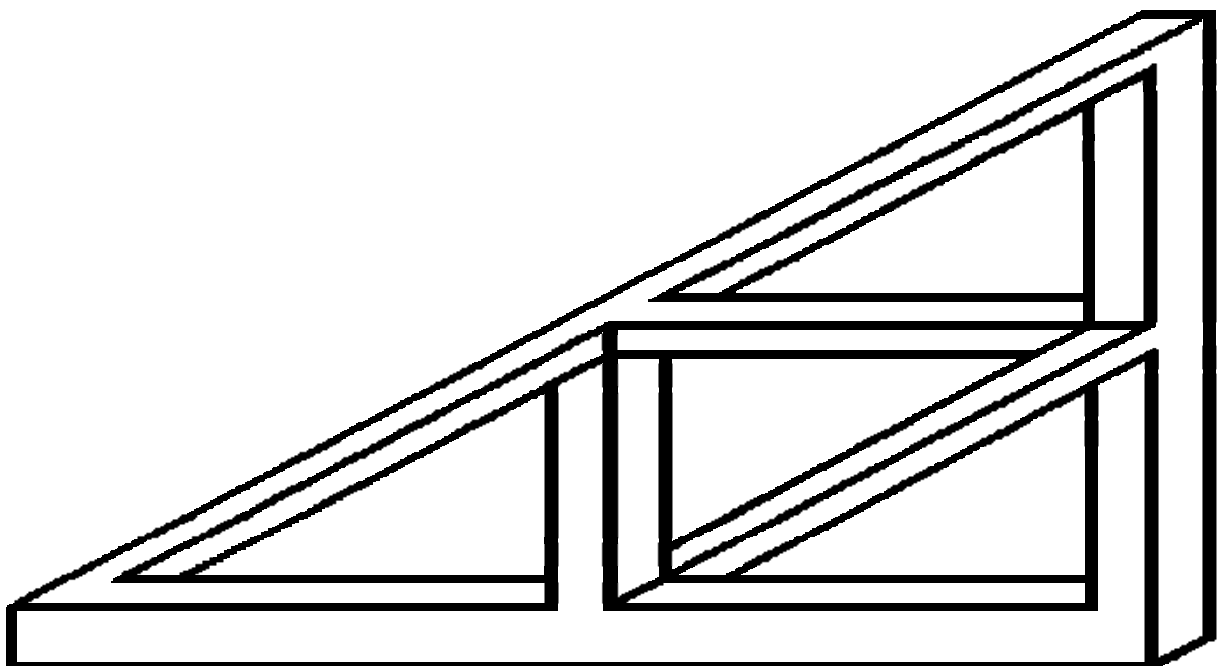


Simon's Observations on Projects – SOOP: Common Sense For Complex Projects



Who we Are

Simon has gained his experience within technically complex, large-scale blue-chip environments across finance and banking, defence, oil & gas, government, and the “big 4” management consultancies.

Simon spent 11 years at the London Stock Exchange, where he was well trained in formal methods for data-processing. During that time he became an early adopter of Unix based technologies in a commercial environment. Since leaving the Stock Exchange in 1990 Simon has run a consultancy business mixing training, mentoring and consulting assignments.

Simon's consulting assignments have included set-up of programme offices for £100m programmes, Rationalisation of Mid-Range Service Delivery in a retail bank, Reorganisation of the management structures in a 6bn usd GE-Capital subsidiary, implementing an

IT Governance framework using ISACA's CobiT™ Vn 4.1 for a UN agency and subsequently a review of the governance of its core information dissemination practices.

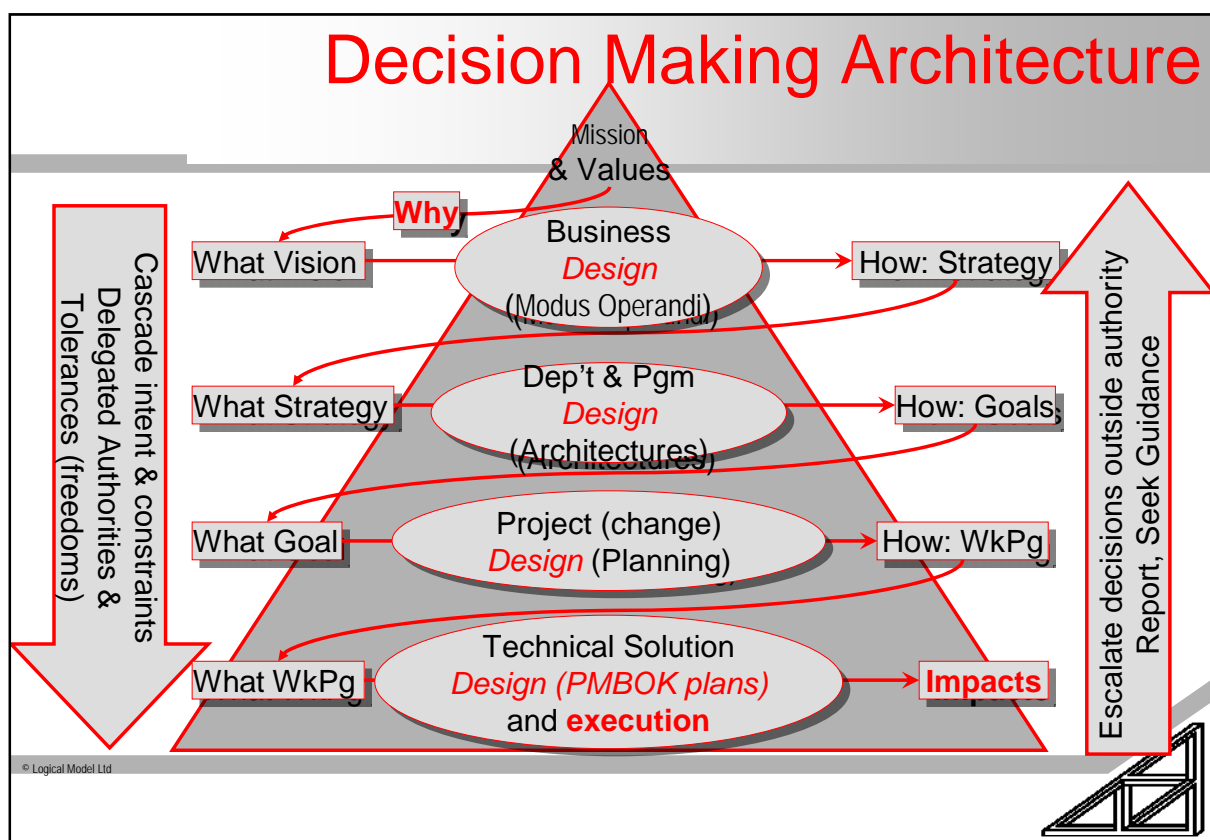
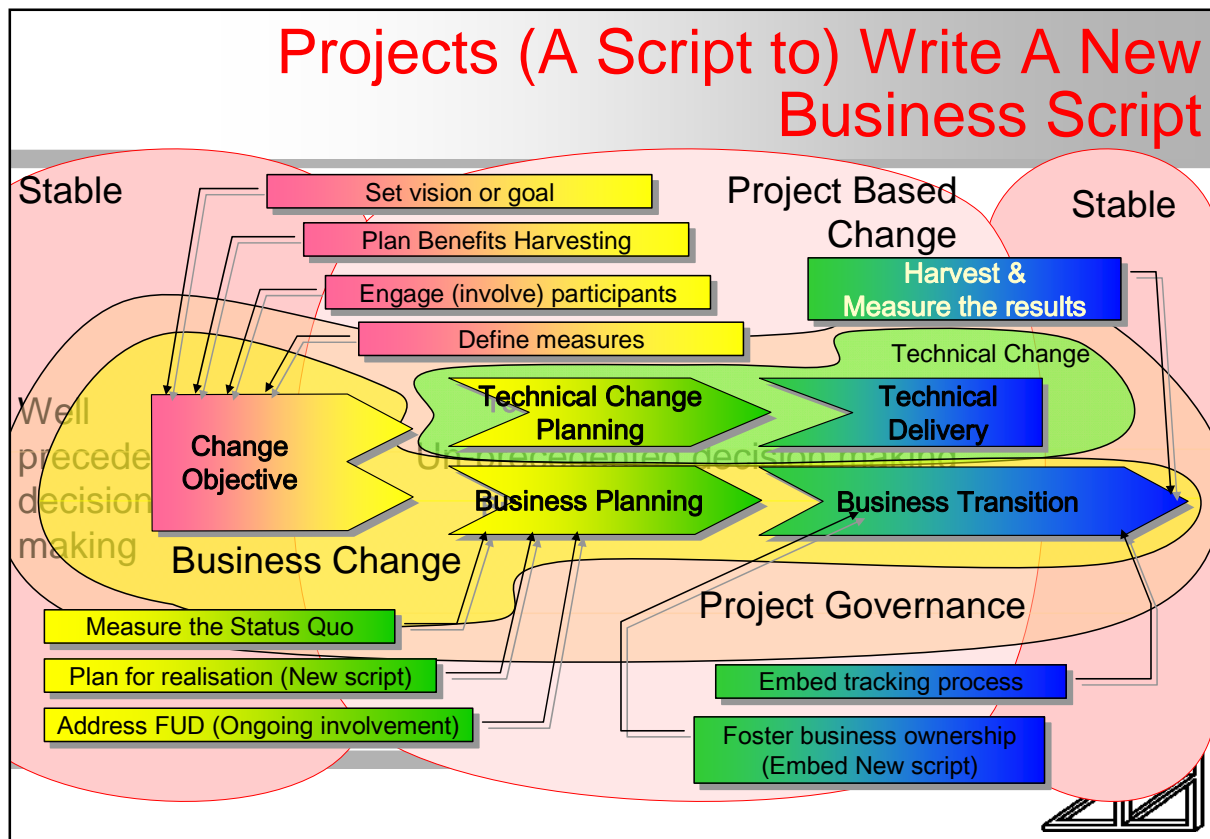


Simon's PM training covers the full spectrum of project management disciplines, tools and techniques from establishing an initial basic structured approach up to topics such as Leading Complex Projects, and Performing Project Recovery. Simon's training activities include a period as a PRINCE2™ examiner (and current authorisation to train in and administer the exams) Simon is PMP qualified and delivers APM exam training programmes.

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Logical Model Ltd's Services, Courses and Contact Details



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First identify the problem: The Problem is People

People

Problems with projects are deeply rooted in people, so too are the solutions. My observations start with the earth at that stage where it is a spinning ball of hot rock devoid of oxygen.

Some time later, but still lots of millions of years ago the elemental forces of nature that today shape markets had created oceans containing so much bacteria manufacturing so much oxygen that those bacteria poisoned themselves (after 300 million years of flourishing).

If they had had newspapers and sentience they may have recognised the onset of their own equivalent to 'global warming'.

Somewhere in the ensuing years came dinosaurs from whom we inherit a primitive brain stem but eventually "us" with our tribal, social programming.

Adaptation

Amongst the many fascinating illustrations of how the world has changed and the

bacteria have given way to the human is the story of the coyote.

The World Does Not Run to Man's Plans

The coyote and the corporation are both agents within ultimately the same Complex Adaptive System (CAS).



To understand projects requires understanding of complex adaptive systems.

Returning to the coyote: less than 200 years ago the coyote was a small, dumb dog with a limited footprint in North America. Following years of persecution by farmers whose aim was to eradicate them the (surviving) coyotes are (apparently) now bigger, stronger, smarter and able to claim residency in 50 of the 52 state of the USA.

Unintended Consequences

Every plan generates unintended consequences - every project needs the mechanisms to detect them, to exploit the positive and eliminate the negative side effects.

The mechanisms that shaped the Earth's population so profoundly over the last half-billion years are still in play. In play in

*While you read this
you were breathing.
A capability provided
by part of your brain
inherited from
reptiles.*

Those who think education is expensive have not accounted what they pay for ignorance.

Attendees after a training course need opportunity to practice skills 'back@work', a manager who understands that new ways take practice to be performed well, and a source of support to ask questions of and seek advice from.

our projects today! To ignore the elemental forces when formulating hypothesis that may explain how to make projects succeed is at best missing an opportunity, at worst it subjects any set of ideas to fatal flaw.

So Much Published 'Expertise'

Witness the Project Management Body of Knowledge, and PProjects In Controlled Environments (PRINCE2™): so much defined process yet globally project performance is most often less than expected.

In a normally distributed, Gaussian world there must be as many early projects as late ones. There aren't, so something more than PMBOK and PRINCE2's prescription must be in play. Something for which defined process models are necessary (maybe) but insufficient (definitely).

Project Require More Than Process

Something more is in play - peoples psychology in estimating, in quality, in teams, in group decision making, in corporate politics, in disconnection between strategic direction, tactical project actions, empowerment and blame-cultures.

Complex Adaptive System dynamics are operating within the mechanics of schedule dependencies, earned value, quality management and oh so much more:

The Reptilian (and Higher Order) Brains Run Your Project

While you read the previous paragraphs you were breathing. An action carried out by that part of your brain largely shared

with reptiles, and certainly not the result of thinking "in-breath, out-breath, in-..."

Next time you say something in a project context of which you are less than entirely certain try not to touch your nose. It is possible (as a result of thinking about it), it is not necessarily easy. Next time someone tells you they agree with you listen to their phrasing. Is it "I see what you mean", "I hear what you say", "We're headed in the same direction"? Their words reveal their world view and their preferred communications mode.

People pursue project for profit

Projects are the creation of people; people the creation of elemental forces. Those forces have given us all one programmed imperative: to proliferate our genes. As a result two universal truths have driven behaviours since at least the dinosaurs' time if not before: the world is driven by sex and death.

Their manifestation in the business world maybe by metaphors such as personal promotion, profit or increased share-price, a nicer car in the garage, more leisure time and sleeping more soundly at night. These drivers (some analysed & described by Abraham Maslow) are there in our tribal behaviours as we *form & storm* through Brian (Bruce?) Tuckman's model of forging teams, embrace goals and seek recognition for a job well done.

Running Projects

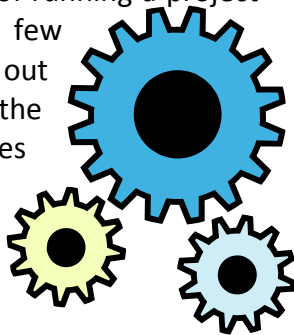
To run a project successfully requires command of tools, for example the family of breakdown structures with which we express scope.

Identifying the causes of project challenge is a long step towards taking corrective actions - Our training & consulting activities show you how to add insight and opportunity to your project plans & actions.

Appreciation of the elemental forces of evolution, appreciation of human group behaviour and motivation should make clear that collaborative activity to define project scope is one place where project success is promoted. Techniques for creating breakdown structures, when correctly employed harness tribal instincts to the good of our projects.

Simple Mechanics

In fact the mechanics of running a project are so simple that a few short paragraphs set out the recipe in full. Yet the whole of our services catalogue is insufficient to fully cover everything needed in every context.



Projects Under the Microscope

A benefits management initiative starts with an idea. The idea germinates in the mind of a person who sees opportunity to pursue or a problem to overcome. In many contexts the idea competes with other ideas for allocation of resources (like the coyote?).

Means such as NPV, IRR or strategic fit vie with politics & power-broking, stakeholder whims and serendipity. When the idea is selected effort is expended to define scope. Often by establishing goals and deliverables, or "Project End-Point" (benefits start point!) perhaps measured by KPIs, CSFs and KGIs used during Benefits Realisation.

[Note: we've no intention of expanding and explaining the alphabet soup here but our knowledge transfer activities do]

We test: the deliverables meet the goal, can resolve (totally?) the problem or

satisfy the need of the (sufficiently significant?) stakeholders.

After Deliverables Define Tasks

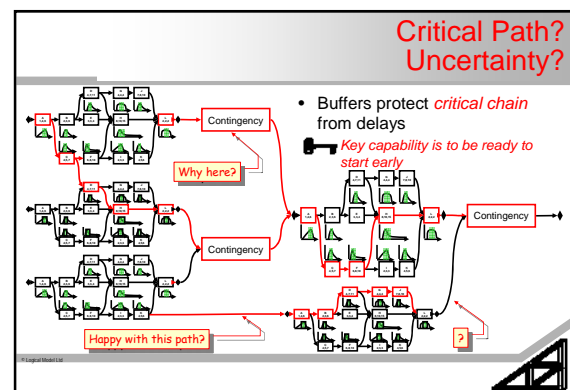
Once deliverables are defined the tasks to create them and the time taken, skills needed and resources consumed can be calculated, plotted and requested.

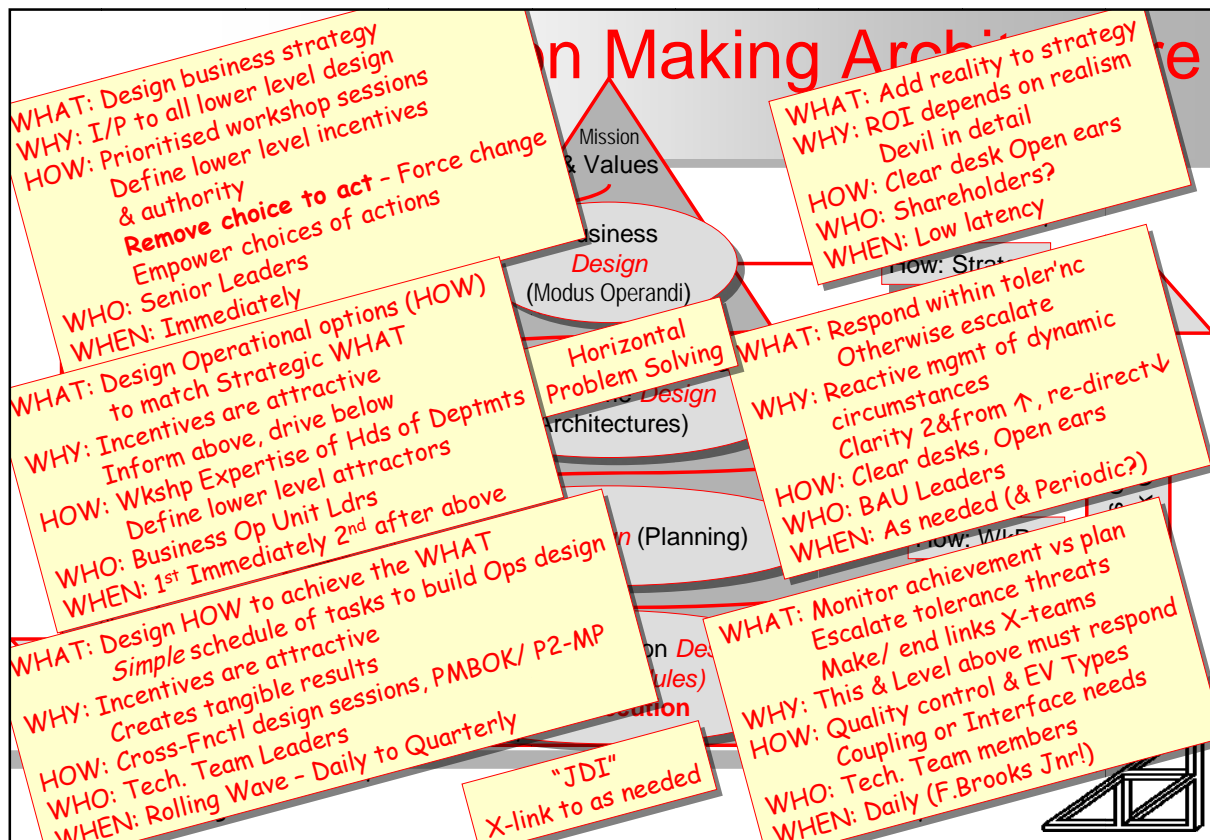
All such requests will (should) include allowance for uncertainty, allowance for change of intention, allowance for failure of capability versus aspiration and for every other way in which either the half-billion year forces or the reptilian and higher minds can confuse and confound purpose.

Part of The Answer

In this jumble of uncertainties is the reason the whole of our services offerings are insufficient to prescribe everything. 'Pre-scripture' (write in advance), 'forecasting' (establish how the future will happen) otherwise known as planning is only part of the answer.

Often planning is not actually possible. Our corporate approval processes would do well to recognise when the 'plan' is a soap-powder ad designed only to release funds before being ignored. Of course preparation is always possible. Normally but not always preparation is justified.





Projects REQUIRE Active Management at Every Level

Monitoring and acting situationally is far more important than just planning. Planning may not always be possible but active control always is. Reactive control is not an excuse for failing to 'pre-prepare' (being ready in advance for what is not as hoped).

Many enterprises that fail in their projects fail because people at every level from technical team member to chief executive fail to perform their part in the start-up, preparation, monitoring, responding and termination of projects.

Once a project is planned and base-lined (or prepared and strategies for adaptive control are in the place) then the project is executed.

Reality Dictates

Reality dictates that many factors effect plan content; mostly they are expressions of uncertainty that cause accurate plans to accommodate increasing imprecision.

If we have the insights into quality control and scope verification techniques to gauge progress then and only then can results be compared to aspirations. Variances from intention & expectation identified. Advances and advantages are consolidated. Problems and short-falls are responded to.

Tracking



The sequence of plan (aspire), execute (respire? perspire?), measure, re-plan/ react, execute (expire?), and measure again cycles around repeatedly until all tasks are complete, deliverables whether

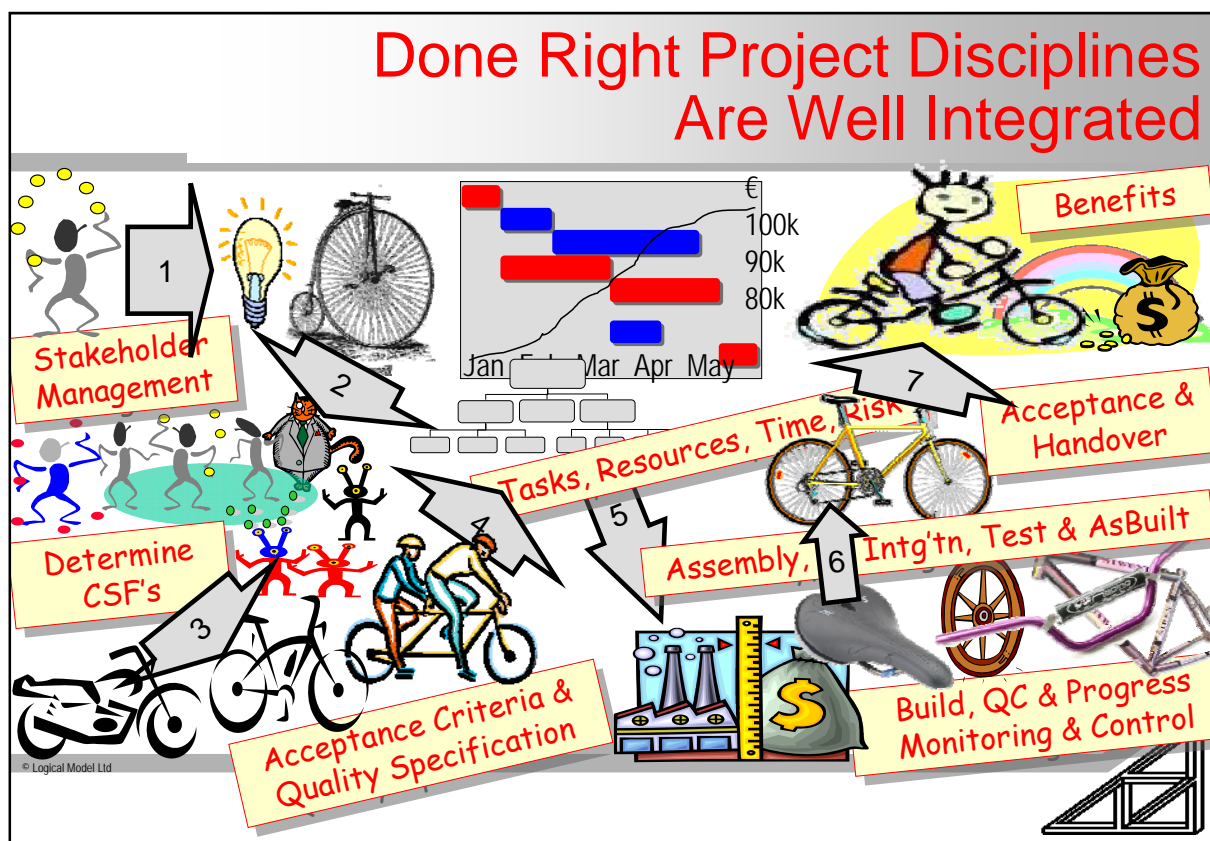
physical or not are produced, participant needs satisfied and either current stage closed and the next one planned or the initiative moves into benefits harvesting (sometimes spelt as "the project is closed and the project manager moves on to a new challenge").

Projects Are A Necessary Evil

Project closure is really only the beginning – for who ever did a project for its own sake?

Projects are just a necessary evil to enable some benefit to be born (the metaphor for 'commercial sex') or some problem to be avoided (the business euphemism for causes of 'commercial death'). When the deliverables are ready and the professional, trained change agent moves on then the question is "has the change sponsor the skills or support to drive the implementation of change?"

Understanding the context by which people plus process produce products = common sense project management.



Benefits

The only reason to run projects is in pursuit of benefits, and of course every project is an uncertain affair that needs thought and preparation to be delivered to the best of our abilities.

The best of our abilities are a combination of planning before the execution phase and reacting during the execution phase.

To determine the optimum mix of preparation and reaction is the challenge. A challenge that can only be met if one is sufficiently fluent in the tools to know when they help and when they should be set-aside.

Contact us

Our home-page & 'phone number is noted in this page's header.