

Defining Program Types

Whilst largely ignored by corporate management, significant work has been done defining the different types of project and the appropriate skills and capabilities needed to manage different types of project. For more on project typology see Mosaic's blog *Projects aren't projects – Typology*¹. PMI have also published *Project Categorization Systems* available from the PMI Marketplace². Project typologies are not industry based! They are based on the inherent characteristics of the project. The emergence of Program Management has created a similar need for the categorisation of programs.

Mosaic's published paper, *Understanding Programs and Projects - Oh, there's a difference!*³ outlines the key differences in managing projects and programs, but only briefly mentions the different types of program. This white Paper will define the different types of programs based on the GAPPS⁴ Program Types. Three basic types of program are defined and the typology also recognises that very large projects have many characteristics of a program (for more on differentiating projects and programs see WP1002⁵).

Multi-Project Programs⁸

This group are closely related to the definition of a program contained in *The Standard for Program Management*⁶. Benefits are expected from the coordinated support of a business objective such as upgrading to 'Version 2.0' or later of a high tech product (e.g., software, electronics, medical devices, pharmaceuticals). The individual project origination and termination is generally external to the program (part of the Portfolio Management Approval⁷).

Projects are closely aligned and with several running in parallel, the key role of the Program Manager is coordination of the individual projects and balancing shared resources. The program will generally terminate once the benefits have been achieved.

Strategic Programs⁸

Strategic Programs are linked to a specific business goal or strategic initiative such as the development and release of a new aircraft or the creation of a completely new high tech product (e.g., software, electronics, medical devices, pharmaceuticals).

The program is a 'learning organisation' focused on achieving its strategic objective and early outcomes influence decisions about later projects. The Program Manager's authority to originate or terminate projects is significant, project origination and termination is generally internal to the program based on perceived progress toward those objectives.

Projects can cover a very divergent range of disciplines running both sequentially and in parallel. Program termination is based on business outcomes, either the achievement of the strategy or a change in strategy.

¹ See: <http://mosaicprojects.wordpress.com/2009/04/09/projects-arent-projects2> and our White Paper on project categorisation: http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1072_Project_Size.pdf

² ISBN: 9781930699380. See: <http://www.pmi.org>

³ Download from: http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/Resources_Papers_078.html

⁴ Global Alliance for Project Performance Standards (GAPPS). This work has been ongoing since 2006, and this White Paper is based on the GAPPS 2009 publication. Download from: <http://www.globalpmstandards.org>

⁵ Differentiating Programs from Projects; see: http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1002_Programs.pdf

⁶ PMI publication, ISBN: 9781933890524. See: <http://www.pmi.org>

⁷ For more on Portfolio Management see: http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1017_Portfolios.pdf

⁸ These types of program are the focus of PMI's PgMP (Program Management Professional) credential. For more on PgMP see: <http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/Training-PgM.html>

Operational Programs

Operational Programs are typically focused on supporting the current business. They include infrastructure maintenance (roads, rail and utilities), improvement to operational assets and repetitive businesses such as producing a season of TV shows.

The key constraints are delivering the maximum value from an annual budget allocation and minimising disruptions to ongoing operations. Project origination and termination are generally external to the program, but the Program Manager will be a key stakeholder and advisor in these decisions.

The primary challenge for the Program Manager is the efficient use of a pool of resources to maximise value by coordinating a diverse range of requests and requirements whilst minimising downtime and operational inefficiencies.

Summary

As with projects, defining a usable typology will assist organisations select and train Program Managers based on the ‘type’ of project. The full GAPPS framework is defined below:

Program Characteristic	Type of Program			
	Strategic Program	Operational Program	Multi-project Program	Mega-project
General Purpose	Deliver assets and benefits that are directly linked to attaining the sponsoring organization’s desired future state	Deliver assets and benefits that are critical to the sponsoring organization’s day-to-day operations	Achieve synergies from projects with common traits such as shared resources, similar clients, or product technology	Deliver a specific asset to the sponsoring organization
Key Differentiating Feature	Link to a specific business goal or strategic initiative	Relative interdependence of constituent projects	Relative independence of constituent projects	Significantly larger than the sponsoring organization’s typical projects
Reason for Grouping Projects	Early results influence decisions about later projects	Minimize negative impact on ongoing operations	Benefits expected from synergy	So much larger than the organization’s typical projects

Figure 1: Extract from the GAPPS Program Typology

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GAPPS have now released a draft *Framework for Performance Based Competency Standards for Program Managers*¹⁰.

This white paper will be progressively updated as more information becomes available.

⁹ There seems to be divergent views in the wider community around mega projects. Some of the literature focuses on ‘complex project management’ other on ‘managing mega-projects and the GAPPS view.

¹⁰ For information on the draft contact: secretariat@globalpmstandards.org or visit www.globalpmstandards.org