

Project Strategy

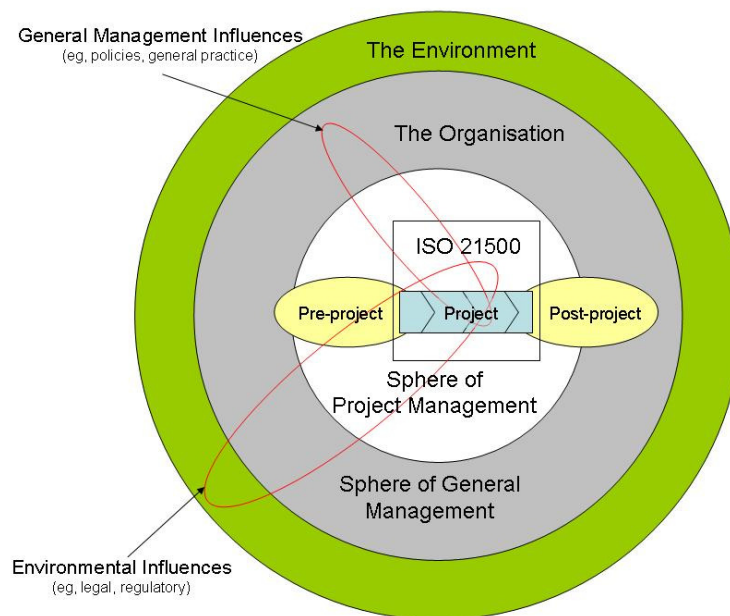
One of the elements missing in much of the discussion around project management is a focus on the key early decisions that determine the project delivery strategy. Decisions on using Agile or Waterfall, pre-fabrication or on-site assembly don't change the required project deliverable but have a major influence on how the project is delivered and its likely success¹. One size does not fit-all.

Developing your project delivery strategy

Some of the key steps in designing a strategy for success include:

- Familiarisation with the overall requirements of the project and its stakeholders²
- Determining the key elements of value and success for the project³
- Understanding the environment the project is operating within
- Determining the delivery methodology and agreeing this with the key stakeholders
- Determining the project management methodology and agreeing this with the key stakeholders
- Developing the project's strategic plan based on the available know-how, resources and risk appetite of the stakeholders (including the project management team).
- Under taking a formal project planning exercise⁴

The problem with implementing this critical stage of project delivery is that it crosses between the project initiators and the project delivery team. Project management as defined by ISO21500 and most other standards, including the *PMBOK® Guide* starts at the point the project is chartered and finishes once the project deliverables are completed.



¹ A feasibility study may have defined the preferred strategy, see:

http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1027_Feasibility_Studies.pdf

² See **Project Definition**: http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1005_Project_Definition.pdf

³ See **Value is in the eye of the stakeholder**: <http://mosaicprojects.wordpress.com/2009/03/28/value-is-the-stakeholder/>

⁴ See **Project Planning**: http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1039_Project_Planning.pdf

The 'sphere of project management extends beyond the mere management of a project. Before the project is chartered, portfolio⁵ and program management may be involved, together with PMOs crating organisational policy⁶. These influences impact on the determination of an acceptable/optimal project strategy. When the project hands over its deliverables, decisions made within the project will influence the organisation's ability to achieve the intended outcomes.

Beyond the sphere of project management, there's the organisation itself and general management. This sphere of influence will determine many factors that will influence project strategy, including acceptable risk parameters. Then there are wider environmental factors including legal and regulatory requirements.

Optimising a project strategy within this overall environment requires both the project delivery team and the client/sponsor team to be involved in discussions focused on developing a project delivery strategy that optimises the opportunity for a successful outcome. Coordinating these discussions should be a key responsibility of the Project Sponsor⁷.

Unfortunately, the opportunities to engage in this type of discussion and planning are frequently difficult to arrange. Many contract documents effectively prescribe a delivery process, and/or the client and senior management don't know they need to be engaged at this stage of the project life cycle. A key challenge for project managers and PMO managers⁸ is to start focusing more on these critical early stages of a project and working to engage senior management at the right time.

Conclusion

The project strategy is the basis for many planning decisions, simply defaulting to 'business as usual' without considering the unique aspects of each project will inevitably lead to many sub-optimal outcomes. The strategy document should not be very large. Its purpose is to set the framework for the project planning work not to replace project planning.

But beware! Devising a good strategy for an ill-defined project goal is not likely to prove very useful. Adequate time and effort should be spent in deciding in clear terms what should be achieved, the *goal!* Then you can work out the optimum strategy and then plan how to implement the strategy effectively.

⁵ For more on Portfolio management see: http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1017_Portfolios.pdf

⁶ For more on PMOs see: http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1034_PMOs.pdf

⁷ See **Project Sponsorship**: http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1031_Project_Sponsorship.pdf

⁸ See **WP1034 PMOs**: http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1034_PMOs.pdf