

THE PROJECT MANAGER'S PREMIER DOCUMENT

In his Just So Story 'The Elephant's Child', Rudyard Kipling wrote "I keep six honest serving men, (They taught me all I knew); Their names are What and Why and When And How and Where and Who"

The mantra based on this of *What, Why, When, How, Where* and *Who* has been used in many aspects of general management. In project management it has become the basis for the Project Management Plan (PMP) or in PRINCE2 terms, the Project Initiation Document (PID). If you also add to the mantra *How Much, How Well* and *What If* to complete the picture with cost, quality and risk, then you have a more comprehensive document that we suggest is the most important process deliverable from project management. So why is it so important?

By definition the PMP (or PID) is the plan for the project, not just a schedule but the plan for delivering the new capability that will allow the benefits outlined in the business case to be realised. It sets out the strategy for implementing the project. As with most things of value, producing and gaining agreement to a PMP that is complete with all the necessary considerations of *what, why, when, how, where, who, how much, how well* and *what if* takes time. Often time that people, including many project managers, believe would be better spent in pushing forward towards implementation.

Whilst the theoretical reasons why every project manager should always produce a PMP that covers all the 'mantra' are well known, as seems too often the case in Lucid Thoughts recently - the compelling logic of the theory does not seem to match the compelling desire to behave differently in practice. Considering our own experiences of managing projects in recent times we have some different thoughts about why behaviour doesn't always match the logic. All our previous Lucid Thoughts about 'planning being counter-cultural for some', or 'knowledge not meaning the same as capability' still apply; but here's another perspective related to the type of project being undertaken.

In describing this we will relate to the labels given to different types of project by Eddie Obeng in his book *All Change!: The Project Leader's Secret Handbook*. The four types of project, defined by the varying degrees of confidence in 'what to do' and 'how to do it', seem to offer some insight into the challenge.

It seems to us that in a 'Paint by Numbers' project where the deliverables and routes to achieving those are understood, there is no reasonable excuse for failing to produce a comprehensive PMP that is reviewed, approved, and used as a baseline from which to monitor and control the project through implementation. Failing to do this is bad practice and means that the project manager and their organisation are taking a greater than necessary chance on failing to achieve the cost/benefit case for the project.

But what about (and we probably all are now claiming this must be the case with our projects!) when the end deliverables are not clearly articulated and/or when the route to achieving the deliverables is clouded in fog?

The logical first answer is that the organisation must improve and more clearly articulate the vision of the end point and find and agree a way out of the 'fog' of not knowing 'how to' **before** the project proceeds into implementation. That way, the PMP maintains its position as the premier document and all the benefits still apply. Whilst your project may be a 'quest', 'fog' or 'movie', this fact should not stop you from focussing on what you can do to migrate to a 'paint by numbers' situation before resources are invested in costly, time-consuming and 'expectation setting' implementation.

The less logical, but more prevalent second answer, is that the project manager must take responsibility for managing the expectations of all stakeholders when the project is not in a 'painting by numbers' state at the end of definition and therefore they should expect issues during implementation that will result in the project:

- Changing strategy
- Encountering problems that were not foreseen e.g. risks that were not identified
- Needing to repeat work, or 'scrap' work that in hindsight has not achieved the objective
- Having no firm criterion on which to assess change requests
- Requiring intense and time consuming stakeholder management

So, the message is clear:

- The PMP is designed to add value from the 'proper planning prevents poor performance' perspective.
- For the PMP to add this value it needs to be comprehensive in terms of *what, why, when, how, where, who, how much, how well* and *what if* so agreement to a firm baseline can be agreed with stakeholders.
- If the PMP isn't clear and comprehensive this is a more risky situation that the project manager **must** acknowledge, take responsibility for and manage.

Perhaps we should all take more time to reflect and think again about what we **can** do in definition before proceeding on our quest, in the fog or making our movie?

Creating Value by Shedding Light on Managed Change