

Managing Successful Programmes (MSP®): A basic overview

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Introduction

Best Management Practice has just released the fourth revision of the globally recognized best practice framework for programme management called Managing Successful Programmes (MSP®). It was first released in 1999, when it crystallized the evolving concepts of business change from projects. In 2003, a second version was released, which reflected the increasing maturity of the concepts. The 2007 version captured the evolving knowledge in this discipline while remaining true to the original concepts. New tools and techniques were added, as well as a greater depth of explanation to help organizations and individuals implement programme management successfully. The fourth revision is a further evolution and particularly reflects the increased awareness and maturity in topics such as benefits management and integrated assurance.

1 What is programme management?

MSP defines programme management as ‘the action of carrying out the coordinated organization, direction and implementation of a dossier of projects and transformation activities (i.e. the programme) to achieve outcomes and realize benefits of strategic importance to the business’.

The MSP framework is designed to enable the delivery of transformational change and the achievement of an organization’s strategic objectives. Programmes exist in the tension zone between the strategic direction of the organization, the delivery of change capability by projects and the need to maintain business performance and stability while realizing and exploiting the benefits from the investments.

2 Types of programme

A programme can be triggered in a number of ways; each will require different focus and intensity of resources and control.

- *Vision-led programmes* that start with a clearly defined vision, have a top-down approach, and focus on strategic or innovative opportunity with radical transformation of business, culture or both.
- *Emergent programmes* evolve from current uncoordinated initiatives, where there is recognition of the value of a joined-up approach with an emergent vision and end goal.
- *Compliance programmes* can also be called ‘must do’ programmes. The organization has no choice but to change; for example, because of market forces or the potential negative impact of not changing.

Unlike project management, which thrives on certainty, programme management recognizes and exploits the ambiguity within which it exists.

3 MSP principles

When picking up the MSP manual, you will note that it has an introduction and sections on governance themes and the transformational flow. The introduction describes the context of programme management and also introduces the programme management principles, which apply to every programme and have been proven in practice, and empower individuals to deliver successfully. These principles are:

- Remaining aligned with corporate strategy
- Leading change
- Envisioning and communicating a better future
- Focusing on the benefits and threats to them
- Adding value
- Designing and delivering a coherent capability
- Learning from experience.

4 The governance themes

The governance themes explain how key elements of the programme should be delivered during its delivery lifecycle. The governance themes cover subjects that will need to be constantly managed to a greater or lesser extent on a daily basis.

Programme organization describes how governance should be applied, through the sponsoring group and programme board, and provides guidance on the responsibilities for the main roles, senior responsible owner, business change manager and programme manager. It also provides guidance for some additional roles that may support the governance structure.

Vision is required for the delivery of any programme. MSP sets out the key contents of a vision statement and how it should paint a picture of a better future for the organization.

Leadership and stakeholder engagement is critical to any programme as change requires effective leadership. MSP emphasizes the need to not only identify and communicate with stakeholders, but also provides analysis tools to generate greater understanding of their needs, perceptions and priorities.

Benefits management is the core difference between projects and programmes. The active exploitation of the opportunities that are offered by the investment in project deliverables is complex, with each benefit having its own profile and a supporting plan to deliver the changes and release the dividend.

Blueprint design and delivery is the foundation for the programme; the desired 'to-be' state for the organization when the programme completes, and the starting point ('as-is' state). Transformation is delivered in step changes through tranches.

Planning and control are covered in detail to explain how to develop the programme plan and maintain internal control of the projects to ensure that the programme remains on course.

The business case will be in place for all programmes, with MSP highlighting the need for the programme to have an overarching case, and each project having its own business case too.

Risk and issue management offers advice and guidance on how to avoid the realization of the events that will cause the programme to fail. It not only focuses on the need to manage threats, but also to exploit opportunities. There are four perspectives: strategic, programme, operation and project risk.

Quality and assurance management describes how there should be optimal management of people, resources, suppliers, processes, assets, information and strategic alignment, and the importance of having an effective quality and assurance strategy to help enable and optimize the achievement of the programme goals.

5 The transformational flow

Transformational flow is the term used to describe the lifecycle of the programme. 'Flow' reflects the evolving nature of the journey the programme takes and the adjustments that will need to be made. The following activities summarize the stages passed through.

Identifying a Programme takes an outline idea, and undertakes analysis of stakeholders, clarification of the strategic requirements and market consultation to turn it into a business concept that gains strategic support.

Defining a Programme confirms the vision, undertakes detailed analysis of options and designs the programme infrastructure to deliver, resulting in a business case and strategic commitment.

Managing the Tranches describes the cyclical activities involved in managing and proving the coordinating interface between projects, business change and strategic direction.

Delivering the Capability explains how the alignment of the projects and other activities that deliver the blueprint will be managed and controlled.

Realizing the Benefits outlines the preparing, delivering and reviewing activities of transition to take the capability delivered by the projects, and embed it within the business operations to realize the intended benefits.

Closing a Programme structures the end to the programme, consolidating and embedding the change, closing down all programme activity and completing stakeholder engagement.

6 Conclusion

MSP has evolved into a mature, proven and robust programme management framework that provides a solid foundation for any organization looking to deliver transformational change. Most organizations will have elements of the framework already in place but the use of MSP will help to make sense of what already exists and highlight gaps and opportunities that may not be visible from within the whirlwind of change.

About the author

Rod Sowden of Aspire Europe Ltd is lead author for the 2007 version and lead author and mentor for the 2011 version.

Acknowledgements

Sourced by TSO and published on www.AXELOS.com

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