Managing Successful Programs (2007)
Published for Office of Government Commerce, UK
(A book review by R. Max Wideman)
(Note: North American spelling has been adopted throughout.)

Introduction

Managing Successful Programs (MSP) has been completely rewritten and takes on an almost entirely new perspective. As Sally Collier[1] explains in her Foreword:

> "The origins of *Managing Successful Programs* (MSP) can be traced back to the practices of the best policy makers in Government. Even though they may not have realized it at the time, they were using many of the tools that are now associated with good program[2] management to successfully transform policy into desired outcomes and, essentially, benefits.
>
> Realization of benefits is, of course, the ultimate goal and this latest version of MSP explores this in greater detail. It includes guidance on managing benefits throughout the program. There is also a comprehensive view on governance that looks at organization, control, leadership and roles."

We have serious reservations about this dramatic shift in focus, as we discuss later under *Downside*. Nevertheless, a formal discussion of the "realization of benefits" is welcome information.

This new MSP document now consists of 258 pages compared to the 158 pages of the previous version of MSP. There are also double the number of illustrations. This general increase in content does provide more explicit direction, but it also takes program management responsibility well into the area of actually garnering the benefits of the outputs of projects. While this information is most useful and as we shall discuss later, it may not sit well with the operations people responsible for doing the actual work of the organization's mandate.

This version of MSP also gives greater prominence to the idea of "tranches". Originally, this word meant things like "loans, borrowings, mortgages"[3], but in MSP it simply means: "A group of projects structured around distinct step changes in capability and benefit delivery".[4] In other words, a logical collection of projects that together bring about a significant measurable advance. Consequently, tranches are established in succession and are at the heart of the MSP concept. This assumes, of course, that the nature of the program is definitive, rather than exploratory[5] as in research and development.

This in turn relies on another uncommon term used in MSP, namely the "Blueprint". As in the previous version of MSP, *Blueprint* means: "A model of the business or organization, its working practices and processes, the information it requires and the technology that will be needed to deliver the capability described in the Vision Statement."[6]

Book Structure

As with its predecessor, the 2007 version of *Managing Successful Programs* (MSP) is structured in four parts as follows:

Part 1: Introduction and Program Management Principles
- Introduction
- Program management principles

Part 2: The Governance Themes
- Governance themes overview
- Organization
- Vision
- Leadership and stakeholder engagement
- Benefits realization management
- Blueprint design and delivery
- Planning and control
- The Business Case
- Risk management and issue resolution
- Quality management

Part 3: The Transformational Flow
- Transformational flow overview
- Identifying a program
- Defining a program
- Managing the tranches
- Delivering the capability
- Realizing the benefits
- Closing the program

Part 4: Appendices, Further Information and Glossary
- Appendix A: Program Information
- Appendix B: Adopting Managing Successful Programs
- Appendix C: Program Office
- Appendix D: Health Checks
- Further Information
- Glossary

By comparing this list with that presented with our *Review of MSP* 2003 [link to http://www.maxwideman.com/papers/successful/structure.htm] readers will observe that Part 2 is again the largest and has been significantly expanded. Part 3 generally covers the same ground as the earlier version though with more detail. However, it has been renamed from *The Program Management Lifecycle* to *The Transformational Flow*. How much clarification this change in title adds to the Guide is open to question.

Most people understand what a *program* is, but not necessarily a *transformation*. Fortunately, for those like ourselves who obviously need educating, *transformation* is defined in the Glossary. It means: "A distinct change to the way an organization conducts all or part of its business."[7] We can think of many programs that are not so self-centered. Besides, we are not great fans of change for the sake of change,

preferring stability and consistency, especially where "standards" are concerned.

What we liked

In the Introduction, we learned that:

> "This manual is not intended to be read from cover to cover. It is a reference guide designed to help those involved in programs to understand how business transformation should be delivered and their roles in this. In addition to this Introduction, it is recommended that all readers familiarize themselves as a minimum with Chapter 2 'Program management principles', Chapter 3 'Governance Themes overview' and Chapter 13 'Transformational Flow' to gain a good overview of MSP."[8]

We did have some difficulty with the definition of Program Management, which definition should provide the very bedrock of this standard. However, we'll get to that in a later next section. Meantime, the essence of the document's content is illustrated in Figure 1.
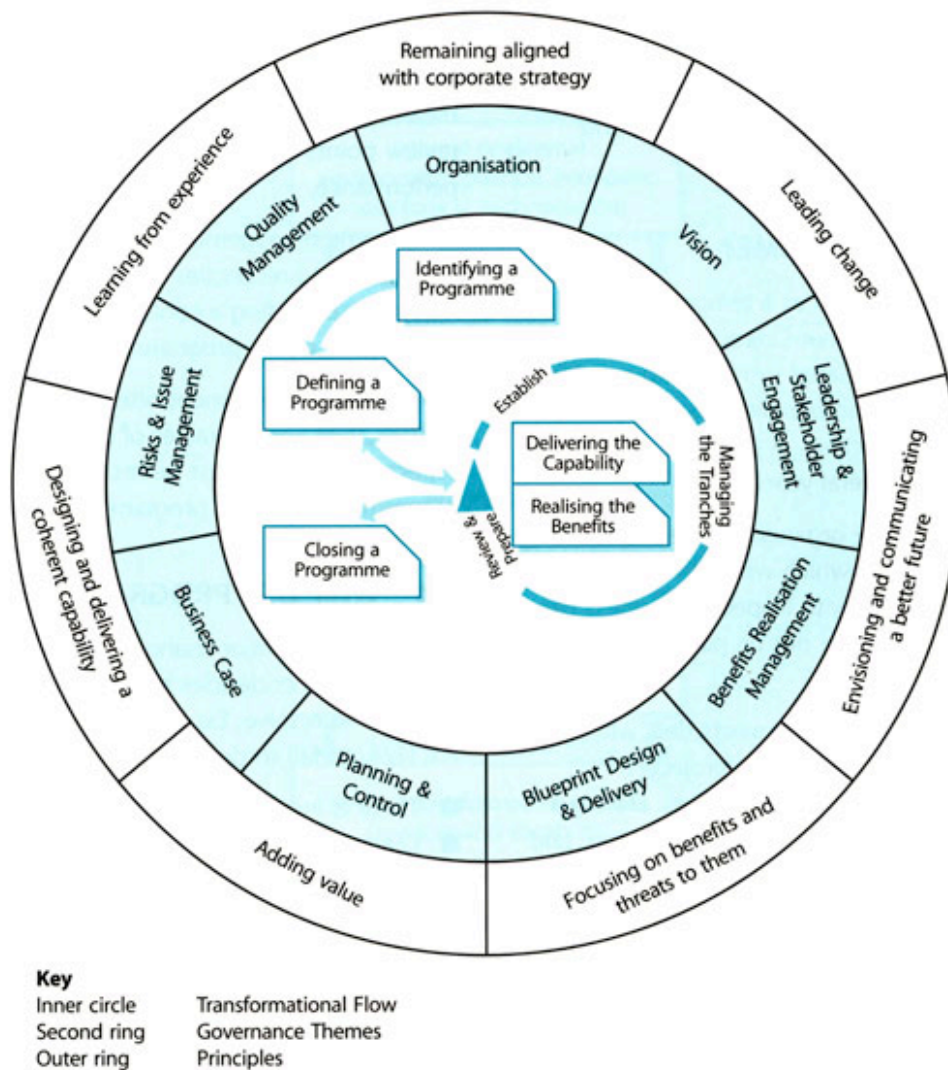
Figure 1: MSP Framework and concepts

At the core of the diagram is an illustration of the "Transformational Flow". This is a Peter-Senge-like reciprocal flow-of-influence system that demonstrates both the progressive and repetitious nature of a program because, in Senge's words: "In systems thinking it is an axiom that every influence is both a *cause* and *effect*." [9]

The second ring lists the key topics covered by Part 2 of the Guide, topics that are generally covered by project management but elaborated to reflect the larger environment of a program. With one exception, that is *Benefits Realization Management*. We'll look at this topic in the next section.

The outer ring lists a set of topics that are referred to as "Principles". However, as we look at the seven labels shown, they appear to us to be more like "practices" rather than "principles". That is because *practices* may be defined as "The usual, traditional, or commonly recommended way of doing things",[10] while *principles* may be defined as "A comprehensive and fundamental law, doctrine, or assumption".[11] In fact, although these items are displayed with prominence in the outer ring, they receive only summary mention in one brief Chapter 2.

So, the major focus of Part 2 of the Guide is on the topics shown in the second ring, each receiving a separate chapter, starting with Chapter 4, and each of which is introduced by a diagram such as that shown in Figure 2.
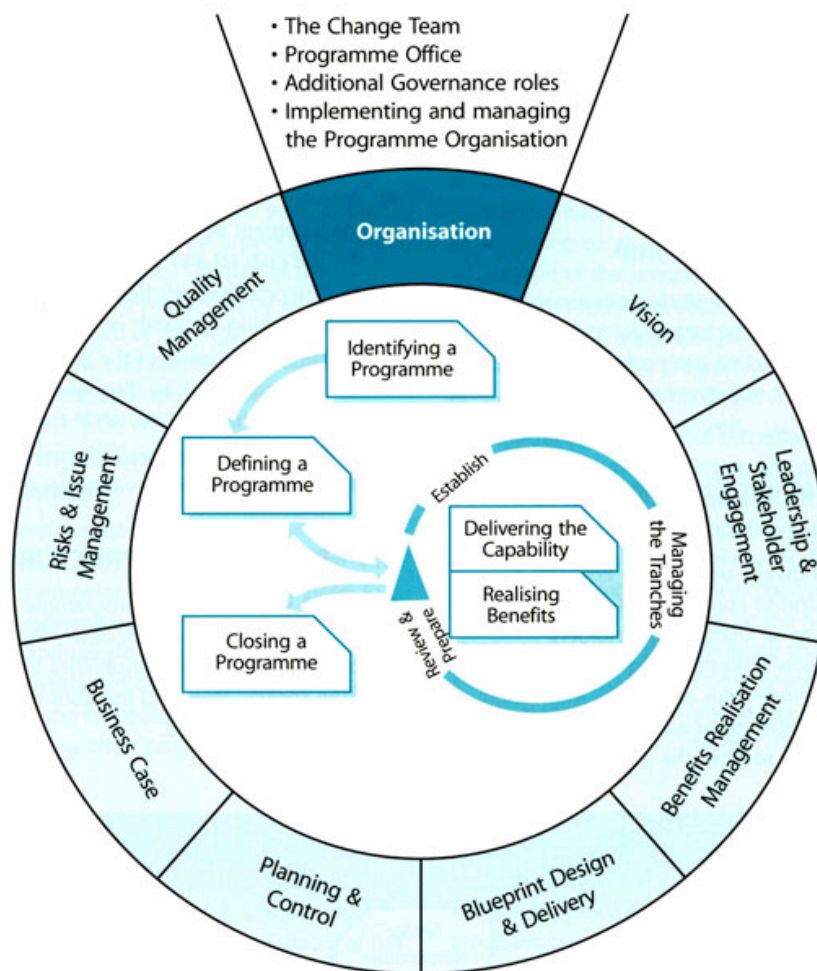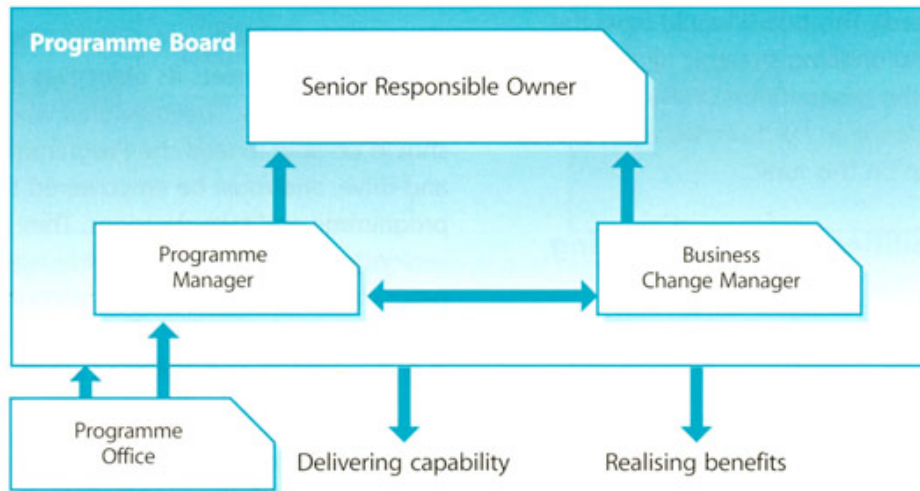

Figure 2: A clear and effective organization is critical to success[12]

Generally, the contents of the associated "hopper" reflected the contents of the ensuing chapter – but not always. However, in Chapter 3, we encountered an interesting graphic as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Senior Responsible Owner and the Program Board[13]

We have to ask this question: If, as shown, the Program Board is "Delivering capability" and "Realizing benefits" then what is the Program Office supposed to be doing?

Benefits Realization Management

The one exception we mentioned in the previous section is Chapter 7, Benefits Realization Management. We found this of particular interest because to us this is a relatively new discipline that to date has received little attention, or gained little traction, in North America. This chapter is introduced with the graphic shown in Figure 4 and as its Introduction states: "A benefit is the measurable improvement resulting from an outcome."[14]

An interesting subtlety in the *Managing Successful Programs* Guide, is how it differentiates between *Outcomes* and *Outputs*. An *Outcome* is:
> "The result of change, normally affecting real-world behavior and/or circumstances; the manifestation of part or all of the new state conceived in a program's Blueprint."[15]

In other words, it is the result of a *program.*

Since a project is defined as:
> "A temporary organization that is created for the purpose of delivering one or more business *outputs* according to a specified Business Case"[16]

And an Output is defined as:
> "The tangible or intangible product [or deliverable] resulting from a planned activity."[17]

It follows that *outputs*, *deliverables* or *products*, whether tangible or intangible, are all the results of *projects*.

To clarify then, in the view of MSP, programs are designed to generate benefits for the organization, while projects produce the products that are the enablers of those benefits. This makes a lot of sense in the overall scheme of things.
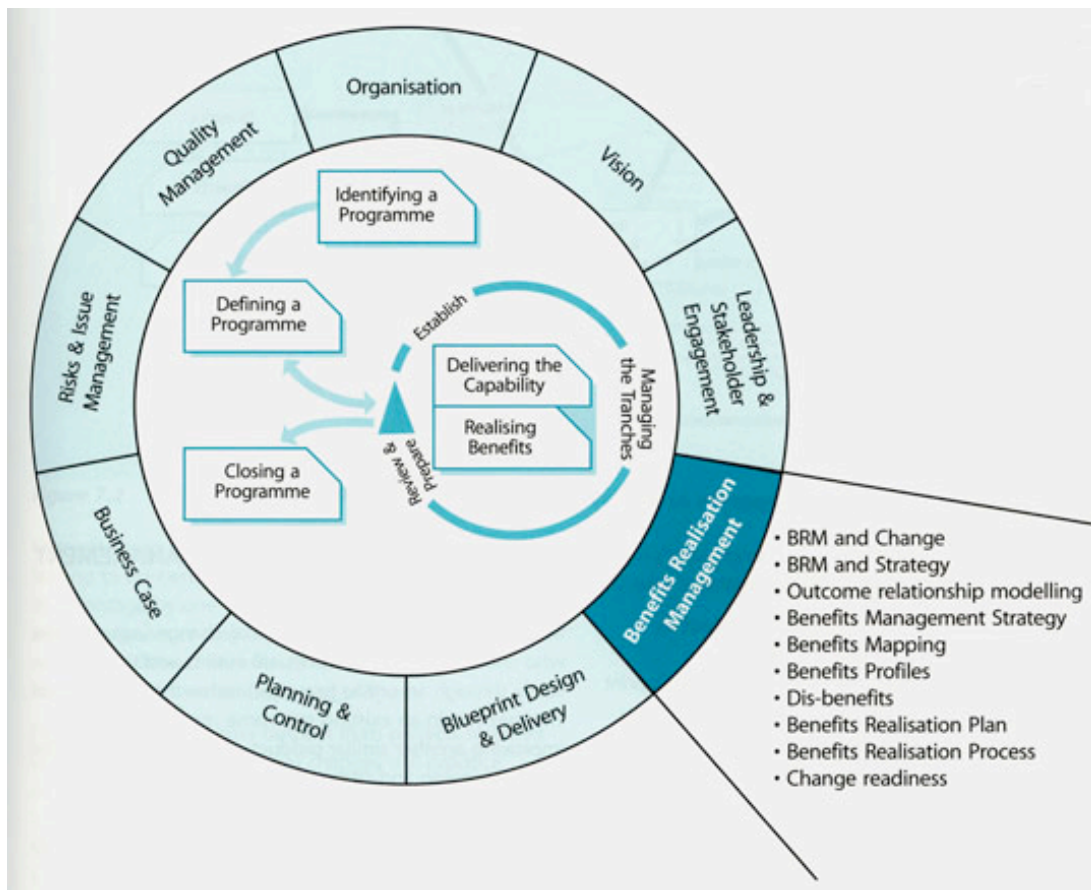
Figure 4: Benefits are anticipated when a change is conceived[18]

In fact, the Guide sheds light on the relatively uncharted post-project waters by illustrating the linear chain from project outputs to the achievement of strategic objectives by the example shown in Figure 5.
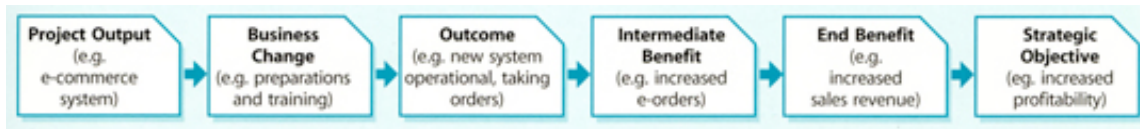

Figure 5: Example of the chain from project output to strategic objective[19]

However, the reality is not that simple because programs that deliver change inevitably cause side effects. These side effects may be perceived as benefits to some and dis-benefits to others, but either way should give rise to further opportunities even if only as intermediate benefits. This complexity is displayed in Figure 6.
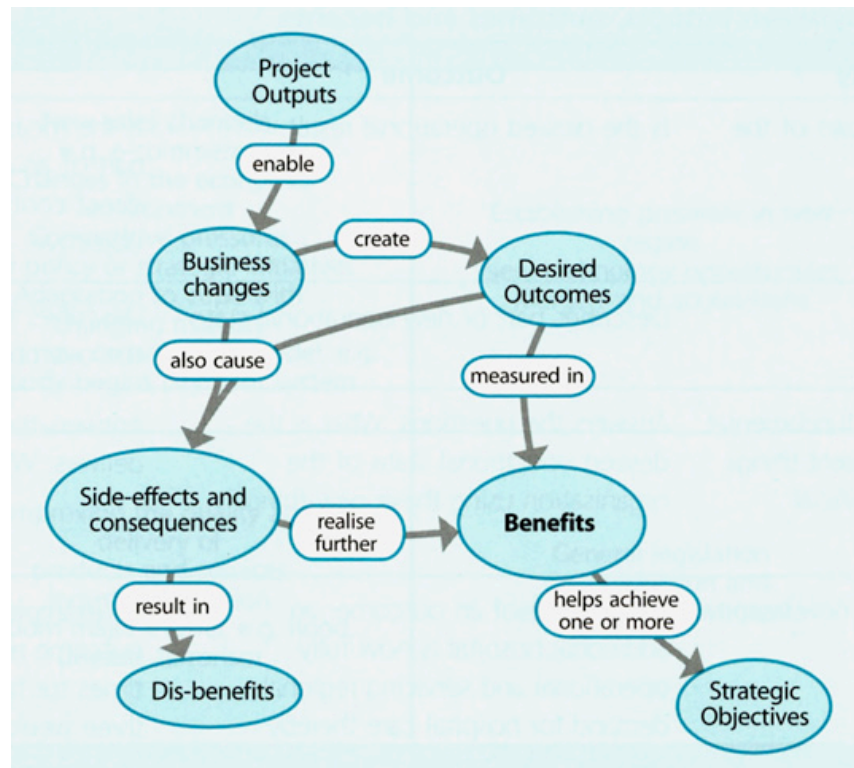
Figure 6: Path to benefit realization and strategic objectives[20]

While the relationships shown may be easy to follow conceptually, they are not nearly so easy to establish in practice. The solution is to carry out a "Benefits Mapping" exercise. The MSP Guide describes Benefits Mapping as follows:

"A Benefits Map is developed to show how the benefits relate to each other and the projects (which deliver the outputs that allow the realization of benefits). A Benefits Map covers the entire set of benefits and becomes a major planning document for programs. The Benefits Map is so important because benefits (and dis-benefits) do not typically happen in isolation."[21]

The Guide also provides the following tip:

"Ideally, the Benefits Map would be created working from right to left, from strategic objectives, through end benefits and intermediate benefits. It should then define the enablers (project outputs) and business changes required. Where the enablers are given, for example in an emergent program, the Benefits Map can be created from both ends and join in the middle."[22]

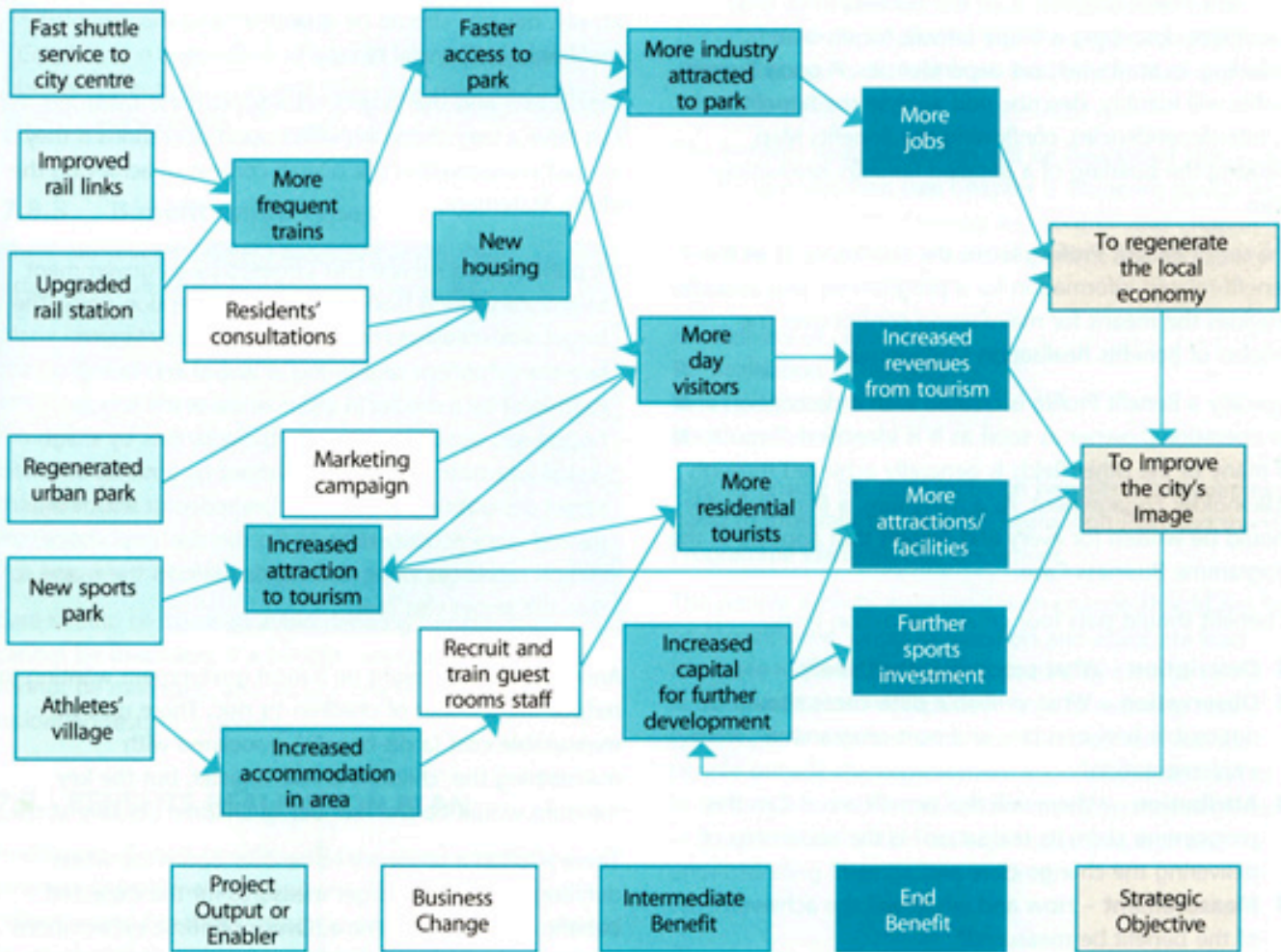As an example, Figure 7 shows a sports-complex legacy Benefits Map.

Figure 7: Benefits Map: Example of a sports-complex legacy[23]

Obviously, there is more to this chapter than we have reported here, all of which is highly instructive.

Downside

It is a common experience that when a new political party takes over governance from its predecessors, the first order of business is to distance itself from those predecessors by revoking many of the things that their forerunners put in place. It's called "putting their own stamp on the new administration". Nowhere is this more apparent than in the recent election of a new US president. One might be forgiven for believing that this is just in the nature of politics.

Conversely, when it comes to standards, one might be forgiven for believing that if the original work is based on sound principles, then any subsequent updating would build on the earlier foundations. Thus, experience in working with the earlier standard would provide a spring board for taking the practitioner to new heights. So, what is surprising is that this 2007 update of *Managing Successful Programs* (MSP), admittedly by an all-new team,[24] fields a document with all-new content that manifests the same imperative as the political environment. The only thing that has not changed is the title. More is the pity because this new MSP sets out a whole new perspective, one that in our view comes close to what we know in North America as *project portfolio management*.

To illustrate this dramatic change, in the second (2003) update of MSP, *Program Management* was defined as "A portfolio of projects and activities that are coordinated and managed as a unit such that they achieve outcomes and realize benefits".[25] In this third (2007) update, *Program Management* is now defined as "The action of carrying out the coordinated organization, direction and implementation of a dossier of projects and transformation activities . . . to achieve outcomes and realize benefits of strategic importance."[26]

That means that Program Management is no longer characterized as managing "a portfolio of projects" but instead is now characterized as "the coordinated organization . . . of a dossier of projects". To the extent that a "dossier" is little more than a "file full of papers containing detailed reports"[27] whereas a "portfolio" is at least a set of investor's securities,[28] i.e. investments, it means that program management has been demoted to a glorified exercise in bureaucracy and paper shuffling. Moreover, only outcomes with benefits of "strategic importance" now qualify as programs. We beg to differ.

Still, never fear. Once we are past the definition, the remaining text almost always refers to portfolios. Unfortunately, that's not the end of the story. The latest definition also now encompasses those "transformation activities" that actually realize the intended benefits. Unless the organization in question is entirely dedicated to the management of one particular program, then we do not believe that this is appropriate. And we have good reason for making this assertion which can be explained as follows.

In the general case, the typical organization is made up of three separate and distinct entities. Indeed, the Guide itself makes this clear. In an early section titled "1.3 What is Program Management?" it states:
> "Program management aligns three critical organizational elements:
> * Corporate strategy
> * Delivery mechanisms for change, and
> * Business-as-usual environment"
> It manages the natural tension that exists between these elements to deliver transformational change that meets the needs of the organization and its stakeholders. It manages the transition of the solutions developed and delivered by projects into the business operations, whilst maintaining performance and effectiveness.[29]

In other words, those three organizational elements consist of the *Executive* responsible for the corporate strategy and general direction of the organization as a whole; *Project Management* responsible for managing the program and the projects contained within it; and *Operations* responsible for the delivery of the goods and services for which the organization essentially exists. It can be demonstrated that these three entities not only have entirely different priorities, perspectives and cultures, but are evaluated on entirely different criteria. Which of course accounts for the "natural tension" referred to in the quotation above.

The key point here is that it is the responsibility of *Operations* to take over the products of the projects and use them to generate (realize) the intended benefits. And it is the *Executive's* responsibility to see that they do indeed do so! Therefore, we believe that it is a mistake to suggest, in the general case, that *Program Management* can do it all.

Summary

For those not familiar with European practice in general and UK practice in particular, the Office of Government Commerce (OGC) is a UK government body that has several branches, one of which deals with project management. OGC develops guides and best practice handbooks to be used by government departments and related organizations. *Managing Successful Programs* (MSP) is one of several in the project management arena, one of which is the flag ship *Managing Successful Projects* known as PRINCE2 that we have reviewed elsewhere in these web pages.

In this case, MSP is the bible on program management for most public bodies in the UK. However, like the Project Management Institute's Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge in the US, it may be questioned as to what extent practitioners actually fully understand the contents. And, if they do understand the contents, to what extent they actually apply them with any rigor!

Nevertheless, if like us, you are better able to absorb concepts depicted in diagrams and charts and adapt them to the circumstances at hand, then this latest update of the Managing Successful Programs Guide will be an asset. However, if you learned the previous version and are now studying the textual content with a view to taking training and testing, then you may be dismayed by the extent of change in detail and direction. Then again, if you are an MSP consultant you will probably be delighted. Here is an example of what you can do.

> "A public sector organization initiated a small project to set up a health and safety help desk, the project brief being to install a call-logging system, telephony and minor role changes. The consultant used the Vision Statement as a tool to define the end game; the senior management team realized the full implication on their current ways of working and organizational structure, which a broader realignment to deal with this new customer engagement route required. This led to a program of change affecting a large number of staff. A standard project output approach to the requirement would have delivered technology and tools effectively, but not have achieved the change, and the money would have been wasted. MSP techniques are not only applicable to large-scale change."[30]

So, there you have it. Given the extent of redirection in the current update of the MSP Guide, it remains to be seen just how much clear agreement there is, even in the UK and Europe, as to exactly what the scope of "program management" really is.

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[1] Executive Director, Office of Government Commerce

[2] UK spelling of "Programs"

[3] Proximity/Franklin US English Thesaurus

[4] *Managing Successful Programmes*, The Stationery Office, 2007, Glossary p249

[5] Often referred to as a "voyage of discovery"

[6] *Managing Successful Programmes*, The Stationery Office, 2007, Glossary p245

[7] Ibid, p249

[8] Ibid, p9

[9] Senge, Peter, M., The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of The Learning Organization, Doubleday, NY, 1990, p75

[10] Wideman Comparative Glossary of Project Management Terms v4.2 [D03148]

[11] Ibid, [D03166]

[12] *Managing Successful Programmes*, The Stationery Office, 2007, Chapter 4, p27

[13] Ibid, p30

[14] Ibid, p61

[15] Ibid, Glossary, p247

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid

[18] Ibid, p61

[19] Ibid, Figure 7.3, p63

[20] Ibid, Figure 7.2, p63

[21] Ibid, p68

[22] Ibid, p69

[23] Ibid.

[24] Actually, three of the thirty-seven people listed were involved with the 2003 update, one of whom was also involved with the original 1999 production.

[25] *Managing Successful Programmes*, The Stationery Office, 2003, p5

[26] *Managing Successful Programmes*, The Stationery Office, 2007, p4

[27] Webster's Concise Electronic Dictionary

[28] Ibid.

[29] *Managing Successful Programmes*, The Stationery Office, 2007, p4

[30] Ibid, p218