

# **The Project Management Life Cycle**

## **By Jason Westland**

### **(A book review by R. Max Wideman)**

#### **Introduction**

***Editor's Note:** We liked so much of this book that we asked for the author's permission to quote extensively from the whole of Jason Westland's Chapter 1. This is because it succinctly describes what follows in detail in the remainder of the book. However, in pursuing our regular book review structure, we placed his text under corresponding headings. Since the quotations are so extensive, we have not followed our normal practice of indenting quoted paragraphs. However, the references are identified in the footnotes.*

As Jason says:

"Welcome to The Project Management Life Cycle. This book describes the Method123® Project Management Methodology (MPMM)<sup>1</sup> and provides a practical approach to managing projects. Every phase, activity and task in the project life cycle is described here in detail to help you manage staff, customers and suppliers efficiently. By reading this book, you will gain the knowledge and confidence required to properly initiate a project, create detailed project plans, build high quality deliverables, monitor and control delivery and close projects effectively.

"Not only will you learn how to successfully complete projects from end to end, but you will also be armed with a suite of tools and templates to allow you to create project deliverables quickly and easily. More than 150 charts, tables and diagrams are included in this book to help explain the steps needed to undertake a project. Each table is full of real life examples to provide you with the knowledge needed to complete project activities faster than before."<sup>2</sup>

#### **Book Structure**

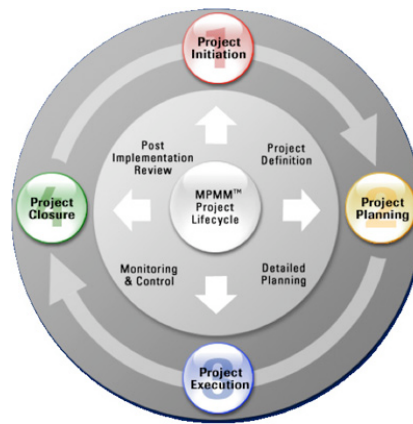
The book structure is very simple, yet it covers a lot of ground in only 237 pages. Jason explains it as follows.

#### ***"The project life cycle***

"The project life cycle consists of four phases as shown in Figure 1.

"As there are four phases within the project life cycle, there are four main chapters in this book. Each of these chapters describes a particular project life cycle phase in detail, by providing the activities and tasks required to complete the phase in its entirety. In Chapter 2 you will learn how to initiate projects by developing a business case, undertaking a feasibility study, establishing the terms of reference, appointing the team and setting up a project office.

"Every step required to build a comprehensive suite of project plans is provided in Chapter 3. This includes the activities required to create a project plan, resource plan, financial plan, quality plan, risk plan, acceptance plan, communications plan and procurement plan. The entire tender process is also defined, allowing you to create a suite of tender documentation to help you select a preferred supplier and create a supplier contract.



**Figure 1: The four phases of the project life cycle<sup>3</sup>**

"The most complex phase in the project life cycle (project execution) is made simple in Chapter 4 with a step by step guide to the nine critical management processes: time management, cost management, quality management, change management, risk management, issue management, procurement management, acceptance management and communications management.

"Finally in Chapter 5, you will be shown how to formally close a project by creating a project closure report and undertaking a post implementation review. So sit back, relax and discover the vital steps needed to manage a project through the four critical phases of the project life cycle: initiation, planning, execution and closure."<sup>4</sup>

### What we liked – Project Initiation

Jason says:

"The first phase of a project is the initiation phase. During this phase a business problem or opportunity is identified and a business case providing various solution options is defined. Next, a feasibility study is conducted to investigate whether each option addresses the business problem and a final recommended solution is then put forward. Once the recommended solution is approved, a project is initiated to deliver the approved solution. Terms of reference are completed outlining the objectives, scope and structure of the new project, and a project manager is appointed. The project manager begins recruiting a project team and establishes a project office environment. Approval is then sought to move into the detailed planning phase."<sup>5</sup>

"Within the initiation phase, the business problem or opportunity is identified, a solution is defined, a project is formed and a project team is appointed to build and deliver the solution to the customer. Figure 1.3 shows the activities undertaken during the initiation phase:



**Figure 2: Project initiation activities**

**"Develop a business case:** The trigger to initiating a project is identifying a business problem or opportunity to be addressed. A business case is created to define the problem or opportunity in detail and identify a preferred solution for implementation. The business case includes:

- A detailed description of the problem or opportunity;

- A list of the alternative solutions available;
- An analysis of the business benefits, costs, risks and issues;
- A description of the preferred solution;
- A summarized plan for implementation.

"An identified project sponsor then approves the business case and the required funding is allocated to proceed with a feasibility study.

**"Undertake a feasibility study:** At any stage during or after the creation of a business case, a formal feasibility study may be commissioned. The purpose of a feasibility study is to assess the likelihood of each alternative solution option achieving the benefits outlined in the business case. The feasibility study will also investigate whether the forecast costs are reasonable, the solution is achievable, the risks are acceptable and the identified issues are avoidable.

**"Establish the terms of reference:** After the business case and feasibility study have been approved, a new project is formed. At this point, terms of reference are created. The terms of reference define the vision, objectives, scope and deliverables for the new project. They also describe the organization structure; and activities, resources and funding required to undertake the project. Any risks, issues, planning assumptions and constraints are also identified.

**"Appoint the project team:** The project team are now ready to be appointed. Although a project manager may be appointed at any stage during the life of the project, the manager will ideally be appointed prior to recruiting the project team. The project manager creates a detailed job description for each role in the project team, and recruits people into each role based on their relevant skills and experience

**"Set up a project office:** The project office is the physical environment within which the team is based. Although it is usual to have one central project office, it is possible to have a virtual project office with project team members located around the world. A project office environment should include:

- Equipment, such as office furniture, computer equipment, stationery and materials;
- Communications infrastructure, such as telephones, computer network, e mail, Internet access, file storage, database storage and backup facilities;
- Documentation, such as a project methodology, standards, processes, forms and registers;
- Tools, such as accounting, project planning and risk modeling software.

**"Perform a phase review:** At the end of the initiation phase, perform a phase review. This is basically a checkpoint to ensure that the project has achieved its objectives as planned."<sup>6</sup>

## **What we liked – Project Planning**

Jason continues:

"Once the scope of the project has been defined in the terms of reference, the project enters the planning phase. This involves creating a:

- Project plan outlining the activities, tasks, dependencies and timeframes;
- Resource plan listing the labor, equipment and materials required;
- Financial plan identifying the labor, equipment and materials costs;
- Quality plan providing quality targets, assurance and control measures;
- Risk plan highlighting potential risks and actions to be taken to mitigate those risks;

- Acceptance plan listing the criteria to be met to gain customer acceptance;
- Communications plan describing the information needed to inform stakeholders;
- Procurement plan identifying products to be sourced from external suppliers.

"At this point the project will have been planned in some detail and is ready to be executed." <sup>7</sup>

"By now, the project costs and benefits have been documented, the objectives and scope have been defined, the project team has been appointed and a formal project office environment established. It is now time to undertake detailed planning to ensure that the activities performed during the execution phase of the project are properly sequenced, resourced, executed and controlled. The activities shown in Figure 3 are undertaken.



**Figure 3: Project planning activities**

**"Create a project plan:** The first step in the project planning phase is to document the project plan. A 'work breakdown structure' (WBS) is identified which includes a hierarchical set of phases, activities and tasks to be undertaken to complete the project. After the WBS has been agreed, an assessment of the level of effort required to undertake each activity and task is made. The activities and tasks are then sequenced, resources are allocated and a detailed project schedule is formed. This project plan is the key tool used by the project manager to assess the progress of the project throughout the project life cycle.

**"Create a resource plan:** Immediately after the project plan is formed, the level of resource required to undertake each of the activities and tasks listed within the project plan will need to be allocated. Although generic resource may have already been allocated in the project plan, a detailed resource plan is required to identify the:

- Type of resource required, such as labor, equipment and materials;
- Quantity of each type of resource required;
- Roles, responsibilities and skill sets of all human resource required;
- Specifications of all equipment resource required;
- Items and quantities of material resource required.

"A schedule is assembled for each type of resource so that the project manager can review the resource allocation at each stage in the project.

**"Create a financial plan:** A financial plan is created to identify the total quantity of money required to undertake each phase in the project (in other words, the budget). The total cost of labor, equipment and materials is calculated and an expense schedule is defined which enables the project manager to measure the forecast spend versus the actual spend throughout the project. Detailed financial planning is an extremely important activity within the project, as the customer will expect the final solution to have been delivered within the allocated budget.

**"Create a quality plan:** Meeting the quality expectations of the customer can be a challenging task. To ensure that the quality expectations are clearly defined and can reasonably be achieved, a quality plan is documented. The quality plan:

- Defines the term 'quality' for the project.
- Lists clear and unambiguous quality targets for each deliverable. Each quality target provides a set of criteria and standards to be achieved to meet the expectations of the customer.
- Provides a plan of activities to assure the customer that the quality targets will be met (in other words, a quality assurance plan).
- Identifies the techniques used to control the actual quality level of each deliverable as it is built (in other words, a quality control plan).

"Not only is it important to review the quality of the deliverables produced by the project, it is also important to review the quality of the management processes that produced them. A quality plan will summarize each of the management processes undertaken during the project, including time, cost, quality, change, risk, issue, procurement, acceptance and communications management.

**"Create a risk plan:** The next step is to document all foreseeable project risks within a risk plan. This plan also identifies the actions required to prevent each risk from occurring, as well as reduce the impact of the risk should it eventuate. Developing a clear risk plan is an important activity within the planning phase, as it is necessary to mitigate all critical project risks prior to entering the execution phase of the project.

**"Create an acceptance plan:** To deliver the project successfully, you will need to gain full acceptance from the customer that the deliverables produced by the project meet or exceed requirements. An acceptance plan is created to help achieve this, by clarifying the completion criteria for each deliverable and providing a schedule of acceptance reviews. These reviews provide the customer with the opportunity to assess each deliverable and provide formal acceptance that it meets the requirements as originally stated.

**"Create a communications plan:** Prior to the execution phase, it is also necessary to identify how each of the stakeholders will be kept informed of the progress of the project. The communications plan identifies the types of information to be distributed to stakeholders, the methods of distributing the information, the frequency of distribution, and responsibilities of each person in the project team for distributing the information.

**"Create a procurement plan:** The last planning activity within the planning phase is to identify the elements of the project to be acquired from external suppliers. The procurement plan provides a detailed description of the products (that is, goods and services) to be acquired from suppliers, the justification for acquiring each product externally as opposed to from within the business, and the schedule for product delivery. It also describes the process for the selection of a preferred supplier (the tender process), and the ordering and delivery of the products (the procurement process).

**"Contract the suppliers:** Although external suppliers may be appointed at any stage of the project, it is usual to appoint suppliers after the project plans have been documented but prior to the execution phase of the project. Only at this point will the project manager have a clear idea of the role of suppliers and the expectations for their delivery. A formal tender process is undertaken to identify a short list of capable suppliers and select a preferred supplier to initiate contractual discussions with. The tender process involves creating a statement of work, a request for information and request for proposal

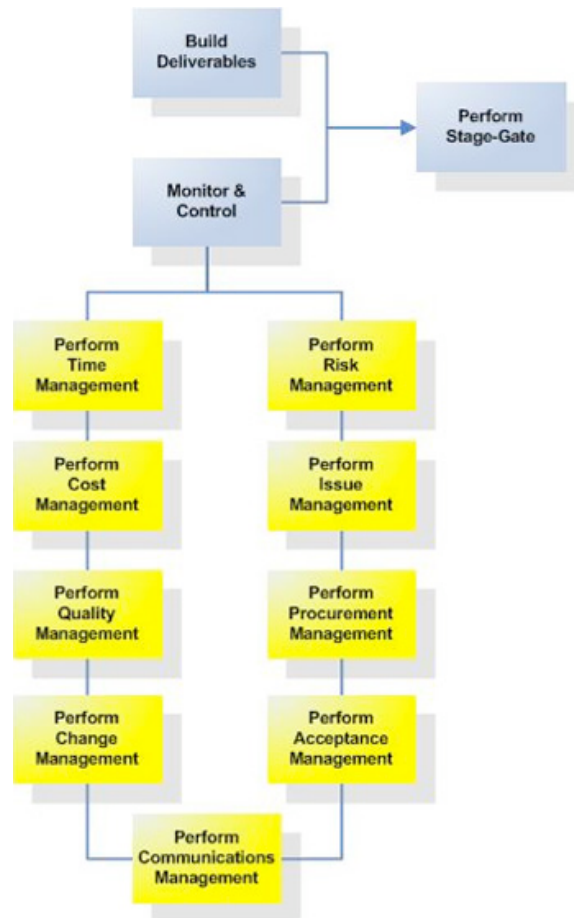
document to obtain sufficient information from each potential supplier and select the preferred supplier. Once a preferred supplier has been chosen, a contract is agreed between the project team and the supplier for the delivery of the requisite products.

**"Perform a phase review:** At the end of the planning phase, a phase review is performed. This is a checkpoint to ensure that the project has achieved its objectives as planned."<sup>8</sup>

**What we liked – Project Execution**

In much of the literature, and in training programs, project management is all about project planning while project execution gets short shrift. This is not the case in Jason's book. As Jason explains:

"This phase involves implementing the plans created during the project planning phase. While each plan is being executed, a series of management processes are undertaken to monitor and control the deliverables being output by the project. This includes identifying change, risks and issues, reviewing deliverable quality and measuring each deliverable produced against the acceptance criteria. Once all of the deliverables have been produced and the customer has accepted the final solution, the project is ready for closure. The activities of this phase are shown in Figure 4."<sup>9</sup>



**Figure 4: Project management execution activities**

"The execution phase is typically the longest phase of the project in terms of duration. It is the phase within which the deliverables are physically constructed and presented to the customer for acceptance.

To ensure that the customer's requirements are met, the project manager monitors and controls the activities, resources and expenditure required to build each deliverable. A number of management processes as shown are undertaken to ensure that the project proceeds as planned.

**"Build the deliverables:** This phase involves physically constructing each deliverable for acceptance by the customer. The activities undertaken to construct each deliverable will vary depending on the type of project being undertaken. Activities may be undertaken in a 'waterfall' fashion, where each activity is completed in sequence until the final deliverable is produced, or in an 'iterative' fashion, where iterations of each deliverable are constructed until the deliverable meets the requirements of the customer. Regardless of the method used to construct each deliverable, careful monitoring and control processes should be employed to ensure that the quality of the final deliverable meets the acceptance criteria set by the customer.

**"Monitor and control:** While the project team are physically producing each deliverable, the project manager implements a series of management processes to monitor and control the activities being undertaken by the project team. An overview of each management process follows.

**"Time Management:** Time management is the process of recording and controlling time spent by staff on the project. As time is a scarce resource within projects, each team member should record time spent undertaking project activities on a timesheet form. This will enable the project manager to control the amount of time spent undertaking each activity within the project. A timesheet register is also completed, providing a summary of the time spent on the project in total so that the project plan can always be kept fully up to date.

**"Cost management:** Cost management is the process by which costs/expenses incurred on the project are formally identified, approved and paid. Expense forms are completed for each set of related project expenses such as labor, equipment and materials costs. Expense forms are approved by the project manager and recorded within an expense register for auditing purposes.

**"Quality management:** Quality is defined as the extent to which the final deliverable conforms to the customer requirements. Quality management is the process by which quality is assured and controlled for the project, using quality assurance and quality control techniques. Quality reviews are undertaken frequently and the results recorded on a quality review form.

**"Change management:** Change management is the process by which changes to the project scope, deliverables, timescales or resources are formally requested, evaluated and approved prior to implementation. A core aspect of the project manager's role is to manage change within the project. This is achieved by understanding the business and system drivers requiring the change, identifying the costs and benefits of adopting the change, and formulating a structured plan for implementing the change. To formally request a change to the project, a change form is completed. The status of all active change forms should be recorded within a change register.

**"Risk management:** Risk management is the process by which risks to the project are formally identified, quantified and managed. A project risk may be identified at any stage of the project by completing a risk form and recording the relevant risk details within the risk register.

**"Issue management:** Issue management is the method by which issues currently affecting the ability of the project to produce the required deliverable are formally managed. After an issue form has been

completed and the details logged in the issue register, each issue is evaluated by the project manager and a set of actions undertaken to resolve the issue identified.

**"Procurement management:** Procurement management is the process of sourcing products from an external supplier. Purchase orders are used to purchase products from suppliers, and a procurement register is maintained to track each purchase request through to its completion.

**"Acceptance management:** Acceptance management is the process of gaining customer acceptance for deliverables produced by the project. Acceptance forms are used to enable project staff to request acceptance for a deliverable, once complete. Each acceptance form identifies the acceptance criteria, review methods and results of the acceptance reviews undertaken.

**"Communications management:** Communications management is the process by which formal communications messages are identified, created, reviewed and communicated within a project. The most common method of communicating the status of the project is via a project status report. Each communications message released is captured in a communications register.

**"Perform a phase review:** At the end of the execution phase, a phase review is performed. This is a checkpoint to ensure that the project has achieved its objectives as planned."<sup>10</sup>

## What we liked – Project Closure

Jason concludes:

"Project closure involves releasing the final deliverables to the customer, handing over project documentation to the business, terminating supplier contracts, releasing project resources and communicating the closure of the project to all stakeholders. The last remaining step is to undertake a post implementation review to quantify the level of project success and identify any lessons learnt for future projects."<sup>11</sup>

"Following the acceptance of all project deliverables by the customer, the project will have met its objectives and be ready for closure. Project closure is the last phase in the project life cycle, and must be conducted formally so that the business benefits delivered by the project are fully realized by the customer. The activities outlined in Figure 5 are undertaken.



**Figure 5: Project closure activities**

**"Perform project closure:** Project closure, or 'close out', essentially involves winding up the project. This includes:

- Determining whether all of the project completion criteria have been met;
- Identifying any outstanding project activities, risks or issues;
- Handing over all project deliverables and documentation to the customer;
- Canceling supplier contracts and releasing project resources to the business;
- Communicating the closure of the project to all stakeholders and interested parties.

"A project closure report is documented and submitted to the customer and/or project sponsor for



approval. The project manager is responsible for undertaking each of the activities identified in the project closure report, and the project is closed only when all the activities listed in the project closure report have been completed.

**"Review project completion:** The final activity within a project is the review of its success by an independent party. Success is determined by how well it performed against the defined objectives and conformed to the management processes outlined in the planning phase. To determine how well it performed, the following types of questions are answered:

- Did it result in the benefits defined in the business case?
- Did it achieve the objectives outlined in the terms of reference?
- Did it operate within the scope of the terms of reference? 0 Did the deliverables meet the criteria defined in the quality plan?
- Was it delivered within the schedule outlined in the project plan?
- Was it delivered within the budget outlined in the financial plan?

"To determine how well the project conformed, an assessment is made of the level of conformity to the management processes outlined in the quality plan. These results, as well as a list of the key achievements and lessons learnt, are documented within a post-implementation review and presented to the customer and/or project sponsor for approval."

Note how each phase described in the preceding pages ends with a *Stage Gate* or *Phase Review*. A Phase review is defined in the book's Glossary as: "A checkpoint at the end of each project phase to ensure that a project has achieved its stated objectives and deliverables as planned" (for that phase).<sup>12</sup>

## **Downside and Summary**

### ***Downside***

Do we have any criticisms? Well, yes, just a few. First, as we have suggested many times elsewhere, we think that Figure 1, showing the four phases of the project life cycle is a perfect illustration of why the "project life cycle" should *not* be called "cycle" but called "span" instead. The figure shows the project phases going round in circles but never seems to produce a final output anywhere. That might be good news for a continuous quality improvement model, but it is not an ideal depiction of a project. And, before anyone jumps in and points out that "iteration" is a key element of information technology, our answer is: True, but the iterations only take place in the project execution phase and the iterations are *progressive!*

We feel strongly that for any but the smallest of projects, the results of the planning phase should be summarized into a Project (Execution) Charter. The approval of this Charter by the project's sponsor or senior management then provides the project manager with the updated authority to expend resources on the remaining phases and in accordance with the planned *modus operandi*. If this corporate management control strategy is adopted, then we think that the creation of the detailed plans described as part of the planning phase, should in fact be included as the first stage in Project Execution.

Finally, we think that the Project Closure phase could have a little more beef to it. Here, the very success of a project depends heavily on how well the product is "transferred to the care, custody and control" of the users. That means careful and appropriate marketing, training and support. This sequence is crucial to the success of any project.

## **Summary**

This book describes Jason Westland's preferred project management methodology that is encapsulated in his proprietary product *Method123*®.<sup>13</sup> The book caters for many types of project, including IT, finance, telecommunications and administrative projects. It is written in plain text and, as Jason observes:

"I have adopted industry standard terminology that can be understood by any reader with a rudimentary knowledge of project management. I have not adopted the complicated acronym-based terminology that is prevalent throughout industry. As such, you will not read about undertaking a PERT (project evaluation review technique) or CPA (critical path analysis), but you will read about how to create practical plans for managing time, cost and quality within a project. This book explains the project life cycle without the fluff."<sup>14</sup>

Amen to that! So, this book is simple, straightforward and detailed, and it includes over 100 tables and examples that you can use as templates for your project. But you will have to read the book for those details.

Highly recommended for the types of projects indicated.

R. Max Wideman  
Fellow, PMI

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.method123.com/>

<sup>2</sup> Westland, J., *The Project Management Life Cycle*, Kogan Page, London, 2006, p1, available from Amazon On Line Shopping <http://www.amazon.com>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p4

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, pp1-2

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, pp3-4

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, pp5-7

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p4-5

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, pp7-10

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p5

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p10-13

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p5

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p225

<sup>13</sup> See <http://www.method123.com/>

<sup>14</sup> Westland, pp xvi-xvii