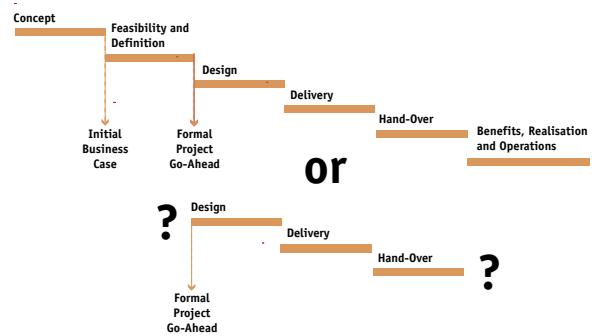


Get to grips with the business case

Sometime ago we found ourselves talking to two of the UK's 'elder statesmen' of project management. We were discussing the role of the Project Manager and the range of skills and capabilities needed to be good at their job. To cut a very long story short, a statement was made by us that a Project Manager should ideally be involved in a project from 'end to end', i.e. from formation of the Business Case through to Benefits Realisation and as such they needed all the skills and capabilities to be able to do this. To our utter amazement one of the 'elder statesmen' exclaimed 'Since when has the Business Case had anything to do with the Project Manager!' At which point the other 'elder statesman' said 'things are different now - project management is not just about building bridges you know'. Is this perception that the Business Case is nothing to do with the Project Manager just a thing of the past or is it still a factor in the management of projects? Unfortunately we observe that it is still very much a factor.

Since the original exclamation we have been heavily involved with the APM in the development of the new Practitioner Qualification that tests a candidate's ability to manage a small to medium sized non-complex project from start (Business Case) to finish (Benefits Realisation). We have now observed over 100 candidates participating in this assessment centre based examination and although over 60% have been successful, less than 20% of them are practising 'full life cycle' Project Managers. So does it matter if a Project Manager understands not only why a Business Case is put together but also what it contains and how it links to the preparation of the plans for which they are responsible? We think that the answer is undoubtedly YES. Does it matter if the Project Manager understands what benefits are sought from the project and how those benefits will be achieved? Again we think the answer is a resounding YES and this is why.



Although we don't argue with the theory that the project sponsor is accountable for the Business Case with the Project Manager 'only' being responsible for delivering the project's products to meet the requirements contained in the Business Case, we do argue that **project management can only be truly effective if there is a partnership and understanding between project sponsor and Project Manager.** Project governance in practice is rarely as 'cut and dried' as some textbooks would have us believe. The reality is that the most robust Business Cases bring together the views of the operational manager with the views of the people who will make the change happen. Many Project Managers are very experienced in the world in which they operate and they can have a very important view on the achievability of the Business Case. They can also have a view on the best way to solve the problem or opportunity as set out in the Business Case.

Furthermore, throughout the life cycle of the project the Project Manager will need to make decisions. Decisions to take longer, do things quicker, spend money, save money, improve quality or allow

quality to be downgraded. A Project Manager will make better, informed decisions if they understand WHY the project is being undertaken. What is the point of reducing quality, therefore saving both time and money, if that means that the product is no longer 'fit for purpose' and as such will not meet the Business Case and not realise the desired benefits.

There is one final point to add. Too many of the businesses we see who deliver projects as their 'bread and butter', i.e. the project is delivering to an external rather than internal client, fail to have an 'internal' Business Case at all. **If the only Business Case for the project is what the external client wants, how are the interests of the internal business being addressed?** What are the benefits for the performing organisation - or don't they care?! The answer is for all organisations to focus much more effort on the front end, involving project management and business expertise in the formulation of the Business Case and focusing attention on business benefits - not just for the 'client' but for all.

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