**4 Phases of the Project Management Lifecycle**

*The project management lifecycle consists of four steps: initiating, planning, executing, and closing.*

**What is the project management lifecycle?**

The project management lifecycle is a step-by-step framework of best practices used to shepherd a project from its beginning to its end. It provides project managers a structured way to create, execute, and finish a project.

This project management process generally includes four phases: initiating, planning, executing, and closing. Some may also include a fifth “monitoring and controlling” phase between the executing and closing stages. By following each step, a project team increases the chance of achieving its goals.

The project management lifecycle provides projects with structure and tools to ensure they have the best chance of being successful. As a project manager, it’s a process you’ll want to know well.

**The Project Management Lifecycle: 4 Steps**

**1.** **Initiating**

In the initiation phase, you’ll define the project. You’ll sort out the project goals, scope, and resources of the project, and what roles are needed on the team. Clarifying what stakeholders expect out of the project, and what exactly the project is aiming to achieve (and why) will give the project and team clear direction.

This is a crucial phase to the project’s success. Without clarity around what needs to be achieved and why, the project runs the risk of not accomplishing the end goals and meeting the expectations of stakeholders.

Some steps in the initiation phase include:

* Communicating with stakeholders to understand the purpose and desired outcomes of the project
* Identifying project scope
* Determining SMART goals (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound)
* Clarifying resources like budget and time constraints
* Confirming team size and roles required
* Determining how often and which stakeholders will be involved throughout the project
* Compiling a project proposal and project charter

Tools and documents used in the initiation phase can include:

* **Project proposal:**The project proposal defines a project and outlines key dates, requirements, and goals.
* **Project charter:**This is a definitive document that describes the project and main details necessary to reach its goals. This can include potential risks, benefits, constraints, and key stakeholders.
* **RACI chart:**A RACI chart plots the roles and responsibilities of members on a project team.

**2.** **Planning**

In the planning phase, you’ll determine the steps to actually achieve the project goals—the “how” of completing a project.

You’ll establish budgets, timelines, and milestones, and source materials and necessary documents. This step also involves calculating and predicting risk, putting change processes into place, and outlining communication protocols. If the initiation phase is assembling your troops, the planning phase is deciding what to do with them.

The planning phase can include the following steps:

* Deciding on milestones that lead up to goal completion
* Developing a schedule for tasks and milestones, including time estimates and potential time buffers
* Establishing change processes
* Determining how and how often to communicate with team members and stakeholders
* Creating and signing documents such as non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) or requests for proposal (RFPs)
* Assessing and managing risk by creating a risk register
* Holding a kick-off meeting to start project

Tools you might use in a this phase include:

* **Gantt chart:** A horizontal bar chart in which members can see what tasks must be completed in what order, and how long each is expected to take
* **Risk register:** A chart that lists risks associated with the project, along with their probability, potential impact, risk level, and mitigation plans

**3.** **Execute and complete tasks**

Executing a project means putting your plan into action and keeping the team on track. Generally this means tracking and measuring progress, managing quality, mitigating risk, managing the budget, and using data to inform your decisions.

Specific steps might include:

* Using tools like GANTT or burndown charts to track progress on tasks
* Responding to risks when they manifest
* Recording costs
* Keeping team members motivated and on task
* Keeping stakeholders informed of progress
* Incorporating changes via change requests

Some tools you might use include:

* **Change requests:**These are documents used to propose changes to a project’s scope or goals
* **Burndown chart:**This chart breaks down tasks on a granular level and visualizes the amount of time remaining

**4.** **Close projects**

In the closing phase of the project management lifecycle, you’ll conclude project activities, turn the finished product or service over to its new owners, and assess the things that went well and didn’t go so well. It’ll also be a time to celebrate your hard work.

Steps in the closing phase can include:

* Conducting retrospectives and take notes of changes you can implement in the future
* Communicating to stakeholders of the end of the project and providing an impact report
* Communicating with the new owners of a project
* Creating a project closeout report
* Celebrating the end of the project and your successes

Tools used in the closing phase include:

* **Impact report:** This report compiles a series of metrics that showcase how your project made a difference and is presented to your stakeholders.
* **Project closeout report:**A project closeout report provides a summary of your project’s accomplishments, and provides key learnings for future project managers to reference.