



Project and Programme Governance

Using Senior Management Support to Ensure Project Success

Having the right support is essential.

Your business case is approved, your project team is in place, and you're ready to go. You have agreement on all the resources you need. You're confident that you're going to deliver on time, to quality, and within budget. The project's success seems to be guaranteed... But how often do things actually work out as smoothly as this?

Then resources that you thought had been assigned to your project start to disappear... Experts that you need are allocated elsewhere. The data storage that you had stated as critical will no longer be provided, because another project has been delayed. Other stakeholders hear about your project, and it becomes obvious to you that the project's scope should be extended to include their needs, but you don't have the funding to do this.

How could you have prevented this? The answer is to have strong project governance in place. This won't necessarily stop these issues from occurring, however, it will ensure that you have the right senior management support lined up and motivated to help you to resolve problems quickly and successfully.

In this article, we'll explain what project governance is, we'll look at some useful governance mechanisms, and we'll give you a checklist that you can use to choose the approach that's right for your project.

What Is Project Governance?

Project governance is the set of processes used to ensure that the project is implemented successfully. This includes reviewing how the project is progressing through the project's phases

Project managers are responsible for making sure that appropriate management processes are used routinely within the project. The Mind Tools project management menu takes you through many of these individual processes – for example, showing you how to initiate a large project, and how to control the scope of the project.

But this isn't enough. A strong approach to project governance is also needed to engage with senior stakeholders. They can make decisions in the wider interest of the organization as a

whole, and they can give you the support you need as a project manager, so that you can resolve critical issues.

You can get this engagement in a variety of ways, and not all are appropriate for all projects. In this article, we'll review three mechanisms that are commonly used as part of the project governance framework (steering groups, panels of experts, and oversight groups), and we'll look at the project sponsor role. You'll then be able to decide what will work best for your specific project.

Project sponsorship is the most important part of project governance, so we'll start with the role of the project sponsor.

Project Sponsor

Every project needs a sponsor to get started. Sponsors are often the executives who want the project's benefits, and they have the authority and commitment to provide the support that the project needs. As such, the sponsor has significant input into the project and is highly committed to the results.

But simply having a project sponsor in place often isn't enough.

Projects have a range of key stakeholders. (You can use the [Stakeholder Analysis](#) to help you think through the communications that each stakeholder needs.)

Managing all of these separate relationships can take up a great deal of time. If you deal with them separately, you may lose out on ideas that would be generated if many of these people were in the same place, at the same time. Also, when dealing with issues or concerns one by one, you don't have the same opportunity for discussing the big picture, and support or advice given privately may not turn out to be that strong if other senior managers think of better ideas or solutions.

One way of getting around this is to set up a series of forums that help you engage with stakeholders efficiently, helping you address the stakeholder engagement problems that many projects experience. These forums give you a way of formalizing this engagement, and put specific, regular events on stakeholders' calendars so that your project gets regular time and attention.

There are three types of forum that can be useful: project steering groups, panels of experts, and oversight teams. We look at these below.

Project Steering Groups

A project steering group is led by the project sponsor, and it includes senior people with a significant interest in the project and its success. This group is responsible for overall decision making with the project sponsor. Members oversee the direction of the project; set its priorities; approve its scope, costs, and resources; resolve major issues; ensure alignment

with the business's strategic plan; and support the sponsor's communication within the business, and with customers and suppliers.

The project steering group usually includes the following people:

- Senior managers from the areas of the business that the project impacts.
- Representatives from key projects or programs with which this project interfaces.
- Functional heads or experts from key risk areas – for example, IT, if there's a heavy reliance on information technology; HR, if there will be a significant impact on the roles that individuals will be required to perform; or a legal adviser, if there are significant contractual issues to be overcome.
- A senior finance person, for both business case approval, and for monitoring of benefits against the business case baseline.
- The project or program manager.

Panels of Experts

A panel of experts is used to make recommendations about what the project delivers. The group may meet only infrequently, because it's likely that individuals on the panel would be needed for their advice at different times.

For example, consider a project to deliver a global finance process to a range of countries. You could establish a panel of global process owners to decide where local variations are required to the global process (for example, local variations may only be needed for local taxation and legal requirements). Finance experts in each of the sub-process areas (for example, accounts payable and accounts receivable) could be consulted to decide which local process variations are acceptable, and which are not.

You can also use this panel of experts approach with supplier and customer representatives, if this is appropriate for your project.

Oversight Teams

Oversight teams are useful when you need to supervise the work and decisions that senior project team members are making, as a way of validating that the work and decisions made are appropriate. This is particularly useful when the project is being implemented by an external group, or by an inexperienced internal team.

This oversight team is likely to consist of a small number of individuals, who will probably be assigned to this role part time (with the exception of very large projects). For an IT implementation, a typical oversight team would consist of a project manager, a technical manager, and a change manager. They would review key deliverables, attend key project meetings, and hold discussions with key team members and stakeholders to understand project progress.

Structuring Your Project's Governance Requirements

There's no single answer to what appropriate governance arrangements look like. You must assess your project's needs to decide what is appropriate. Here's a checklist that will help you think about this:

- Which stakeholders are really important to the success of your project? And are their different interests likely to lead to competing priorities within the project? (If they are, a steering group or other forum will enable them to discuss these competing priorities and create a single list of products for the project to deliver.)
- What is likely to cause the most significant issues within the project? (Use your log of critical risks to identify these.)
- Who will be able to help you if these become major issues? What is the best way to engage these people before any issues arise, so that they're available to you for support if the issues do occur?
- Which of your project decisions involve several departments or functions? What is the best way to coordinate these decisions across these departments?
- What profile does the project have within the organization? (The higher the profile, the stronger the governance needs to be.)
- Whose support is critical for the sponsor to be effective? How is this support best given?
- What is the attitude of key stakeholders to any change that the project will bring? If they're reluctant or if they refuse this change, what is the best way to engage them? Who is in the best position to convince them that this change is in their best interests, and what will convince them?
- Who must sign off on the project deliverables to enable the project to proceed? How is this most effectively achieved? Who has the power to block the project, and for what reasons?

Key Points

Effective project governance is critical to the success of many projects. Structure this governance so that it supports you and your project sponsor. By doing so, you can ensure that your project receives the support it needs when it needs it, which can make the difference between success and failure for the project.

Source: Mindtools.com