

Transition Management: Strategy & Process for High Risk Project for Taking Transition in the Middle as a Project Manager

Sunil Kumar Sharma, PMP

Infosys Technologies

Deepali Goyal

Infosys Technologies

Ranjan Sopan Kolte

Infosys Technologies



Leveraging project management for excellence, growth and transformation



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1.1 Abstract

Does a project manager's role in a project start with project initiation? Not always! A project manager may be required to take over in a project already in execution. How does midway transition to a new project manager in a high risk complex project with distributed team and stakeholders from across organizations and geographies impact the project and new project manager? How do we apply best project management practices in transition phase to ensure a smooth takeover and successful delivery? Can we assume that outgoing project manager would be a PMP and would have followed all the processes and all reports and collaterals can be taken at face value? Can we assume that all stakeholders have the correct view of the project and roles and responsibilities the way currently defined are signed off? This paper attempts to examine taking over a new partially executed project as a separate project phase within the project life cycle, a separate process and its relationship with all other processes and knowledge areas via a case study of a mid way takeover of a high risk project by a PMO certified project manager. Transition process steps, inputs, output and collaterals are discussed in light of challenges, risks and learning's faced during the project transition and post transition execution by application of standard project management processes. This paper outlines the transition methodology, based on the learning from midway transition of a high risk project and issues found and processes deployed for transition.

1.2 Introduction

First thought when we talk about transition is addition of risk to the project. There are comprehensive methodologies for transition of projects to new team and guidelines for due diligence to ensure minimal addition of risk. It is often found that same rigor is not applied for transition of key roles to new person. Elaborate mechanisms and guidelines which can be used as a standard are not available. This becomes very crucial for the success of the project when the key role in question is the Project Manager as it adds significant risk to an already high risk projects. In this paper we examine this issue and propose a process for project manager transition.

Project is just not a set of process and documents but has a very big human factor and is influenced by personal management style of the project managers. Initiatives like PMI have helped a lot to bring about a standard project management practices but environmental factors, personal leadership style of project manager are still great influencers. Hence a transition is always a risk and could be significant in a high risk complex project.

Project manager, one taking over transition of a project with significant complexity and in advanced stage has a lot of worry about. Shouldn't a transition of signed off documents baselines, project plan, charter etc should enable the new project manager to take over the project and start managing. Answer could be 'yes' in some cases and 'no' in many cases. 'No' not because outgoing project manager will play deliberate mischief and may not be trained in project management, but more because nature of project management since it is based on progressive elaborations and is in constant state of potential changes. Due to break in continuity lot of things can fall through the gap. So what could go wrong in a real scenario




- WBS may not be updated as team may be too busy. One may be surprised to find out that lot changes which team is working on may actually qualify for change requests which no one is taking care of.
- A close look at updated WBS may reveal the budget left is inadequate and schedule unachievable
- There may be many undocumented commitments which may not be known till a deep discussion happens with stakeholders
- Scope and estimation may not have been done using the standard techniques and may be well off the mark.
- Team may not have right skills to do the job and as a new project manager it may take some time before team members become open about issues unless there is a conscious attempt during transition
- There may be issues with resource availability and issues which may need immediate escalation but may not be documented.
- There may be changes which should have been initiated by now but are deferred because of adverse environment.
- Dependencies may have forced project manager to deviate from original plan and risks may not be registered.
- Due to potential transition there is a chance that some processes may be adhered to as diligently

When the same project manager continues he may be able to handle many of these things but as a new project manager it is responsibility of new project manager to start with correct baseline and not end up being a person who is bringing new issues though project was sailing smoothly before. With this responsibility on shoulders project manager's transition becomes a lot more intensive exercise which needs buy in from all stakeholders. A structured and process driven approach can help reduce the uncertainty and risks associated with transition.

1.3 Case under Discussion

A global bank GBANK initiated a strategic IT project to develop a core application for its investment bank division. The project was to address regulatory compliance related to assess the risk exposure of organization's investment over several time steps for multiple investment products. As part of the scope, project had to interface with multiple upstream and downstream systems on variety of technologies. Any error in final reports to regulatory compliance bodies would result into financial and legal implications. GBANK had decided to execute this project by outsourcing it to vendor partner INNVO. Project was structured to be executed from multiple locations across US, India and other APAC regions. Because of the regulatory nature of project there was push from business to implement the application as soon as possible so that business gets sufficient time to test the outputs. Owing to the



pressures, the stakeholders agreed to start the project. A Project Manager who had managed small projects successfully in the past was assigned the responsibility of managing the project. The project in question was being executed on-schedule with green status till the build phases. During integration, it was realized that some of the components did not tie together well. The reasons for the same can be attributed to multiple factors such as lack of integration planning, technological limitations and product incompatibility. The problems compounded by the delayed discovery of the issues. The team on the ground had decided to go for break-fix rather than going back to the drawing board as a solution to this problem. This went for a month and then a week before the delivery the Project Manager highlighted the inability to do delivery on time. Extension of 8 weeks was sought. In the second week of extension period the Project Manager had to leave the project because of unavoidable circumstances on personal front. A PMI certified PMP professional was brought as replacement and a worst case transition of a week was planned. The incoming project manager had planned for transition based on the tenets of project management as recommended by PMI.

1.4 Project Challenges uncovered during transition

One of the biggest challenges faced by new project manager was the misleading/incorrect status reporting. Though prima facie schedule appeared to have been monitored and tracked, yet there was not much evidence of monitoring of other key parameters like cost, quality and scope changes. Project manager listed the potential challenges before putting action plan in place –

1. Gap in status reporting from the perspective of completeness and correctness
2. Gap in tracking the earned value
3. Gap in quality processes institutionalization
4. Gap in key stakeholders communication as huge mismatch in expectation vis-à-vis the plan and the appraisal of actual progress
5. Risk and issues tracking started but was stopped sometime while the work pressure started mounting
6. Gap in implanting change control process

Delving deep into the issues, after initial few meetings as part of transition it was quite clear that taking a transition without validation of baseline was like getting into a minefield. Following issues were identified as potential issues in brainstorming session with Project Manager and key stakeholders -

- **Issues in scope definition:** It was evident that scope documented and WBS don't look in sync and scope definition was not correct. This will depend on project context but scope revalidation is a key activity without which a project transition is at serious risk. Hence, a review with all key



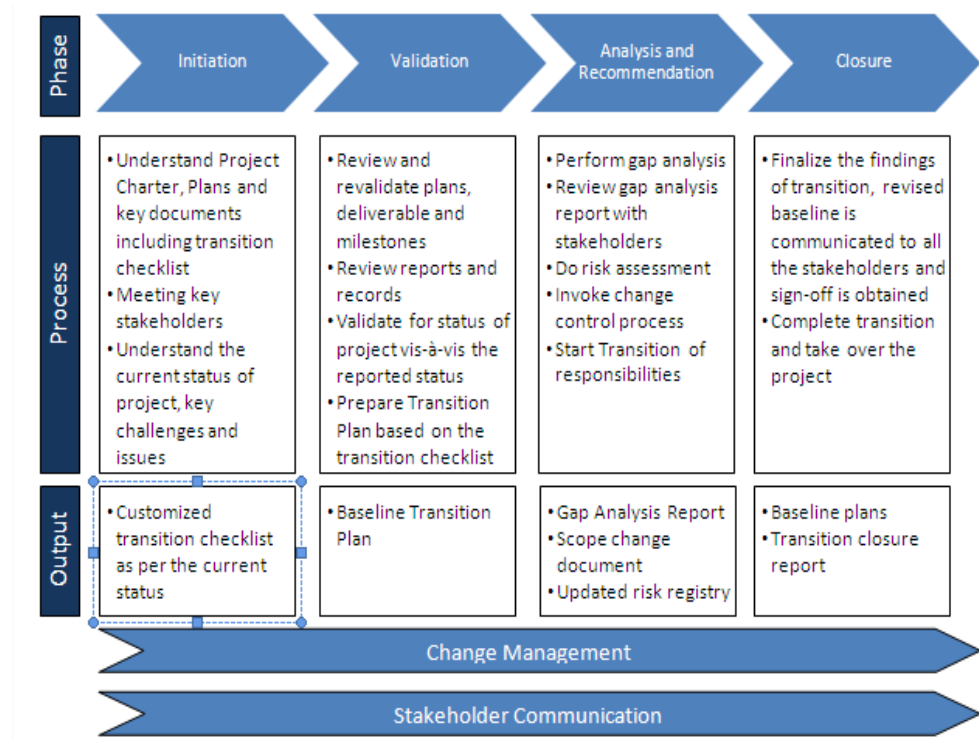
stakeholders and project sponsor is mandatory in this process. Mere document transfer will not be sufficient.

- **Issue in estimation:** Re-estimation for all the scope changes was not done. Though for an in-flight project there are expected deviations from initial estimations but a sanity check is required to uncover any major risks. A clear understanding of how estimation was done using what methodology and whether enough expert judgment was used are some of key sanity checks.
- **Issues with Project Plan:** Project plan was not updated for major changes during the fire fighting mode. This is the biggest minefield which can reveal a lot about current state of the project. There are a lot of sub plans which hold the key for the project manager
 - Scope Management and WBS: Need to be closely reviewed to ensure WBS covers all the tasks
 - Schedule Management
 - Cost Management
 - Risk Management
 - Issues Management
- **Issues in task allocation:** Task allocation was being done on adhoc basis based on the availability of the resources. Skillset and task allocation should be reviewed and rationale understood. Any serious gaps should be presented for stakeholder review .
- **Issue in Change control:** Change control process was not triggered at appropriate time. There could be many changes which were accepted without change control process. Change control process should be triggered for any serious issues having impact on schedule, cost and/or quality.
- **Issues in Stakeholder communication:** Stakeholders may not hold a uniform view and correct view of the project. Any such issues should be recorded and remediated.
- **Contract management:** This may look simple but can lead to serious complications. With help of finance department this should also be reviewed.

After the initial analysis it was assessed that a transition and continuation of project AS-IS will take 7 months for completion.

1.5 Methodology Adopted for Turn Around

For transition it was decided this will be done by adopting a process driven approach rather than treat it like a person transition. Approach adopted is described below -



Initiation – This phase involves kick-off of the transition, stakeholder communication about the change, gathering all the relevant artifacts for transition and understanding the health of the project. Ground work for the validation and analysis phase is done during this phase

Validation – This is a crucial phase as it involves re-assessment of the project health by a new eye.

Analysis and Recommendation – This phase is equally crucial as the *Validation* phase because it involves identification of gaps, re-assessment of risk and the more important of all alignment of all the stakeholders about the project health

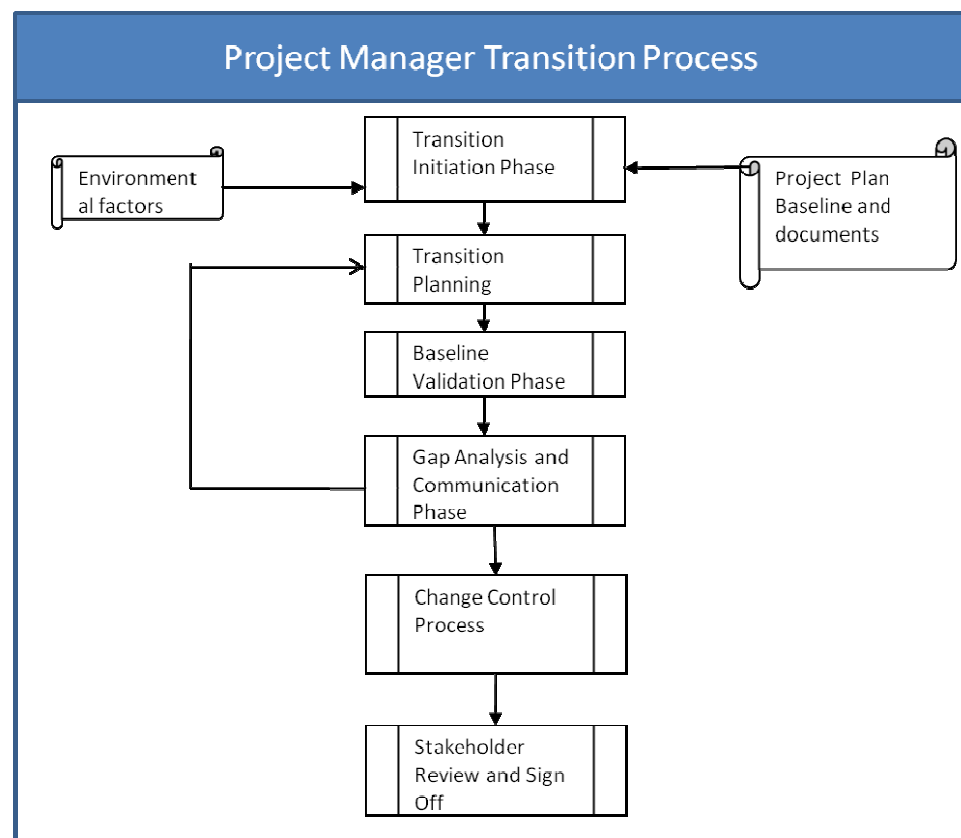
Closure – Transition closure can be looked upon as a course correction and continuation of the journey towards successful completion of the project. All the modified artifacts are baselined and form the basis for driving the future course.

1.6 Outcome

The project was completed successfully and handed over to business within the revised budget and two months ahead of the schedule revised during the transition

1.7 Recommendations

We would like to recommend a process for project manager transition to be included in PMBOK as a separate process so that it can be ensured that Project Managers are able to take over in-flight project and manage it in accordance with principles laid out by PMI to enhance the project success rate. Proposed Project Manager transition process-



Transition Initiation Phase

During transition initiation phase project manager gets to know about basic objectives of the project , brief history of the project , get to know basic structure of project documentation and a brief introduction with key stakeholder. Below is a summary list of documents ,reports and factors which should be covered in this



phase. An updated transition planning checklist will be key output for successful transition.

Plans	Reports and Records	Environment and Other factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Project Charter• Project Management Plan and sub-plans• Schedule• Risk Records• Issue Logs• Scope and scope change requests• Baseline acceptance criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Record of change requests (scope changes)• Risk Review Reports• Record of plan changes and re-baselines• Record of estimation changes and schedule re-baselines• Review of cost and schedule adherence• Review of latest issue logs and status• Stakeholder communication records• Milestone review reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lead time taken for closure of issues• Involvement of appropriate stakeholders• Confirmation on stakeholders understanding of their roles and responsibilities• SME co-operation and availability• Team motivation and people issues (if any)• Changes in team and attrition• Understanding of business drivers for the project, any critical dependencies, legal and regulatory implications for client• Elicitation of specific undocumented requirements or expectations from the stakeholders

Transition Planning Phase

After transition initiation phase based on information received a detailed transition plan is prepared using the checklist. Some of the best practices are

- Project manager should get buy in from all stakeholders about their availability as required.
- Transition plan should reflect the resource and SME availability, factor lead time for any access, approval, legal and security aspects .
- Transition plan should cover all areas of transition checklist.
- A reasonable time should be assumed for validation phase and expert s availability for the same should be factored.



Baseline Validation Phase

Base line validation is the most important step in project manager transition process. In this phase focus should be retained on issues finding if any and documenting the same. Some of the best practices for the phase are

- Analysis of the gaps is separated as a process steps as that steps may need a more complete picture and ad-hoc analysis should be avoided.
- Issue log should be shared with stakeholders only on need to know basis during the process to avoid unnecessary alarm.
- Final issue log should be shared with all relevant stakeholders

Gap Analysis and Stakeholder Communication Process

Once the issues in base line validation phase are available next steps is analysis of gaps with relevant stakeholders to understand the impact . Following actions may result from this phase

- Some part of impact may introduce a reasonable risk which in which case risk register needs to be updated.
- Some issues, like gaps in documentation, small missing portions in WBS and communication and perception gap, may be possible to remediate and same should be done.
- For some of larger impact issues change control process may need to be triggered

Change Control Process

Once stakeholders have reviewed the gaps and there is agreement on triggering change control process then change requests should be raised and process assets modified accordingly.

- Impact on cost, schedule and impact should be documented
- Risk register should be updated
- Project plan and WBS should be updated
- Communication management plan should be updated

Once change are approved then a new baseline should be created for the project which should reflect current status , understanding of scope, roles and responsibilities, risks , budget and schedule.

Stakeholder's Review and Project takeover

New baseline should be reviewed by all stakeholders. Stakeholder should be briefed about

- How gaps have been addressed
- Impact of changes
- Review of risk register

Upon stakeholder approval project manager should take over the project and start Managing.

1.8 References

1. PMBOK Version

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1.9 Author(s) Profile



Sunil Kumar Sharma, is a Sr Project Manager with Infosys. He has diverse experience in project and program management of IT services delivery, solution design, outsourcing and client relationship management

E-mail: sunil_sharma@infosys.com



Deepali is a Senior Project Manager with Infosys Technologies Limited. She has over 16 years of experience in project and program management of IT consulting, solutions and services.

E-mail: deepali_goyal@infosys.com



Ranjan is a Senior Project Manager with Infosys Technologies Limited. He has over 10 years of experience in Project and Program Management. He has managed complex programs which required transition from clients and multi-vendor from multiple locations across the globe.

E-mail: ranjankolte@infosys.com;
ranjan_kolte@yahoo.com