

Basic Concepts in Project Management

Each discipline of knowledge, from physics to biology and from computer science to poetry, builds upon some basic concepts. The terms that refer to or define these concepts make up the language of the discipline. The very basic terms in project management are described briefly in the following list:

- **Project.** A project is a work effort made over a finite period of time with a start and a finish to create a unique product, service, or result. Because a project has a start and an end, it is also called a *temporary effort* or *endeavor*.
- **Project Phase.** A project phase is a set of logically related activities that usually completes one or more major deliverables of the project. The phases are generally completed in sequence; however, an overlap is possible in some situations. Depending on its size and complexity, a project may have one or more phases.
- **Project Life Cycle.** It is the full project duration from beginning to end, including all project stages: initiating, planning, executing, monitoring and controlling, and closing. If projects have multiple phases, all of these stages are repeated in each phase.
- **Process Groups.** These are the technical names for the project stages: initiating, planning, executing, monitoring and controlling, and closing.
- **Organization.** An organization is a group of individuals organized to work for some purpose or mission. Computer companies, energy companies (to whom you pay your electric bills), and cable companies are examples of organizations. An organization might offer products, such as books or donuts, or services, such as Internet access or online banking.
- **Performing Organization.** The performing organization, also referred to as the project organization, is the organization that is performing the project.
- **Project Stakeholder.** A project stakeholder is an individual or an organization that can affect or be affected by the project execution. A project can have a wide spectrum of stakeholders, from the project sponsor, to an environmental organization, to an ordinary citizen.
- **Process.** In the context of projects, a process is a set of related tasks performed to manage a certain aspect of a project, such as cost, scope, and risk. Each process belongs to a knowledge area and corresponds to a process group.

- **Knowledge Area.** A knowledge area in project management is defined by its knowledge requirements related to managing a specific aspect of a project, such as cost, by using a set of processes. PMI recognizes a total of nine knowledge areas, such as cost management and resource management.
- **Tailoring.** Obviously, you don't apply all the project management knowledge to a project. For a given project, with help from the project team, you select appropriate lifecycle phases and needed outputs, and to produce those outputs you choose the right processes, inputs, and tools and techniques. This method is called tailoring.
- **Project Management.** Project management is the use of knowledge, skills, and tools to manage a project from start to finish with the goal of meeting the project requirements. It involves using the appropriate processes.
- **Phase Gate.** A review at the end of each phase leading to the decision to continue to the next phase as planned, continue to the next phase with changed plan, or end the project.

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