online post-graduate diploma in monitoring and evaluation

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**MODULE 7 Questions:**

**Q1:** Where M&E necessitates revision of project plans, outline key steps Program Management teams need to take towards this end. (10 mrks)

Healy (1998) states that a project can be carried out in just about any sphere of human endeavor and that all projects reach a conclusion, that is to say, they have an end point and that any activity with an end-point is a project. Project management vocabulary in Lester (2017) defines a project as “a unique process, consisting of a set of coordinated and controlled activities with start and finish dates, undertaken to achieve an objective conforming to specific requirements, including constraints of time, costs and resources”.

Carpenter (2008) points out that a project’s characteristics represented in a project plan can be summarized as a triangle in which angles represent cost, time and performance, circumscribed by regulatory or external constraints. She uses an illustration whereby as with any triangle, you cannot change one angle without affecting one or the other angles or both. For example, the timescale of your project cannot be changed without affecting either cost or performance or both. Projects are planned and implemented against a background of risk as well as external constraints about which you make considered assumptions but which you cannot control.

The most important activity in projects is planning, therefore, detailed, systematic, team involved plans are the foundation of project success; projects typically include the mission, goals, beneficial gains, objectives, key success criteria, deliverables, project constraints and a risk analysis (Chittick and Persaud, 2001). A project plan helps to represent how the project will unfold and helps to focus participants on the task ahead and to ensure that everyone agrees on what has to be accomplished. Having said that, Reid (1999) clearly emphasizes that before the work is done, there is need to know what has to be done to achieve the goal so that we can establish the cost, the resources, the materials and a logical method of completing the work.

Chittick and Persaud (2001) also advise that projects are best accomplished using a temporary team consisting of members from within and outside the organization because outside expertise facilitates the inclusion of objective and varied opinions along with recent developments. However, at the start of a project, the status of the project plan may be questionable, leaving the project team wondering whether it is still accurate, whether it reflects organizational realities or is detailed enough to begin its implementation. So the revision of the project plan can be done for several reasons, for example, staff members who developed it may have left the organization or the project plan was submitted for funding approval in previous financial year, since when various changes in organizational structures and budgets have taken place (Carpenter, 2011). She adds that project and programme management are complimentary and related disciplines. So the programme team or project team would still manage a project in the same way. First the project plan may need a detailed review and possibly a revision. This may involve renegotiating certain aspects of it and reassessing what can be achieved with allocated budget in changed circumstances.

Where monitoring and evaluation necessitates revision of project plans, Carpenter (2008) outlines the following key steps. First is reviewing the project aims, objectives and required outcomes after an interval to assess them in a fresh light to see what outcomes must manifest at the end of the project for the project to be considered a success. These considerations are helpful for project evaluation. Second, analysis of work content into work packages, tasks and activities. Third, consideration of effort and duration of each task and elapsed time. Fourth, determination of the logical sequence for each work package, its prerequisites and outcomes (scheduling) and fifth, construction of a project timetable based on the schedule and finally, the consideration of the resources required to complete each activity and work package.

To conclude, although initial plans will be updated, they are critical because when the project is completed they will be used to measure its success, particularly that related to time, cost and performance and the constraints within which the project was conducted. Determining whether the way the project was planned is the most appropriate way of solving the problem at hand. Planning is everything and is ongoing; planning and replanning must become a way of life. Clear, defined and refined project plans help to keep the project team and other stakeholders focused on what has to be accomplished. The clearer the target, the easier it will be to hit it!

**Q2:** Briefly explain in about 250 words the key actions required at project-level monitoring work and describe the key variances between project level monitoring and program level monitoring. (10mrks).

Carpenter (2011) states the following actions in project monitoring: the first is to collect data and documentation of indicators for work package, task and activity objectives, quality and appropriateness of activities and use of resources, the project environment, cooperation with target groups and partners; secondly, analyzing and drawing conclusions regarding comparison of planned and actual achievements, any deviations, changes in project environment and consequences for the project and comparison of planned and actual procedures of project organization, cooperation or communication with target groups or partners and; thirdly, making recommendations and taking corrective action in relation to adjustment of timing of activities and resources, adjustment of objectives, procedures, and cooperation or communication methods.

Note (2016) defines a project as a series of unique, multifaceted and related activities with a purpose that must be accomplished at a particular time, within cost constraints, and according to specifications while programs are sets of correlated projects that are achieved using project management techniques in a coordinated fashion.

Organisations usually administer projects collectively as programs, and in doing so, they capitalize on benefits that would not be achievable if the projects were managed separately (Vuorinen and Martinsuo, 2018). While projects start and come to an end, programs are usually phased; when first phase approaches completion, new related projects are initiated. Dietrich (2006) states that programs differ from projects because they often produce not just a single, clear deliverable but rather multiple deliveries. Besides, single projects are often focused on delivering an asset or a change whereas programs aim to produce strategic or extra-project objectives.

Martinsuo and Hoverfätt (2018) state that projects and programs are different, each with unique profiles including monitoring. Carpenter (2008) highlights that project monitoring involves giving feedback about the progress of the project which information is used in making decisions for improving project performance. It provides the kinds of information that will help in determining whether the inputs into the project are well utilized; identifying any problems facing the project team and finding solutions; determining whether the way the project was planned is the most appropriate way of solving the problem at hand and ensuring that all activities are carried out properly by the right people and in time.

On the other hand, Hope and Moehler (2014) argue that at program level, there is monitoring dependencies among the projects in a program, determining which issues among the projects in the program should be escalated, escalated issues are addressed, tracking contribution of each project to the consolidated program benefits. It also involves tracking the contribution of the program-related non project work to the consolidated program benefits.

Having said that, Sanghera (2008) expounds on the variances between program monitoring and project monitoring in this way. A program is monitored to deliver benefits and meet some predetermined objectives while project monitoring is focused on the project to ensure that the project delivers its product, service or results and meets its objectives. At program level monitoring, one eye is kept on the outcome of each project and the other on the desired program benefits and ensures that the outcomes from multiple projects meet the desired benefits and objectives expected from the program.

To conclude, a project is a subset of a program, projects and programs may be monitored in relatively the same way, it’s just that monitoring at project level focuses on the project while monitoring at the program level focuses on the program, the projects and non –project work under the program. Monitoring at the program level is more complex than at the project level.

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