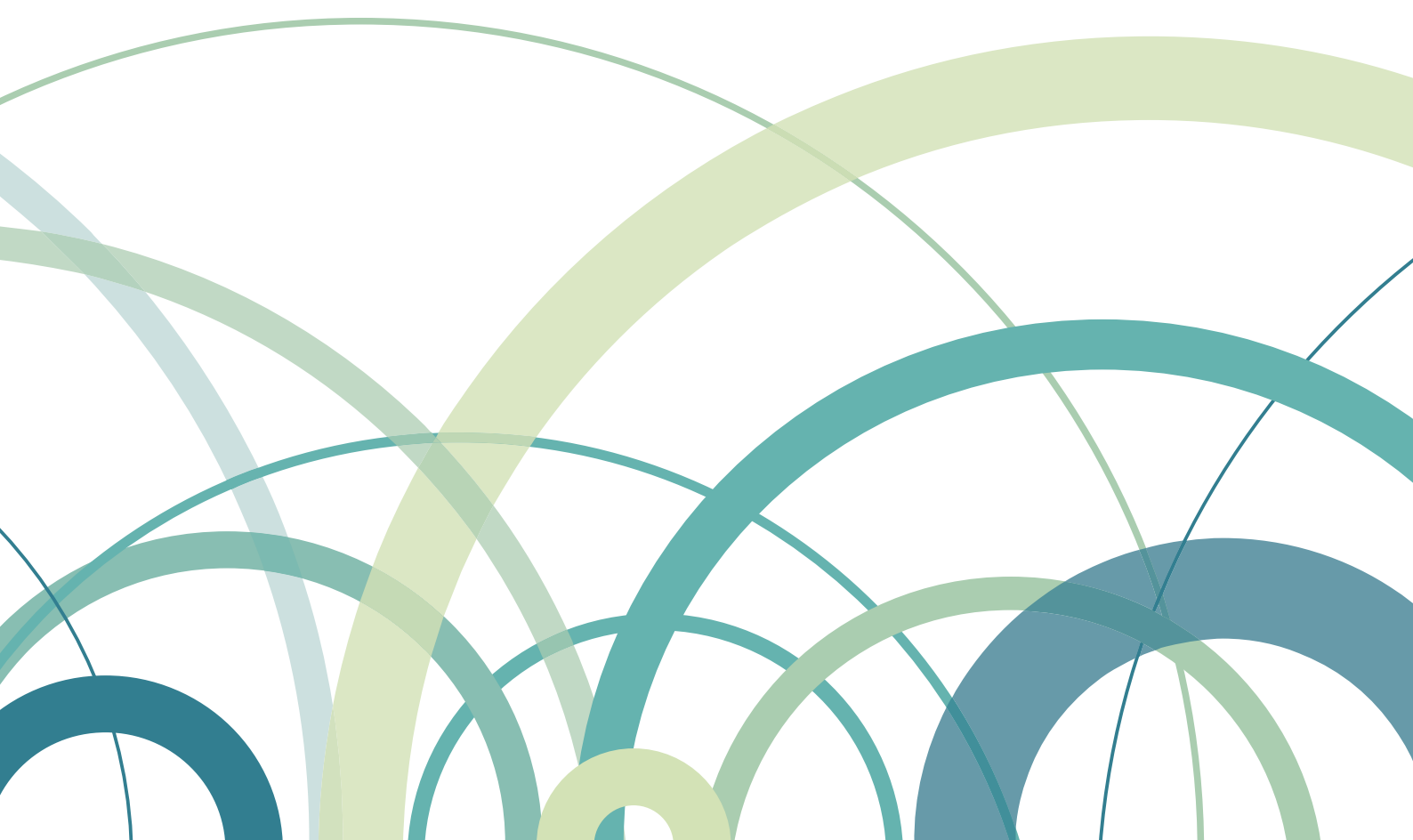


Using programme management to deliver strategic objectives

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This paper sets out to explain programme management from a senior management perspective demonstrating how programme management is an effective mechanism for translating strategic plans and goals into definitive actions and clearly understood responsibilities.

I have not assumed that those reading this paper have any prior knowledge of programme or project management and have sought to explain definitions and terminology in straightforward language in the hope of avoiding the jargon that is often employed in these contexts.

A programme is a temporary, flexible organisation created to co-ordinate, direct and oversee the implementation of a set of related projects and activities in order to deliver outcomes and benefits related to the organisation's strategic objectives.

Programme management is the co-ordinated organisation, direction and implementation of a dossier of projects and transformation activities to achieve outcomes and realise benefits of strategic importance to the business.

Managing Successful Programmes 2011

In the project management community programme management appears as a logical progression bringing multiple projects together so that their related deliverables, resources, risks and issues can be addressed as a whole whilst their day-to-day management can be treated independently.

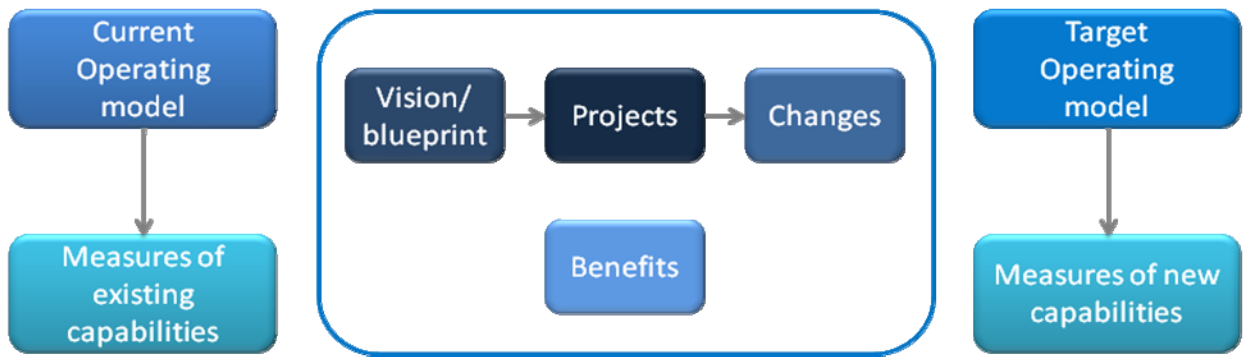
For senior managers programme management offers a structure for defining, managing and implementing the transformational changes associated with achieving strategic objectives.

Using this structure removes some of the uncertainty and chaos that is often associated with transformational change:

- It breaks down the many moving parts of the change into clearly defined pieces of work, reducing the paralysis that arises when staff and managers feel the work is so complex that they don't know where to start
- It produces a roadmap of changes and new capabilities that are expected as a result of all the different projects which enables people to identify how they will be affected and how they can become involved
- It creates a single version of the truth, a unified vision of what is to be delivered that can be clearly communicated
- By grouping the projects and change activities together the total amount of resource required can be clearly seen and decisions can be taken to balance the work against the available resources

Programmes have two elements that come together to make the strategy a reality:

- A clear description of the future of the organisation that will be created as a result of the programme
- An explanation of why this future is necessary and beneficial



The clear description of the future is provided by creating a vision and a blueprint.

The vision is the description of what the programme will achieve. Essentially it describes the future of the organisation assuming that the strategy has become a reality. It might describe the size of the organisation, where it operates, its sources of revenue, its customer base, the products and services that it now offers or its reputation in the market place.

The vision provides the initial guide to what work must be included in the programme i.e. growth, an efficient working environment, the results of a restructuring or the impact of a change in values and culture.

It is very high level and does not provide enough detail to identify every project that is to be undertaken. Often it is a short paragraph that hopefully everyone involved in the programme can remember. The secret to writing an effective vision is to use words that excite and inspire people to create what is being described. Essentially it is the 'marketing blurb' for the programme, advertising the delight of a new working environment. It needs to describe a future that people intuitively want to be a part of, an organisation that they feel proud to work for. It needs to avoid management jargon and instead use simple language that everyone can understand.

The blueprint provides an index of all the aspects of the organisation that will need to change to achieve the vision of the programme.

For every new process or system that the programme creates the blueprint defines the resources and skills needed to operate them, the inputs required to undertake them and the data generated by them. The blueprint defines what measures the organisation will use to assess its performance and identifies which processes and systems are used to generate this data.

Creating the blueprint produces a definitive picture of all the changes that the organisation will be undertaking as a result of the programme and helps to ensure changes are only included if they make a genuine contribution to the achievement of the strategy, removing ideas which have support but are not essential.

The blueprint demonstrates the complexity of the programme and gives a valuable overview of its impact. The scale of the changes defined in the blueprint can be considerable, and will need to be balanced against their contribution to the achievement of the strategic objectives and the value of delivering the new strategy. The benefits and costs of each change must be identified in the business case and the blueprint balanced to ensure that the changes deliver the greatest possible value for the organisation for the spend involved.

The importance of benefits

Programmes must be benefits led – such a significant use of resources cannot be assigned to an idea that ‘feels right’ – there must be a very clear idea of what benefits will be realized, when and in what areas of the organization.

The programme is the mechanism for delivering these benefits but the benefits themselves come from the research and analysis used to identify the strategy for the organization. A benefit is the measurable advantage that comes from the new operating model. Decisions have been taken on whether the organization is growing: pursuing new markets, developing new products and services or retrenching, streamlining processes, reducing staff.

By planning the programme the activities needed to achieve these benefits are defined and these activities are shaped by the type and scale of benefits and the timeframe within which they are to be achieved.

This timescale is reflected in the business case which summarises all of the benefits set against the cost of achieving them and defining when they will be realized, with the objective of ensuring that as many benefits as possible are achieved as early as possible during the programme. This ensures that we are not committing to a piece of work that offers only costs in its early years, and where the organization has to wait several years before the benefits come on stream.

A benefit profile provides a detailed description of the benefits explaining the measures that need to be taken to prove that it is being achieved.

The decision on what data is to be measured is important because the areas that are measured will inevitably be prioritized. Selecting the wrong measures can also lead to the law of unintended consequences – by improving something over here we have a negative impact over there. There are many examples of this in cost cutting programmes where on the surface costs have been cut through the reduction of staff and a streamlining of processes without realizing that behind the scenes the cost per transaction is rising due to the cost of handling customer complaints and the cost of rework to fix mistakes

Whatever measures we choose for our business will be what our staff strive to achieve, so we must select them carefully and achieve a balance that emphasizes the need to be more efficient without losing elements of customer satisfaction, staff satisfaction and a quality reputation.

Programme management must be underpinned by effective project management. A programme can only be successful if each of its component parts is delivered on time and on budget and meets the needs of the users. Programme management co-ordinates all of the project activity and without a project management framework there will be different approaches to managing each piece of work which makes this co-ordination extremely difficult.

Each project needs to have a common approach to planning, reporting and managing risks and changes. The programme manager needs to be fed important information that is in the same format and is provided at the same level of detail so that it can be assimilated into a comprehensive view of programme progress (for reporting to stakeholders) and overlaps and inter-dependencies can be more easily spotted (for reporting to all project managers).

Projects are clearly defined units of work that result in the creation of something new. This new thing can be an amended / changed version of something that already exists or it can be the creation of something totally different that did not exist before.

The benefits of dividing work into projects is that it gives the creation a focus. The work is not absorbed into business as usual where there is the risk that day-to-day demands of generating revenue, servicing customers and meeting targets will push it to the bottom of the priority list.

The project structure ensures that definite decisions are taken about who is going to do the work, when it will be done and emphasises the need to research and specify exactly what is to be created.

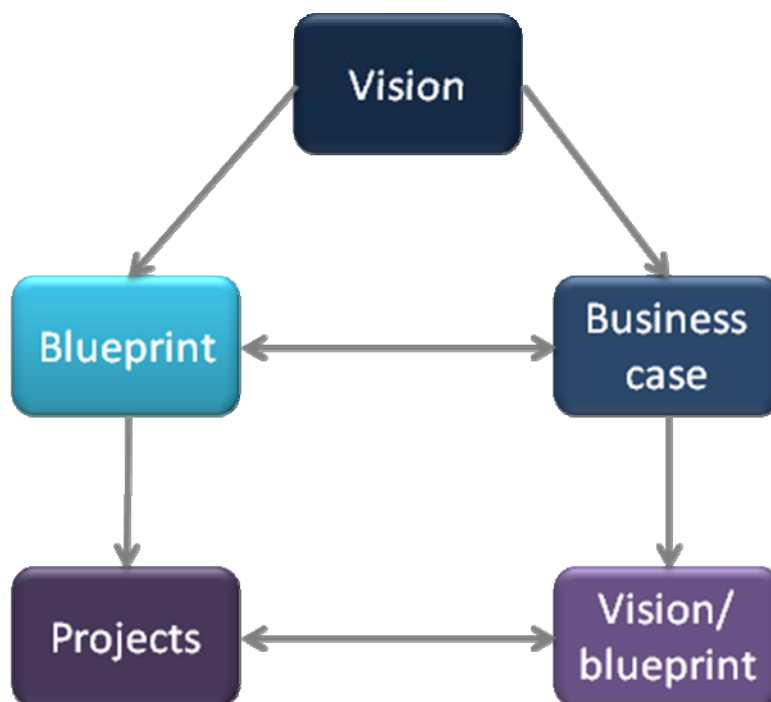
Projects sometimes get a bad press because they fail to deliver what was expected, exceed the agreed timescales and budgets or deliver something that is never fully adopted by users who see the deliverables as an additional problem and not the solution they were hoping for. All of these issues tend to have a common cause which is the failure to define the exact requirements at the beginning of the project and a failure to control any changes during the project.

Senior managers can improve the success of projects by ensuring that all requests to change the scope and deliverables of the project are carefully evaluated. All those expected to use what the project delivers must be consulted and their requirements evaluated and prioritised.

Benefits are only realized once the new processes, systems and capabilities created by the programme have been successfully implemented and the new ways of working have been adopted to become 'business as usual'. Individual project managers have a responsibility for ensuring that their project deliverables are handed over to users effectively i.e. training has taken place and user guides have been created. However changing how people work requires support that can only be provided by the managers within the organization. Time must be made available for training, staff must feel able to ask questions and practise new skills without fear that their performance will be criticized. Managers must temporarily amend targets and offer encouragement and praise as their staff adopt new approaches and learn new systems.

A change management framework is beneficial because it provides a clear set of activities that managers and staff can work through to evolve their working practices until the vision of the programme, that is the new business environment, has been achieved.

A change management framework involves understanding the change, planning how it will take place and then guiding people to implement and embed the changes. As with a project management framework, the processes and activities included in this framework must be relevant for your organization, but an example of the most common steps and activities is set out below:



Everyone must be involved in these activities. Senior managers need to demonstrate their commitment to the new environment by behaving as if things had already changed. This includes altering their attitudes, prioritizing different tasks and creating new relationships with customers, staff and suppliers, creating new teams and reporting lines and visibly supporting training and the learning of new skills.

Defining the scope of the Programme is critical to ensuring that it is a viable, realistic and achievable piece of work. Turning strategy into concrete specific actions can be hard as there are so many unknowns and it is tempting to wait until there are more definite requirements for what is needed before starting a programme. Programme management encourages an iterative approach that enables large-scale transformational change to begin by making decisions about the initial steps, with planning for later activities taking place once more information becomes available.

As a programme is a significant piece of work, budget and resources will be assigned to it. This can lead to pressure from managers to include in the programme projects that offer solutions to existing business problems as well as those projects that create the new business environment. Those managing and sponsoring programmes must be alert to this risk and, as much as possible, must keep the activity concentrated on delivering the strategy and not short term tactical solutions.

To define the programme correctly requires a significant amount of time and resources because every action needs to be assessed for its knock on effect to everything else. This period of research and design can feel frustrating because it absorbs resources but produces nothing concrete and the temptation can be to get started before sufficient thinking has taken place. This achieves the common 'busy fools' scenario where there is a lot of activity producing lots of new processes, systems and data not all necessarily contributing to the strategy which those working in the business as usual environment struggle to assimilate.

As programmes are a collection of projects and changes, some organisations fall into the trap of believing that the programme can be run alongside business as usual responsibilities so they fail to appoint full time dedicated resources to it. Whilst it is certainly possible for managers to take responsibility for projects alongside their 'day job' there does need to be full time co-ordination of a programme where the programme manager is responsible for active pursuit of progress, constantly assessing the environment for risks and issues that could prevent successful achievement of the objectives.

Programme management offers an effective structure for managing transformational change, with clearly defined processes, documentation, decision points, techniques and individual responsibilities. It is important to ensure that those working in the programme have been given some training in programme management otherwise their progress will be hampered by 'feeling their way', often failing to carry out essential tasks simply because they did not know that these tasks were required.

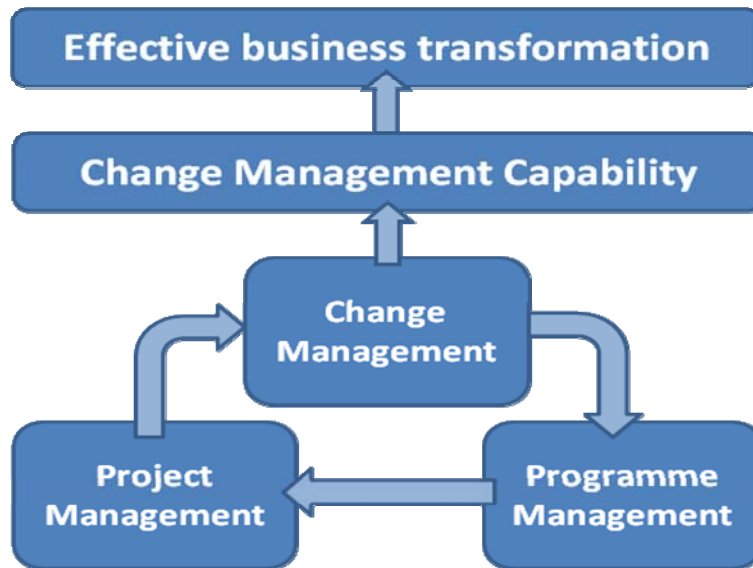
Conclusion

Programme management is an essential skill set for senior managers who are increasingly responsible for the definition and implementation of initiatives to restructure, re-organise and grow their organisations.

Knowledge of programme management is part of the strategic toolkit, and is the next logical step after strategy definition. It is this link to strategy which has led to its inclusion in so many MBA courses and executive development programmes.

Programme management provides a structure through which you can set the direction that needs to be taken and your managers and staff can use to deliver the components that lead to successful achievement of the strategic objectives.

Maven has a strong foundation in change, programme and project management expertise. We have synthesised this wealth of skills and knowledge in these three areas to provide our clients with a systematic approach to business transformation.



We will work with you to:

- define what your organisation needs to achieve and the structures and roles required to do so
- ensure that the change leaders can provide inspiration, motivation and drive for the change
- enable managers to implement the change
- ensure that those impacted by the change to their working environment know why it is happening and support it

Maven can provide you with the skills and techniques to avoid becoming yet another case of business transformation gone wrong. We are not management consultants – we will not do it for you – but we will enable you to do it.

For further information about Maven Training and its capability building services please contact:

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