- *Understand the importance of defining a project correctly*
- *Learn what questions must be answered to properly define a project*
- *Understand how defining a project relates to planning a project*
- *Review the essential elements for a project definition document*
- *Learn how to determine whether a project has been properly defined*

INTRODUCTION TO PROJECT MANAGEMENT

LECTURE 1

DEFINING THE PROJECT

Defining a Project

Depending on your organization and industry, you (the project manager) might be the primary agent in getting this done, or you might not be involved at all until after project definition is complete.

You need to know how to properly define a project and how to evaluate if a project definition by others is complete before starting any detailed project planning efforts.

Setting the Stage for Success

Pick your cliché of choice here: "getting everyone on the same page," "singing from the same songbook," "dancing to the same beat," "pointed in the same direction," and "painting the picture." They all apply, and they all communicate the importance of getting the key project participants to agree on the answers to these seven basic project definition questions:

1. Why are we doing this? (Purpose)
2. What organizational level goal(s) does this project support? (Goals and Objectives)
3. How does this project fit with the other projects that are going on? (Scope, Project Context, Project Dependencies)
4. What is the expected benefit from this project? (Expected Benefits, Business Case, Value, Success Criteria)
5. What are we going to do? (Scope)
6. Who is impacted by this and who must be involved? (Stakeholders)
7. How will we know when we are done or if the project was successful? (Success Criteria)

Gaining consensus on these questions is paramount to managing the organizational-level factors that get projects in trouble (such as alignment with organization and management support) and to controlling key project-level factors that impact project success: stakeholder management and scope management.

How Does Defining a Project Relate to Project Planning?

Many people think of "defining a project" as part of the project planning process and they are correct. It is the first step. However, it is important to make the distinction for several reasons:

- Logistically, before you develop a detailed and complete project plan, you need to know the parameters and boundaries for the project.
- Politically, you need to know the key stakeholders are all in agreement with the project mission (project purpose, goals, objectives, and success criteria) before proceeding forward.
- Practically, the work to properly define a project is often not trivial. In fact, many process-focused and disciplined organizations handle "project definitions" as separate projects. Common examples include business case development projects, cost-benefit analysis projects, selection projects, and assessment projects.

As with all project management processes, the time and rigor invested should be consistent with the size and risk level of the project.

As a general guideline, 20% of the total project duration should be invested in definition and planning activities.

- Historically, people have learned that detailed project planning and general project management are inefficient, and difficult at best, if project definition is not performed.
- Financially, effective execution of the project definition process enables the organization to leverage portfolio project management processes. This should allow

the organization to better invest their limited resources into initiatives that offer the greatest return.

Project Definition Document

We've referred to "gaining consensus" and "getting agreement" on the answers to the important project defining questions several times. How do you do this? You write them down and get everyone to formally sign off on this document. We will refer to this document as the Project Definition document. In this section, we will review both the "must-have" elements and "good to have" elements of the Project Definition document.

Caution

There are many different names for the Project Definition document. Some of the most common alternative names are Project Brief, Project Charter, Project Initiation, Scope Statement, and Statement of Work.

We are using Project Definition, because this term best describes the purpose of the document.

Required Elements

First, let's review the must-have informational elements that should be included in your Project Definition document.

- **Purpose** – this section should answer the "why?" question and clearly communicate the expected business value.
- **Goals and Objectives** – this section is derived from the Purpose and communication targeted outcomes for the project. It should answer the "What are you going to accomplish?" question.

- **Success Criteria** –this section should list the measureable, verifiable results that determine the success level of this project.
- **Project Context** – documents how this project relates to other projects within the organization as a whole. This section should also describe how the project fits within the Organization and business process flow.
- **Project Dependencies** –this section clearly documents any dependencies that could affect the results or success factors of this project.
- **Scope Specifications** – clearly describes the organizational, process, systems, and functional specification boundaries for the project.
- **Out-of-Scope Specifications** – clearly indicates the high-level work items that are related (or associated) to this initiative but that are not part of this project to better communicate what is considered to be "in scope".
- **Assumptions** – clearly communicates the underlying basis or things to be considered true in regard to any other aspect to this document. In most cases, the Scope, Out-of-Scope, Assumptions, and Constraints sections combine to clearly define what work will be performed by this project.
- **Constraints** – lists any business event, schedule, budgetary, resource, or technical factor that will limit the options available to the project.
- **Risks** – lists any uncertain event or condition (risk) that, if it occurs, could have a negative effect on one or more project success criterion (schedule, budget, quality, and so on)
- **Stakeholders** – list all the individuals, business units, and organizations involved in the project, the role(s) each is expected to play, and an indication of how they relate to one another.

Project Definition Checklist

A project definition checklist can help you to determine whether your project is defined properly and whether you are ready to proceed to the next iteration of detailed planning. If you find that your project is not properly defined, you have the following options available:

- Resolve any gaps with appropriate stakeholders before moving onto next phase
- If the project has already been defined, work to resolve these gaps during the detail planning phase.
- If gaps cannot be resolved, then handle as project risks or issues (whichever is appropriate for the specific gap).

General

- Is it clear why this is project is being undertaken?
- Is there a clear picture of the desired results of this project?
- Is there a clear picture of how this project fits within the organizational landscape?
- Is there a gap between available and needed funds?
- Have the success factors been identified? Are they complete? Are they SMART?
- Have any future state performance targets been defined as success factors? Are they SMART?
- Is the gap between the current state and the desired future state clearly documented and understood?
- Has the expected "change" impact on existing business processes, customers, systems, and staff been clearly documented?
- Do you understand who is funding the project initiative?

Scope

- Does project scope indicate boundaries among impacted processes, systems, and organizations?
- Is the project scope defined clearly enough to show when scope creep is occurring?
- Have any external process or system interfaces that will be impacted by this project been identified?
- Has the process workflow between business units or business functions been properly considered?
- Have the organizational and geographic boundaries been clearly defined?
- Does the project scope include related items that are out of scope?
- Does the project scope include any other organizational or technology-based initiative that is needed to fully support the project objective?
- If the project scope includes any requirements, have the requirements been properly validated?
- Have any and all project constraints been identified?
- Have any and all project assumptions been identified?
- Are there any known policies, regulations, or standards that apply to this project (such as procurement, quality, security, regulatory compliance, and so on)?

Stakeholders

- Has the project sponsor been identified and engaged?
- Is each affected business unit and business process step presented on the project team?
- Is each customer group represented on the project team?
- Are all stakeholders identified in a project organization chart?
- Are the reporting relationships indicated in the project organization chart?
- Are project roles described and assigned to each stakeholder?
- Have we identified which stakeholders form the core management steering committee?
- Have you identified which stakeholders need to review and approve any requested changes to the project definition?

Project Approach

- Does the recommended approach explain why it is selected over the alternatives?
- Are the proposal technologies, strategies, and methodologies documented?

Other

- Are the project definition elements documented?
- Is the project definition document under configuration management (version control)?
- Have high-level risks and planned responses been identified?
- Have the preliminary timeline and budget been stated? Are the supporting reasons and assumptions documented?

Acceptance

- Have all the stakeholders reviewed, agreed upon, and approved the Project definition document?
- Have the project manager been officially authorized?