

Programme Management

– What your Department Needs to Know!

Background

Since the recognition of programme management in Treasury Board Policy documentation in 2019¹, there has been a considerable discussion about programmes within the federal government environment. Some departments have had an opportunity to progress this but there are others who do not have a full appreciation of the value that programme management can bring to successful delivery². In addition, and more importantly, departments are challenged with how to determine whether an initiative should be considered for a programme approach to delivery. Often it is said ‘Well it is just a technology project’, e.g. purchase of a new system or ‘it is an upgrade to an existing one’.

One of the challenges that exists is where a project is viewed as in this way “it’s just a project”, limited consideration is not given to the wider implications of the change e.g. Phoenix Pay System which was considered an ‘incomprehensible failure’ by the Canadian Auditor General³. There is often a need to consider wider business change implications, such as process redesign, re-skilling or re-deployment of staff, accommodation/ construction requirements, etc all of which could influence a Department’s choice of seeking to progress using a programme approach.

Experience in programme management has shown that the choice of using a project approach overlooks some of these key aspects in what it would take to make the delivery successful. This white paper is designed to give an appreciation of the wider aspects that should be considered and provide guidance to support successful delivery of the change and achievement of the value and the benefits a department can look to achieve through using a programme approach.

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Factors to be Considered

It is recognized that TBS has linked the use of programme management to major transformational change within their Directive, although this is not the case in other jurisdictions where the principle focus on using programme management links to the nature of the change required.

TBS has also proposed that Departments approach their Program Sector early to discuss the use of programme management. While this is beneficial it is important that departments consider key elements of the delivery of the change prior to interacting with TBS. This will allow them to form a view on whether elements of the change would support the programme environment. Experience of programme management in the Canadian Government is limited and so Departments need to be aware of these key areas for consideration and formulate their own view of the beneficial use of programme management.

We have tried to factor these considerations into this paper so that departments understand the key criteria from **best practices**⁴ that would justify the use of a programme approach.

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Key Criteria

The key criteria identified in this section is drawn from work done by experienced practitioners and is based around seven critical factors. These are:

- Scope of the proposed initiative;
- Level of complexity;
- Level of change;
- Impact on people;
- Cost;
- Timescale; and
- Resources.

We would like to explore the importance of each of these in a bit more detail to provide a platform for departments to consider the use of a programme management approach. Asking these questions can help to foster this deeper appreciation.

1. Scope of the proposed Initiative

- Does the delivery of the initiative support the organization(s) strategic objectives?
- Will the initiative impact multiple business lines either in the organization(s) involved or the wider Canadian public?
- Is there likely to be research/development work required to help define the outcomes of the initiative?
- Are there any existing projects underway that would contribute to the delivery of the programme outcomes?
- Would the initiative be more likely to be successful if it was delivered through a number of projects using different project delivery methods?
- If so, would they be better delivered incrementally avoiding the big bang approach which has been the downfall of many initiatives in the past?
- Is there a lack of clarity in the number of outputs required to support the delivery of the initiative's objectives?

2. Level of Complexity

- Will the initiative have a significant number of diverse⁵ stakeholders? (**diverse is the difference in values, expectations and interests among stakeholders*)
- During the delivery of the initiative, are there likely to be dependencies between outputs?
- Will the initiative's delivery be difficult to be clearly defined at the outset?
- Given the size of the initiative, will the scope need to be adjusted as ambiguities are clarified and the changes are delivered in steps over a number of years?
- Is the initiative's ambition to develop multiple capabilities that are likely to be innovative in nature?
- Will the initiative require considerable leadership and governance to achieve its **outcomes**?
- Is the initiative likely to have major political implications if not delivered successfully?

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3. Level of Change

- Will the end result lead to a major change in the way business is done compared to the current position?
- Once the initiative is complete, will the proposed products and/or services be handed over to a new state of operations?
- If yes, will a transfer of knowledge be required to the operational team? (Upskilling/training)
- If yes, will the business need to transition into a new state of operations over a period of weeks or months until benefits are achieved?

4. Impact on People

- Will the impact of the initiative change the way people work? (This includes re-training existing staff in a new role or hiring new talent.)
- How significantly will the initiative impact the operations workload?

5. Cost

- Does the degree of uncertainty of the initiative and its outputs have an impact on the development of indicative costs for the whole initiative?
- What is the estimated cost of this initiative **at this point in time**?

6. Timescale

- What is the likely timescale of this initiative **at this point in time**?

7. Resources

- Can the resource requirements be easily estimated in advance to deliver the initiative? (+/- 20%)
- Will the initiative require various skills and capabilities to achieve its objective? (e.g. process development, construction, technology etc.)

We have highlighted these seven key factors to provide the basis of a wide-ranging discussion within the department prior to contact with their Program Sector within TBS. The purpose is to consolidate the Department's perspective on whether they think the initiative would benefit from a programme approach thus making the scoping exercise with TBS more valuable.

It is worthwhile to keep in mind that these early considerations are **not meant to be detailed** but to support and clarify the assessment of what is known at an early stage in the development of the initiative.

¹ Policy on the *Planning and Management of Investments and Directive on the Management of Projects and Programmes*.

² See our white paper on *'Three Peas in a Pod: Far more than that'* (The Right Door Consulting and Solutions Inc.) which explores the differences between Portfolio, Programme and Project Management

³ <https://spectrum.ieee.org>

⁴ Managing Successful Programmes (MSP®) is a world-wide recognised framework for the successful delivery of change through the use of programme management.

⁵ diverse is the difference in values, expectations and interests among stakeholders)



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Alvin Gardiner, MBA, retired from his consultancy and training career in December 2021 but continues as the Practice Lead on MSP® for The Right Door Consulting & Solutions Inc. He enjoyed a prestigious career as an international portfolio/programme and project management consultant and trainer with over 30 years of experience in the Public Sector including 15 years as a Senior Executive working for Registers of Scotland Executive Agency. He holds an MBA from the Open University. He is an accredited Management of Portfolios

(MoP®) and Managing Benefits™ registered practitioner. He was also an MSP® (Managing Successful Programmes) Advanced Practitioner and Approved trainer. He is a member of the Association for Project Management (MAPM), is APMP Certified, and was a trainer in APM Fundamentals and Project Management Qualification certifications. Over the past twenty years, Alvin has worked on numerous assignments with key UK and Canadian Government organizations. He was Lead Author on the White Paper 'Delivering Complex Change Successfully within the Federal Government Environment'. Alvin Gardiner, Practice Lead, MSP®

The Right Door Consulting & Solutions Inc, under the Leadership of Alvin Gardiner, has a Team of MSP® experts that can provide consultancy on this subject.

If you are interested in learning more about Managing Successful Programmes (MSP®), contact Heather Buchan at hbuchan@therightdoor.ca.

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We also provide Virtual Training for certification in MSP®, Managing Benefits and MoP®. For more info on these courses, please contact Kathy Ring at kring@therightdoor.ca or call 514 970 4242



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