

# Portfolio – Programme – Project

## There is a difference!

### Introduction

Within the change delivery environment, the terms portfolio, programme, and project have become common terms used in many organizations. One of the big challenges that has been observed is the confusion around these terms and what they really mean e.g., ‘Portfolios and Programmes are the same’ and ‘Programmes are just big projects’ to mention a few.

Failing to recognize the distinction between portfolio, programme and project denies an organization the opportunity to support effective governance, decision making and delivery through the use of these tools. **This short paper is designed to describe at a high level the distinct differences of these three disciplines and the benefits to be accrued from them along with the specific value of programme management.**

With the recent updates in the Treasury Board Policy on the Planning and Management of Investments and the Directive on the Management of Projects and Programmes there is value in re-enforcing the differences between the three P’s.

### Portfolio Management

How often when working in an organization is the question ‘*So who approved this project and why are we doing it anyway?*’

Portfolio Management provides the organization with the opportunity to ensure that the investments the organization (or a part of it) makes are done to achieve the organization’s strategic outcomes or on the department’s objectives. This allows organizations to identify, prioritize and then plan these programmes and projects successfully. The portfolio is then developed within the capability and capacity of the organization including resources and available funding.

Portfolio Management allows for a regular updating of the portfolio based on changing priorities and is typically a **full-time function** within the organization designed to underpin effective decision making. It also supports the removal of programmes and projects which no longer support the organization’s strategic outcomes. In the words of an incredibly famous song:

**‘You’ve got to know when to hold them, know when to fold them, know when to walk away and know when to run’** – Kenny Rogers: The Gambler.

So, in summary, Portfolio Management is about ensuring that the **‘right’** programmes and projects are selected to support the delivery of the strategic outcomes of the organization.

Let us now move on to consider how we deliver the changes required.

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### Programme Management<sup>1</sup>

Designed to deliver transformational change, programme management has been recognized as a different discipline to project management requiring different skills and capabilities.<sup>2</sup> While new to the Canadian Federal Government, it has been around for more than 20 years and has been successfully used in numerous jurisdictions around the world.

Investments delivered in a programme environment support key elements of change which are not typically reflected in the project environment. These include:

- Strong focus on achievement of outcomes and benefits which require to be professionally managed throughout.
- Creation of a flexible environment based on the delivery of an end state which cannot be fully defined at inception.
- Incremental delivery to achieve the embedding of transformational change successfully.
- Defined programme boundaries which incorporate change management as a key component of the programme environment.
- Clearly articulated governance designed to provide the right level and composition to support the delivery of complex change; and
- A recognized end date at which capabilities have been delivered and the vision has been achieved.

Programme management provides the ideal environment to deliver not only the outputs and deliverables required but also the transformational aspects of change in support of the delivery of outcomes and benefits which contribute to the strategic outcomes of the organization.

The principles of programme management can be applied not only to large scale transformational change but also to smaller initiatives which have a significant requirement to secure change.

### Project Management

The project management discipline has been around for a number of years and primarily focuses on the project's deliverables and outputs. Outcomes and benefits are often achieved post project and therefore responsibility falls to the business owner.

Projects typically have a focus on planning the work to be done, monitoring progress towards delivery and are undertaken within specific parameters for time cost and performance.

Projects can contribute to the overall delivery of a programme. Their deliverables are designed to support the delivery of programme capabilities.

### Conclusion

**Delivering change successfully is not easy. Developments in the use of the three P's - Portfolio Programme and Project Management have taken place over the last 40 years resulting in a toolkit designed to support organizations successfully deliver change. All three disciplines can add value.**

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<sup>1</sup>Programme Management should not be confused with Government of Canada policy or operational programs like the Temporary Foreign Workers Program.

<sup>2</sup>Michael Hanford Gartner 2011



### **Alvin Gardiner MBA, MAPM**

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®), please email Heather Buchan at [hbuchan@therightdoor.ca](mailto:hbuchan@therightdoor.ca).**

**Or call:**

**Heather Buchan 613-627-2158 Extn 100 or cell 613-447-5505  
Sarah Pike 613-797-4388 | Sarah Hafez 613-325-0264  
Daniel Barnabe 613-796-5435**

**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](mailto:kring@therightdoor.ca) or call 514 970 4242**



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100 Gloucester Street, Suite 307, Ottawa, ON K2P 0A4 T 613.627.2158  
M 613.447.5505 [hbuchan@therightdoor.ca](mailto:hbuchan@therightdoor.ca) [www.therightdoor.ca](http://www.therightdoor.ca)