MSP®: The Basics

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Background/history

Managing Successful Programmes (MSP®) is a best-practice framework for delivering complex programmes in accordance with long-term strategies. MSP was developed for and is owned by the Office of Government Commerce (OGC), an agency of the Government of the United Kingdom.

MSP was first released in 1999 in recognition of the need for greater links between an organization's longer-term strategy, objectives and goals and the projects being undertaken by that organization. This initial version of MSP drew together a number of evolving approaches to managing the links between projects and business change.

The current (third) version of MSP was released in 2007 and demonstrated a significant advance in the maturity of programme management by expanding the original concepts and introducing new tools and techniques. The development of this current version of the framework distilled the lessons learned and experiences of a wide range of contributors into a workable and flexible form.

MSP defines programme management as 'the action of carrying out the coordinated organization, direction and implementation of a dossier and transformation activities to achieve outcomes and realize benefits of strategic importance to the business.'

Why would an organization use MSP?

MSP is designed to support change within an organization or in the wider community. Therefore MSP would, or should, be of interest to any organization which is undertaking a change. This would include:

- Organizations that are merging, or going through an acquisition
- Government agencies rolling out the mechanisms to implement new legislation
- Organizations developing and launching new products
- Partnerships that are developing a new facility.

Organizations need to have a reasonable level of project management maturity to enable the programme management framework to be efficiently applied. Organizations in this position are often interested in applying a more holistic approach to their work which is more focused on stakeholder engagement and benefits management.

Who uses MSP?

A large number of the organizations that use MSP are in the public sector. This is a result of the design of the framework being based on long-term policy implementation, which suits the public sector environment.

Greater awareness and familiarity with MSP is leading to its application in a wider variety of organizations. The private sector is increasingly recognizing the advantages of using MSP and organizations in the following sectors have established MSP environments:

- Finance
- Defence
- Energy
- Oil and gas
- Fast-moving consumer goods.

What are the benefits of using MSP?

MSP is a pragmatic approach to programme management which ensures that a strong leadership and governance structure is established and maintained. There is a strong emphasis placed on stakeholder

engagement and benefits realization management. MSP ensures that these areas receive the focus required to ensure change occurs and benefits are generated.

The benefits of adopting a recognized approach are primarily that all programmes will be managed in the same way – utilizing best-practice. This will raise the visibility of all aspects of the programme and enable the assurance and governance functions to operate effectively.

MSP will provide experienced project and senior managers with skills, techniques and tools which they are not normally familiar with, thus providing them with another tool to add to their professional toolkit.

An overview of the MSP framework

The MSP framework was designed to enable the delivery of significant and longer-term change which will allow the organization to achieve its strategic objectives. The programme requires the management of two distinct environments to enable the realization of benefits. These environments are:

- The delivery of projects that create the capability for change
- The operational environment which will undergo change in order to deliver the benefits.

MSP recognizes three broad categories of programme. All three categories can implement the MSP framework, but each will apply a different focus to the manner in which MSP is applied. The three categories are:

- Vision-led programmes
- Emergent programmes
- Compliance programmes.

1 VISION-LED PROGRAMMES

A vision-led programme takes a top-down approach by establishing a clear vision at the commencement of the programme which is closely aligned to the corporate strategy. This type of programme is usually innovative and involves significant change.

2 EMERGENT PROGRAMMES

Emergent programmes evolve from the current workload and aim to combine existing projects and associated tasks with the objective of exploiting any synergies. There must be recognition that there is an advantage to combining the projects by developing an emergent vision with a common end-goal. Emergent programmes are faced with a number of issues because projects will already be under way and may have established their own identity and culture. Drawing these projects together will require the planned engagement of the stakeholders.

3 COMPLIANCE PROGRAMMES

In some instances an organization will have no option but to change. This may be as a result of one of several drivers such as:

- Market forces
- The potential negative effect of maintaining the status quo
- Legislative changes
- Mergers and acquisitions.

These programmes must be commissioned and completed, and therefore the focus tends to be less on the realization of benefits and more on the achievement of the obligatory outcome.

Elements of the MSP framework

The MSP framework comprises three major elements:

- Principles: Seven principles of programme management which are applied to every programme
- Governance themes: Nine aspects of governance which ensure that the programme can be controlled
- Transformational flow: A series of interdependent steps which enable the change to be coordinated and delivered with benefits realized.

1 PRINCIPLES

The principles identified by MSP represent key aspects of programme management which should be adopted to ensure success. The principles are based upon experience, and are:

- Universal – they apply to all programmes
- Self-validating – they have been proven by experience
- Empowering – they allow practitioners who apply this framework the ability to influence the outcomes of the changes applied.

These principles have been distilled into seven features which form the foundation of the framework. The seven principles of programme management are:

1 Remaining aligned with corporate strategy

2 Leading change

3 Envisioning and communicating a better future

4 Focusing on benefits and threats

5 Adding value

6 Designing and delivering a coherent capability

7 Learning from experience.

2 GOVERNANCE THEMES

The governance themes represent topics which need to be addressed constantly throughout the life of the programme. It is the control framework which enables the programme to deliver and ensures that there is visibility for the stakeholders.

Each of the nine themes will now be described in turn.

Organization

The organization theme details the roles required to deliver the programme and its associated change. This role-based approach ensures that the governance structure is applied through a sponsoring group and their appointed representative, the Senior Responsible Owner (SRO).

A programme board is established to drive the programme on a daily basis. The key personnel appointed to the programme board are:

- The Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) – who represents the sponsoring group
- The Programme Manager – who is responsible for the coordination and management of the delivery of the projects within the programme
- The Business Change Manager (BCM) – who is responsible for the realization of benefits.

This standardized organization structure ensures that the team will have access to the appropriate skills and authorities required to lead the programme. The team can be supplemented with additional roles as required by the specific needs of the programme and the organization.

Vision

The vision, defined by the vision statement, is agreed and committed to by the sponsoring group. It represents the better future which the programme is designed to deliver and
provides a focus for the team throughout the life of the programme. This is particularly important due to the long-term nature of programmes and means that even if the team membership changes, the vision statement will provide a constant focal point.

The vision statement provides the link between the programme and the organization's strategies.

Stakeholder engagement and leadership

Programmes attract a large number of stakeholders from a variety of backgrounds and with differing degrees of influence over the programme. The MSP framework ensures that the stakeholders are identified and engaged in an appropriate manner to allow the participation and involvement of those who have an interest in the outcomes. MSP recognizes the criticality of communication with the stakeholders and the link between this engagement and the leadership.

There is recognition, within the framework, that engaging and communicating with stakeholders is essential to the success of the programme. MSP incorporates a number of tools and techniques to enable stakeholders to be engaged, including stakeholder mapping and analysis and a stakeholder engagement process.

Blueprint design and delivery

The blueprint is a document which translates the vision statement into a detailed description of the capability that is required to enable the outcomes. The blueprint defines the scope of the programme manager's authority by describing the current (or as is) state of the organization and the future capability which will be delivered through the projects dossier.

The blueprint is not concerned with how to deliver the future state; subsequent documents, such as the projects dossier and programme plan, contain that level of information. The delivery of the blueprint is achieved through these supporting documents and the management of the projects.

Benefits realization management

Benefits are defined as 'the measurable improvement resulting from an outcome which is perceived as an advantage by a stakeholder.' The rigour with which an MSP programme addresses the management of benefits is one of the distinguishing features between programmes and projects. The governance theme of benefits realization management incorporates a number of techniques and tools that support the identification, realization and measurement of benefits within the programme. The methodical approach to the management of benefits is closely linked to other governance mechanisms within MSP, including the role of the business change manager (which is closely linked to this theme).

The identification and mapping of the proposed benefits and negative impacts as a result of implementing the programme enables the development of a robust business case and allows the accurate measurement of the progress of the programme. MSP programmes focus attention on the generation and measurement of benefits.

Planning and control

Planning and control are fundamental to the success of the programme and should be seen as separate and complementary concepts.

A programme plan is developed when the programme is defined (during the defining a programme process) and will contain many assumptions and estimates. These will be revised as progress is made and information becomes available. The preparation of the plan requires the analysis of large volumes of data and consultation with subject matter experts and stakeholders before the distillation of that information into a coherent plan.

Programme control is exercised through a number of mechanisms which collate and present the information related to progress to the higher authorities. Supporting activities and processes will be

applied to ensure that projects are commissioned on a timely basis and that the progress and transition activities are undertaken as scheduled.

Business case

The business case provides the test of the viability of the programme and justifies the investment in the programme. Closely linked to the analysis of benefits, this document provides the SRO and the sponsoring group with the information required to support their investment decisions. The programme business case is maintained throughout the life of the programme to provide the sponsoring group and programme board with the confidence that the investment in the programme is worthwhile.

As the programme progresses, more accurate information will become available to support the business case and the assumptions and estimates upon which it is based. The use of this information allows the business case to be regularly refined and revised, providing the SRO and sponsoring group with the most accurate and up-to-date information available upon which to base all major decisions.

Risk and issue management

Programmes are managed in an uncertain environment and risks will be identified throughout the duration of the programme. This governance theme covers the identification, management and escalation of risks and issues.

The risk process is applied to both threats and opportunities. Threats have a negative impact on the programme outcomes, whilst opportunities have a positive or advantageous impact. From an organization's perspective, there are four types of risks:

- Strategic
- Programme
- Project
- Operational.

Categorizing the risks in this way enables the appointment of suitable risk owners and provides the opportunity to escalate the risks to higher authorities if their status or significance changes.

Issue resolution is closely linked to change control and provides a formal approach to the treatment of changes. It is critical that a strategy is established to provide guidelines for the management of issues because it is impossible to plan a programme that will not be subject to change requests and issues. This governance theme highlights the need for pre-emptive guidelines and tools to allow the effective and efficient management of issues when they occur.

Quality

Quality management, in relation to MSP, refers to the need to satisfy the stakeholders' requirements by meeting their expectations and offering the best opportunity to realize the planned benefits.

Quality management activities will be undertaken throughout the duration of the programme to confirm that the people, processes and outputs will meet and continue to meet the stakeholders' expectations.

3 TRANSFORMATIONAL FLOW

The term 'transformational flow' is used to describe a series of six processes which guide the programme management team through the programme. Each process details the management activities that are required to be undertaken at each step of the programme.

The transformational flow is designed to ensure that the team gathers information and makes decisions at the appropriate point in the programme's lifecycle. Some of these processes are designed to be undertaken sequentially; for example, "identifying a programme" is completed before defining a programme. Others may be undertaken in parallel; for example, "managing the tranches", "delivering the capability" and "realizing the benefits" will all have considerable overlap during many of the tranches.

Each of the six processes will now be described in turn.

Identifying a programme

During this process the programme mandate is agreed by the stakeholders and developed into a more comprehensive document which outlines the purpose of the programme. The process is designed to engage with key stakeholders, who will (in most cases) form the sponsoring group, to ensure that there is a common understanding of the purpose and intent
of the programme.

Defining a programme

The detailed planning for the programme is undertaken at this stage. Once the sponsoring group refines and approves the vision statement, the programme board and supporting subject matter experts undertake a number of activities which culminate in the development of a programme plan (normally part of the larger and more comprehensive programme definition documentation) and the programme's business case.

To enable the development of a robust business case, the process must first consider:

- The blueprint – to understand what capability is required
- The projects dossier – to enable the estimation of costs, duration and benefits associated with the programme
- Confirmation of benefits – resulting from the analysis of the benefits and modelling to achieve the optimum result
- The programme team
- Governance requirements.

Managing the tranches

Primarily the responsibility of the Programme Manager, the process of managing the tranches implements the governance arrangements for the programme to each of the tranches.
The activities contained within this process are applied in alignment with the previously defined strategies and plans which would be accepted towards the end of the defining a programme process.

Delivering the capability

The programme manager is responsible for the coordination and management of the projects. This is achieved through the process known as delivering the capability. The programme manager will deliver the blueprint using this management process.

Realizing the benefits

The business change manager is responsible for integrating the outputs from the projects into the operational environment and thereby generating the expected benefits. Realizing the benefits identifies three distinct sets of activities which comprise this process. These activities are as follows:

- Manage pre-transition, incorporating the analysis, preparation and planning for the business change
- Manage transition, incorporating all of the activities involved in the handover and integration of the outputs into the business environment
- Manage post-transition, including the measurement of progress and the benefits.

Closing the programme

The purpose of each of the processes within the transformational flow is to ensure that each programme is approached from a management perspective in a consistent manner. The closing a programme process is applied at the end of the programme to ensure that the work of the programme is completed and that any follow-on support and actions are in place to ensure the ongoing realization of the benefits.

Further information

Further information is available at:
www.Best-Management-Practice.com
www.apmg-international.com
www.ogc.gov.uk
www.fpmsgroup.com

About the author

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Kenn Dolan is a registered consultant for both MSP and PRINCE2. Kenn is an experienced programme and project management consultant. He has worked in Europe, Africa, Australia and throughout south-east Asia with clients from the private and public sectors. He has coached and mentored senior executives in more than 20 countries through the process of creating their organization's PMO capability and establishing an effective environment to deliver the planned strategic benefits. Kenn's expertise lies in the adaptation of methodologies to ensure the application of a lean and efficient approach that enhances the organization's productivity.

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Trade marks and statements