

## Power Program: 10 Vital Imperatives to Successful Delivery

August 12, 2008

Successful program delivery doesn't have to be hit or miss—if you know the key steps to pulling it off.

By Julie Zinn

Over the last several years, organizations around the world have begun to realize the success of strategic, on-going initiatives is fundamentally tied to program management proficiency.

This realization has taken some getting used to, especially for the project management enthusiasts among us. However, according to the Project Management Institute (PMI), programs are distinctly different from projects. PMI says program management is "a group of related projects managed in a coordinated way to obtain benefits and control not available from managing them individually."

For example, Apple's new iPhone represents a program. The product's packaging, the education of help desk technicians about features and the development of communication channels between headquarters and retail outlets represent three projects among many that make up the one program. These projects are distinctly interrelated and must be managed as such so program benefits can be realized and stakeholders effectively managed.

However you define them, programs are a vital part of business today, especially regarding change initiatives. In a 2006 PricewaterhouseCoopers survey, 80 percent of 133 executives cited program management as an important factor in managing change.

Unfortunately, experience shows many ways programs can fail. According to a recent report by Gartner, "66 percent of large program initiatives fail to achieve their stated business objective. Further, they are delivered late and substantially over budget." The list of reasons for these failures includes:

- Underestimating program complexity
- Lack of firm leadership, commitment, and sponsorship
- Poor cross-functional communication
- Lack of integrated planning
- No defined success metrics

### The Vital Imperatives: 10 Things that Must Be Done Right

Below, I've identified 10 steps for avoiding program failure. As you'll see, some are performed by the program manager and other team members, but, it's the program manager's responsibility to ensure each step is performed—and performed well.

#### 1. Generate a Solid Business Case

Whether a program is funded, continued, and/or terminated hinges on the business case. An effective business case should align with the organization's project portfolio management framework. In particular, it should reflect strategic dimensions considered most important by senior management, and clearly articulate to how the proposed program will address and support these dimensions. A business case must address:

- Why the program is important and what it needs to achieve.
- The current state and why it should change.
- What the end state will look like.

The business case development process should be conducted during Strategic Enterprise Analysis (SEA). SEA takes a close look at the organization's business architecture and its impact on the business. The decision packages generated during SEA allow for early phase-gate decision making, ultimately culminating in a business case.

#### 2. Establish the Right Program Organization

A program's success depends heavily on the quality of sponsorship it receives. Due to a program's scope and scale, sponsorship typically resides within a governance board or steering committee headed by an executive sponsor. This group provides authority on program funding, purpose, and direction. Specific roles include:

- Program manager/directors manage the program plan on a day-to-day basis.
- Change managers prepare the business for change.
- Risk managers define and implement the risk management process.
- Business analysts coordinate the scope of the requirements across projects and perform quality assurance.
- Program office managers set standards for practices, provide administrative support, and consolidate progress information.

### **3. Build a Well-Defined Program Architecture**

The program architecture is the road map for getting from the as-is to the to-be state, and it provides an outline of how the projects within the program will deliver required benefits. The program architecture should clearly:

- Define the projects within the program.
- Ensure projects deliver benefits.
- Define high-level dependencies.

A benefits map extends the architecture further by demonstrating how the program's ultimate strategic objectives will be met and identifies the boundaries of each component project. The architecture, therefore, defines linkages between goals and benefits, and provides some clarity on the emergent component projects, their deliverables, and the major functions required to perform the program's work.

### **4. Manage Stakeholder Expectations**

Stakeholders are individuals whose interests may be affected by the program outcomes. The program manager must understand the positions stakeholders may take, the way they may exert their influence, and their source of power. This is key to forging a deep understanding of needs and concerns, addressing any sources of apprehension, and ensuring alignment of perspectives on program objectives.

Many program managers neglect to relay sufficient information on benefits realization, which is what stakeholders care most about. The program manager needs to ensure there is communication from the very beginning of the life cycle. Stakeholder management requires program managers to have:

- Strong negotiating skills
- An ability to manage cross-functional conflict
- A properly balanced approach to coping with multiple interests

### **5. Adopt Integrated Program Planning**

To achieve a detailed program definition and execution schedule, a number of vital intermediate steps are required, including:

- Defining and verifying scope roll up from projects to program.
  - Identifying and defining all cross-project interfaces.
  - Developing the integrated master schedule.
- Integrated planning begins with a program charter, which provides the foundation for scoping each of the component projects. Detailed work breakdown structures (WBS) must be developed for each project. Preliminary project schedules should then be examined for cross-project interfaces. These interdependencies must then be fully defined, matched, and linked to arrive at the detailed, integrated program master schedule.

### **6. Use Scenario-Based Execution Simulation**

Scenario analysis techniques establish greater insight into evaluating possible program outcomes and maximizing credibility with sponsors and governance boards. The two primary methods include:

- Alternative execution strategy assessment, which involves re-shaping the detailed integrated master schedule to consider alternative technical, sourcing, and funding approaches.
- Probabilistic forecasting and analysis, which provides crucially important information such as the most likely completion date and the likelihood of meeting the target deadline.

### **7. Practice Systematic Risk Management**

The program manager shouldn't be afraid to cancel individual projects due to poor risk management. In fact, good risk management should be considered a key criterion for ongoing assessment.

It's typically best to prioritize a list of risks in order to focus the development of response strategies on the most severe risks. Response strategies should then be incorporated into the integrated program master plan. Once this is completed, the program manager can respond to risk by utilizing the risk reserves included in the budget. The amount of reserve will depend on many things—primarily the level of estimated confidence and the expected value of the risks.

### 8. Implement the Right Control Processes

For all programs, a program office should help individual project managers update their progress reports to the program manager. Project reports should contain relevant information in a standardized format to help aggregate the information at the program level. The impact of any risk, issue, or change within a component project must be recognized as early as possible in order to manage it carefully and guard against any adverse impact across the program community. Rigorous and systematic scrutiny of the status of program interfaces must supplement traditional critical path analysis.

### 9. Develop Achievable Benefits and Requirements

For a program to have any chance of success, it's vital that requirements and benefits are:

- Realistic
- Clearly articulated
- Understood by all stakeholders
- Accepted and signed off as viable
- Supported by a rigorous change management process

Benefits management is best led by a dedicated change manager who can ensure that outcomes, strategies, events, and assumptions are all linked. The change manager should also establish agreed-upon benefits-tracking metrics. Without this, disagreements about the level of success will develop. And requirements management should be led by a business analyst. This critical role ensures the program and its projects are consistent with common practices and processes for requirements elicitation and documentation.

### 10. Facilitate Effective Change Management

Successful program managers recognize the appointment of a change manager can be a prerequisite for facilitating widespread understanding and acceptance of program goals, solutions, and outcomes. A five-step approach is advocated to help shape, steer, and realize change:

1. Identify need for change
2. Define compelling vision or "to-be" state
3. Choose a change strategy
4. Engage the support of stakeholders
5. Implement change strategy

In choosing a change strategy, the change manager must secure organizational readiness for change by conducting environmental assessments in order to develop solutions that will create the least possible cultural stress.

### Delivering Program Success in Your Organization

Now, more than ever, managing successful programs requires a combination of strong skills in leadership, management, communication, and more. To build a solid foundation for success—and to help personnel effectively implement these ten steps—many organizations have used comprehensive training programs to accelerate skill development, knowledge application, and program execution. There are a number of organizations capable of creating such programs for your organization. My advice: choose one that works for you and get started as soon as possible.

*Julie Zinn, executive director of project management and business skills programs at ESI International, has a background in management, human resources development, and corporate training. She holds Bachelor's Degrees in music and business from the University of Colorado at Boulder and a Master's Degree in education with an emphasis on human resources development from The George Washington University. Zinn also earned a Master's Certificate in Project Management from The George Washington University and a training specialist certificate from The Georgetown University. For more information, visit .*

### Training Magazine



[SUBSCRIBE](#) | [ADVERTISE](#)  
Contact Training Magazine about this  
article at  
[info@managesmarter.com](mailto:info@managesmarter.com)

### Links referenced within this article

SUBSCRIBE

<http://www.managesmarter.com/msg/subscriptions.jsp>

ADVERTISE

[http://www.managesmarter.com/msg/about\\_us/ad\\_opps.jsp](http://www.managesmarter.com/msg/about_us/ad_opps.jsp)

[info@managesmarter.com](mailto:info@managesmarter.com)

[http://www.managesmarter.com/msg/content\\_display/training/mailto:info@managesmarter.com](http://www.managesmarter.com/msg/content_display/training/mailto:info@managesmarter.com)

### Find this article at:

[http://www.managesmarter.com/msg/content\\_display/training/e3ib795ce2f70633fae2c2c5b304958bd89](http://www.managesmarter.com/msg/content_display/training/e3ib795ce2f70633fae2c2c5b304958bd89)

Uncheck the box to remove the list of links referenced in the article.

2008 VNU eMedia Inc. All rights reserved.