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Introduction

Recently, there has been much discussion in the business world about program management. A good bit of this has been in the form of arguments about the definition of program. Some categorize programs as little more than big projects, while others refer to them as otherwise unrelated projects bound together by a business cycle, like distant cousins at a family reunion.

Personally, I like the definition provided by the Project Management Institute ("PMI"). PMI categorizes programs as "a group of related projects managed in a coordinated way to obtain benefits and control not available from managing them individually." I would also add a caveat to this, that the central purpose of a program is to effect strategic change in an organization - change that extends beyond that achieved by only one project.

An example would be the rollout of a new generation of cellular phone. The design, development, manufacturing and launch of a new phone bring tremendous change to the organization that is responsible for all these activities. Within the umbrella of this major strategic initiative exists dozens of projects - from bringing together design engineers from a variety of disciplines, to setting up a process for the repair of defective phones, to designing the packages that will appear in stores. To succeed, and to realize the desired benefits, each of these projects must be managed with an eye toward the other projects and the overarching business objective.

Because such major initiatives are ripe with business, leadership, management and technical challenges, an organization's ability to execute them successfully is fundamentally tied to proficiency in program management.

In this paper, I'll discuss the ten essential steps that must be taken to realize a program's goals and desired benefits. Each step should be addressed thoroughly by the program manager and his or her team.

Program Management Challenges ►

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