

MAXPERT®

MSP in 1000 Words

MSP® Foundation/Practitioner

Version 1.0.1

MSP 1000

The Big Ideas in 1000 words

Principles

Some big ideas that are universal, self-validating and empowering are covered in this description of MSP. We call them principles. By the way MSP has emerged as people like you have learnt from their experience of managing programmes.

What's a Programme?

But let's hold on right there! What's a Programme? Of course you can use the word to mean anything you want. We talk about TV programmes and that comes from the idea of a schedule or agenda being a programme. In some industries everyone considers there is a programme (a schedule) at the heart of a project. Be careful if that's what your colleagues think. They will imagine MSP is a scheduling tool!

Other project people think a programme is a set of projects. And good luck to them. You can use parts of MSP very successfully to look after a set of projects. Let's call that multi-project management.

But there is still a gap. How do you take the outputs from projects, which have a capability in business as usual, and exploit them? That work, those transformational activities, takes place in the business not in projects.

The Transformational Flow

You will be comforted to know programmes contain a set of processes:

- Transformation or transition takes place in one called realizing the benefits.
- Projects are delivered from delivering the capability.
- Identifying a programme is where the business decides to take a programme approach to an initiative.
- Defining a programme is where we set up the governance for the programme and
- Closing a programme is where we wind down that governance.
- Finally managing the tranches is where we look after each chunk of a programme. A tranche delivers a step change in capability.

Benefits Management

Let's make sure we have a word for that capability once it's been exploited, i.e. what the world will look like after it's been changed. Outcomes will do – the effect of change. Benefits are how we measure outcomes. To manage benefits we need to identify them, plan to deliver them, actually deliver and then review how it went.

Blueprint Design and Delivery

Perhaps we had better be clear how all these outcomes fit together. They are part of a future operating model or blueprint: a “to be” state as opposed to today’s “as is” state. We will have to model the future in some depth describing processes, organizational structures, technologies, information and a whole heap of other detail. We may even need to model the state at the end of each tranche so we will have a series of blueprints. Once we have a blueprint we can identify the gaps and decide which projects need to delivery capability to allow us to fill the gaps. Otherwise how do we know which projects to do?

The Vision

A blueprint is very useful but it’s not very inspiring. Because it contains a lot of detail is also likely to be volatile. So we need a stable, high level, inspirational vision of a compelling future. It is a marketing tool; don’t be frightened to make it inspirational. It also needs to be in language that all stakeholders can understand. It can be a real challenge to avoid jargon and perhaps state less than welcome outcomes (dis-benefits) in a way that is acceptable.

Leadership and Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholders are really vital in programmes because those programmes tend to have a profound effect out there in the real world. So the programme needs to really understand the stakeholders and properly enter into a dialogue with them, engagement not manipulation. This requires leadership both from the top and out there in the business. Properly organized stakeholder engagement is a cycle of asking who, why, what, how and when? Then you can engage and use the results to modify communication.

Programme Organization

Perhaps we should be clear who “you” are. Programmes are of strategic importance, so they need to be lead and championed from the top. The sponsoring group are the senior managers who define the direction of the business and they appoint a senior responsible owner who is probably one of them and will be accountable for the success of the programme. The SRO many need a programme board to help drive the programme forward and deliver those outcomes and benefits.

In a single business, these ideas are straightforward. But when a programme covers several organizations or impacts society, working out who should form the sponsoring group and programme board becomes more complex.

A programme manager will lead and manage the programme day-to-day. It can be a big job and they may have a team of additional specialists who help them. On the other side of the coin, the work in the business needs to be managed in a structured way by business change managers who will be from the business and may continue to hold senior positions in the business while also changing the business. To help they are likely to have business change teams that will be dispersed through the organization.

Quality and Assurance Management

All aspects of the programme have to work in the right way. So quality management becomes broader than in projects and has to cover how the programme is managed, the processes used and how it remains aligned with the environment.

In something as complex as a programme, assurance has to show it is independent, integrated, linked to decisions points, risk-based and results in action where needed.

Risk & Issue Management

Risk and issue management has to cope with the unexpected and uncertain emerging from a wide range of sources and from different perspective; strategic, operational & project as well as programme. The programme needs to be able to differentiate if it is not to be overwhelmed by detail.

Planning and Control

Planning needs to be robust enough to cope with large amounts of information & numerous stakeholders. Control must present a clear picture and minimize the impact of ambiguity. As a programme can last for a long time, it should be trying to improve delivery as it gains experience and must also justify its on-going existence.

The Business Case

Finally let's look at justification and programme business case. It has to be created at the beginning of the programme and maintained as the environment changes. The focus is on the cost and timescale for achieving the blueprint and the value of the benefits balanced against the risks of achieving those benefits.

There you are

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