

## A Phased Approach to Project Management Implementation

by Thomas P. Stevens, PMP

Implementing a formalized project management process in an organization that does not have a history of using a structured approach to project planning and control can present significant challenges. A phased approach to implementation is a crucial element of a successful implementation strategy because it helps overcome resistance to change, allows lessons learned in early phases to be incorporated in the systems installed in later phases, and ensures that a solid foundation of project-level data is available prior to rolling-up enterprise-level information.

Resistance to change is a well-documented phenomenon. And, we know from experience that the implementation of structured project planning and control techniques is a substantial departure from the norm for many companies. Therefore, resistance to change with respect to project management is something that should be expected (and even planned on). A phased approach to implementation can help overcome this resistance by allowing an organization to create success stories, provide the necessary communication (downward and upward), and build momentum prior to rolling-out the process to the general population. By taking a phased approach, we can dramatically increase our chances of acceptance by the organization and reduce the probability of a “program-of-the-month” fiasco.

A project management system must be tailored to the organization. A “one size fits all” approach has a low probability of success because it does not recognize differences in project types, management and staff capabilities, and organizational culture. A phased approach to implementation allows time in the initial phases to gather first-hand information about project characteristics, personnel, and cultural nuances. Then, based on this information, a project management system can be designed and a roll-out plan crafted that

maximizes the prospects for success. The later stages of implementation are focused on providing the enterprise-level tools that allow an organization to gain visibility to project schedule, resource, and cost information across the entire portfolio of projects. This information can be used to optimize business decision making given that there are constraints related to limited resources, limited budgets, and project priority. Unfortunately, enterprise-level decision making must be based on solid project-level information, otherwise, the decisions that are made may not be correct. A phased implementation approach allows time to ensure that sound plans for all individual projects are created prior to rolling-up enterprise-level information. Also, enterprise-level tools can represent a substantial financial commitment. A phased approach can coordinate the timing of the investment in these tools with the point of maximum usefulness.

### The Four Phases of Project Management Implementation

PMAlliance utilizes four phases for the project management implementation process: Initiation, Project-Level Installation, Enterprise-Level Installation, and Maintenance. A description of each phase follows.

## 1. Initiation Phase

The purpose of the Initiation phase is to mobilize the organization, remediate any current at-risk projects, and set the stage for the Installation phases. Time is of the essence in the Initiation phase. Management “cracks the door open” with the organization by endorsing the process at kick-off and requesting the support and participation of all employees. However, from the moment of kick-off, employee patience and willingness to participate is in jeopardy until success stories have been created and communicated. This is perhaps the riskiest of all of the phases of implementation because even small failures at this stage can fuel the arguments of naysayers, substantiate the fears of those employees “sitting on the fence” with respect to project management, and dissipate any momentum created by management during the kick-off process. For these reasons, the Initiation phase includes the selection of pilot projects that have the potential for near-term successes and great emphasis is placed on creating and communicating those success stories to the organization.

## 2. Project-Level Installation Phase

During the Project-Level Installation phase structured project planning and control processes are implemented on all targeted projects, the project management infrastructure necessary to support the consistent, successful application of project management techniques by the Project Office on future projects is created, and Project Office staff are trained and mentored.

## 3. Enterprise-Level Installation Phase

The Enterprise-Level Installation phase creates the infrastructure necessary to support business decision-making based on schedule, resource, and cost information “rolled-up” from the entire portfolio of projects and transitions the day-to-day responsibility for developing and maintaining individual project plans to the Project Office staff.

## 4. Maintenance Phase

The purpose of the Maintenance phase is to transition the responsibility for supporting all of the project management requirements of the organization to the Project Office staff and to ensure long-term continuity by establishing project management as a core competency and an essential function within the organization.

## Conclusion

In today’s economic environment it is absolutely essential to “get it right the first time” when it comes to making organizational changes. A phased approach to implementing project management can dramatically increase the probability of success because it helps to overcome resistance to change, creates an opportunity to incorporate lessons learned into the design of the project management infrastructure, and ensures that high-quality enterprise-level information is available to major stakeholders.

### ABOUT Thomas P. Stevens, PMP

Mr. Stevens is the President and Founding Partner of *PMAlliance*, Inc. and has over 30 years of project management experience.

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