Project Management Process Groups Explained

~ By Duncan Haughey

Project management itself is nothing new. The modern framework began in the early 1950s, driven by businesses that realised the benefits of organising work around projects. More importantly, they realised the critical need to communicate and co-ordinate work across departments and professions - the benefits of which continue to drive project success today.

Project management is no small task. It has a definite beginning and end - it's not a continuous process.

As we move through a project, project management tools help us measure progress and track project tasks. Tools allow us to manage the ad-hoc resources critical to project success since projects don't draw on the ongoing, dedicated full-time positions found in businesses.

Simply having these tools and resources at our disposal doesn't ensure a project's success, though. We need something that guides the team and the project from beginning to end in order to initiate, plan, execute and close projects with more precision.

This guidance in applying applicable project management knowledge and skills to the project is done using the project management processes, which consist of five process groups and a control system.

Those process groups¹ typically include the following:

1. Initiating
2. Planning
3. Executing
4. Monitoring
5. Closing

Then, the control system is at play throughout every process. Here's a breakdown of what's involved.
1. Initiating

All projects start with an idea for a product, service or another desirable outcome. The initiating process group then determines the nature and scope of the project. Not performing this stage well means it’s unlikely the project will be successful in meeting the business’ needs.

The key project controls required are an understanding of the business environment and incorporating all necessary checks into the project. There’s two crucial things throughout this process: 1) reporting any deficiencies and 2) making a recommendation to fix them.

The first project document is the project charter. These are the key components:

- Business case
- Scope and deliverables
- Objectives
- Resources needed
- Milestone plan and timeline
- Cost estimate
- Risks and issues
- Dependencies

The charter answers the fundamental question, "What are we trying to do?"

2. Planning

After initiating, the project is planned to an appropriate level of detail. The main purpose is to plan time, cost and resources adequately to estimate the work needed and to manage risk effectively during project execution.

All of this information is recorded in the project management plan. As with the initiating process group, a failure to plan adequately lessens the project’s chance of success.

Project planning includes the following:

- Developing the scope statement
- Developing the schedule (often a Gantt chart)
- Developing the budget
- Selecting the team
- Creating a work breakdown structure
- Identifying deliverables
- Planning for risk
- Establishing a communication plan

This information forms the project contract used to gain formal approval to begin work.
3. Executing

Executing consists of the processes used to complete the work defined in the project management plan. It’s about accomplishing the project’s objectives. The executing process involves co-ordinating people and resources, as well as integrating and performing the project activities. The deliverables are produced as outputs from the processes performed, as defined in the project management plan.

4. Monitoring

The monitoring process group involves managing and tracking the project. Potential problems can be identified quickly for the team to take corrective action. The project management plan is used for this purpose.

Monitoring includes the following:

- Measuring ongoing project activities (where are we against where we should be?)
- Monitoring the project variables (cost, effort, scope) against the project management plan and the project baseline (where should we be?)
- Identifying corrective actions to address risks and issues (how can we get back on track?)
- Managing changes using the change control process (what is the impact of this change?)

The monitoring process group ends once the project has achieved its goals and objectives, as detailed in the project contract. Monitoring also means that sometimes a project is stopped before completion. This can happen for many reasons, including changes in the business, lack of resources or higher priorities.

5. Closing

Project closing is an important part of project management that’s sometimes overlooked. Closing a project means finishing all activities across all process groups, disbanding the project team and signing off the project with the customer.

At this point, it’s important to know how well the project has performed. This task is done using the project closure report. The report communicates how well the project has performed against its original business case, quality measures, cost, duration and tolerances.

Rather than leave valuable project experiences locked in people’s heads, it’s a good idea to complete and publish a lessons learned report. This report passes on valuable lessons that future projects can apply.

Project Control

Throughout the above processes, project control is the part of a project that keeps it on track, on-time and within budget. Project control begins early in the project with planning and ends late in the project with a post-implementation review.

Projects should be assessed for the right level of control needed. Too much control is time-consuming. Too little control is risky.
Typical elements of project control are as follows:

- Overall business strategy
- Standards for new systems
- Project management policies
- Change management
- Quality control

In Summary

From start to finish on any project, project management processes keeps you, as the project manager, on task to measure and track project progress. Ultimately, then, the processes and control system let you apply the knowledge, skills, tools and resources that ensure project success.

References


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