



The Major Projects Association



The **purpose** of the Major Projects Association is: To improve the initiation and delivery of major projects through the interaction of members from all sectors in sharing experience, knowledge and ideas.

Approach: To draw upon the collective experience of our cross-sectoral membership to create, collate and share innovations, knowledge and best practice across the whole major project sector, both in the UK and overseas. This is delivered through events, easily accessible reports, discussions, simulations and development programmes as well as by working with carefully selected influencers and decision makers.

The Major Projects Association (est. 1981) is a membership association for organisations engaged in the delivery and the development of major projects, programmes and portfolios.

When the Association was established the key objective of the Founders was to share their cross-sectoral experience, knowledge and ideas about major projects – both successes and failures – to help others to avoid mistakes and to incorporate good practice, in order that future projects would be better initiated and delivered.



Our members







Project Initiation Handbook



01 Having a vision

Creating clarity and ownership of the vision.



02 Where's the value?

Establishing the robust business case to underpin investment.



03 Leaders must lead

Owning the vision setting realistic and deliverable scope, objectives and measures for success.



04 Communications, engagement and consultation

Effective communication with society and communities.



05 Managing the market

Creating an appetite to be involved by engaging the supply chain and ensuring contracts reflect the right behaviours from the start.



06 Governance for confidence

Creating the right governance structure with early review points to check clarity and line of sight.



07 People, people, people

Getting the team right, and keeping it together..



08 A project for life

Defining and delivering a whole life investment approach.



09 Plan for change

Embrace change from the top – and be ready to challenge the status quo.



10 Successful feedback loops

Using the consensus of best practice, benchmarking, lessons and case studies to improve delivery.



“The moment the project passes the business case gate there is impatience by senior executives to demand visible progress to create the dream that others have been waiting for. We must ask whether this impatience is well-founded.”

Professor Stephen Wearne,
Senior Research Fellow,
University of Manchester

“ Small mistakes are usually the fault of the project director but the really big mistakes are most often down to the business not understanding the project. Initiation is not just about getting the project set up correctly but about getting everyone bought into the project.”

Nekkhil Mishra, Regional
Director, EMEA, IPA Global

“Our aspiration is for there to be no major programme starts without a realistic assessment of cost, schedule and benchmark performance. We need to learn how to do it better.”

Tony Meggs, Chief
Executive, Infrastructure
and Projects Authority



Having a vision

- Establish a clear vision and articulate the wider project benefits.
- Ensure key stakeholders share the vision – if possible engage them in its development.
- Seek clarity on the overall priorities and desired outcomes.
- The vision should be underpinned by a clear and agreed plan.
- The plan should establish a realistic assessment of cost and schedule, and should benchmark performance.

“I have a dream that one day, on the red hills of Georgia, sons of former slaves and sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.”

Martin Luther King, Jr. Washington, DC, August 1963



Where's the value?

- Set out a robust business case.
- Understand where the project value lies and who will benefit from the investment.
- Determine who will bear the cost, or loss, of benefits when changes are made.
- Establish the wider project benefits to society.
- Value should be defined – for whom and over what period of time.

“How different would the decisions we make be, if value had primacy over cost?”

Ross Agnew, Director, KPMG LLP



Leaders must lead

- Seek a highly experienced leader with a proven track record who can take a holistic view.
- Good leadership will enhance the potential to maximise value.
- A good major project leader will be politically savvy, comfortable dealing with ambiguity and capable of establishing transparency around their decision-making.
- A successful major project leader understands what is important, has instilled this in their team so that everyone stays focused on what is important, even when the project is going through a major transition.

“Success can never be guaranteed, but it should not be an unfathomable mystery. The common threads...are evidence that a favourable outcome is not a matter of luck, but is the result of sound judgement.”

Sir John Bourn, former Comptroller and Auditor General, National Audit Office



Communications, engagement and consultation

- A communications strategy must create a narrative which is meaningful to the wide varieties of stakeholder groups which have an interest in the project.
- Effective, open and honest communication with communities and society is vital and will build trust.
- The wider value of investment must be emphasised.
- Understand how society and customers can be included more effectively in discussions and the evaluation of investment in major projects.

“We need to restore the trust between people and business. When business and society work together both tend to prosper, and major projects are one of the most obvious points of contact between business and society.”

Lord Browne of Madingley



Managing the market

- Clients must be prepared to create markets where competition does not exist.
- Engage the supply chain early to create a well-developed supply chain strategy.
- Assess complexity and context of the delivery environment and ensure it matches the capability of the market.
- Identify where complexity capability gaps are found and seek to fill them.
- Be aware of market risk throughout the process as well as the risk appetite of suppliers.

“Supply chain management is pervasive and touches every aspect of our lives. Buy-one-get-one-free deals on food waste, automotive industry product recalls, horsemeat in ready-meals and queues in accident and emergency departments are all supply chain issues.”

Professor Janet Godsell, Professor of Operations and Supply Chain Strategy, WMG, University of Warwick



Governance for confidence

- A clear statement of the objectives and parameters for delivery.
- A single controlling mind.
- A clear system of delegation.
- A clear process for controlling change.
- A collaborative culture and working relationship between sponsor(s) and execution team.
- Board members who have sufficient understanding of the project context to make reasonable timely decisions (or seek advice to help them).
- A defined system for assurance at all levels.

“Project sponsors create or destroy value. Their role determines whether or not each project gets off to a good start.”

The late Mike Nichols, The Nichols Group

“ Good governance is about a balance between the natural desire of sponsor(s) to retain control, and the need of the delivery team to have sufficient freedom to allow it to manage the risk to meet the project objectives.”

*Improving Infrastructure Delivery: Project Initiation
Routemap Handbook*



People, people, people

- Getting people with the right skills and experience is central to project success.
- Understand your staffing needs depending upon your maturity and technical skills as a client.
- The skills required at the start of a project are very different to those required at the end.
- Ensure that the project minimises staff turnover across the project life cycle.
- Consider diversity of the team as well as the skills profile.

“It should come as no surprise that more diverse companies and institutions are achieving better performance. Most organisations must do more to take full advantage of the opportunity that diverse leadership teams represent.”

McKinsey Report 2015, Why diversity matters



Project for life

- Do not give away whole-life value simply to reduce short-term cost.
- Delivery silos rarely achieve overall maximum value of the assets produced.
- Recognise the value of operational and maintenance efficiency and productivity gains across the whole life of the investment.
- Understand from the start that savings in CAPEX can be dwarfed by even small increases in production or reductions in OPEX.
- Make sufficient time to explore long-term costs and value implications.



“We defraud the taxpayer by arguing that the minimum spend now is the best long-term solution.”

Richard Threlfall, Partner, KPMG LLP



Plan for change

- Establish systems which enable change, innovation and disruption to happen.
- Leaders need to establish project teams with the ability to challenge the status quo.
- Evolution of the project should be proactive as well as reactive.
- Embrace disruption.
- The project team should be reviewed across the project life cycle.
- Feedback loops will help to identify lessons learnt.

“In project management it is the moment when you realise that the business model does not seem to fit any more because of a major unanticipated problem. To sustain success, large companies today need to be good at innovation; innovating in terms of the business model, the technologies they use, and finding solutions that are more gainful in the marketplace.”

Dr Nick Leon, Head of Service Design, Royal College of Art



Successful feedback loops

- Identify critical success factors, establish best practice and then learn and implement the lessons.
- Establish formal strategies for reviewing project performance.
- Quality and performance should be assessed, benchmarked.
- Project controls should be set up to measure and report.
- Make time to learn and apply lessons from past successes and failures as these are not always applied consistently.
- Any step changes made to improve delivery should be captured.

“ The temptation is always to ignore or under-report warning signs, and give more time for things to improve to avoid revealing bad news, rather than to intervene decisively at the earliest opportunity.”

Lord Browne of Madingley