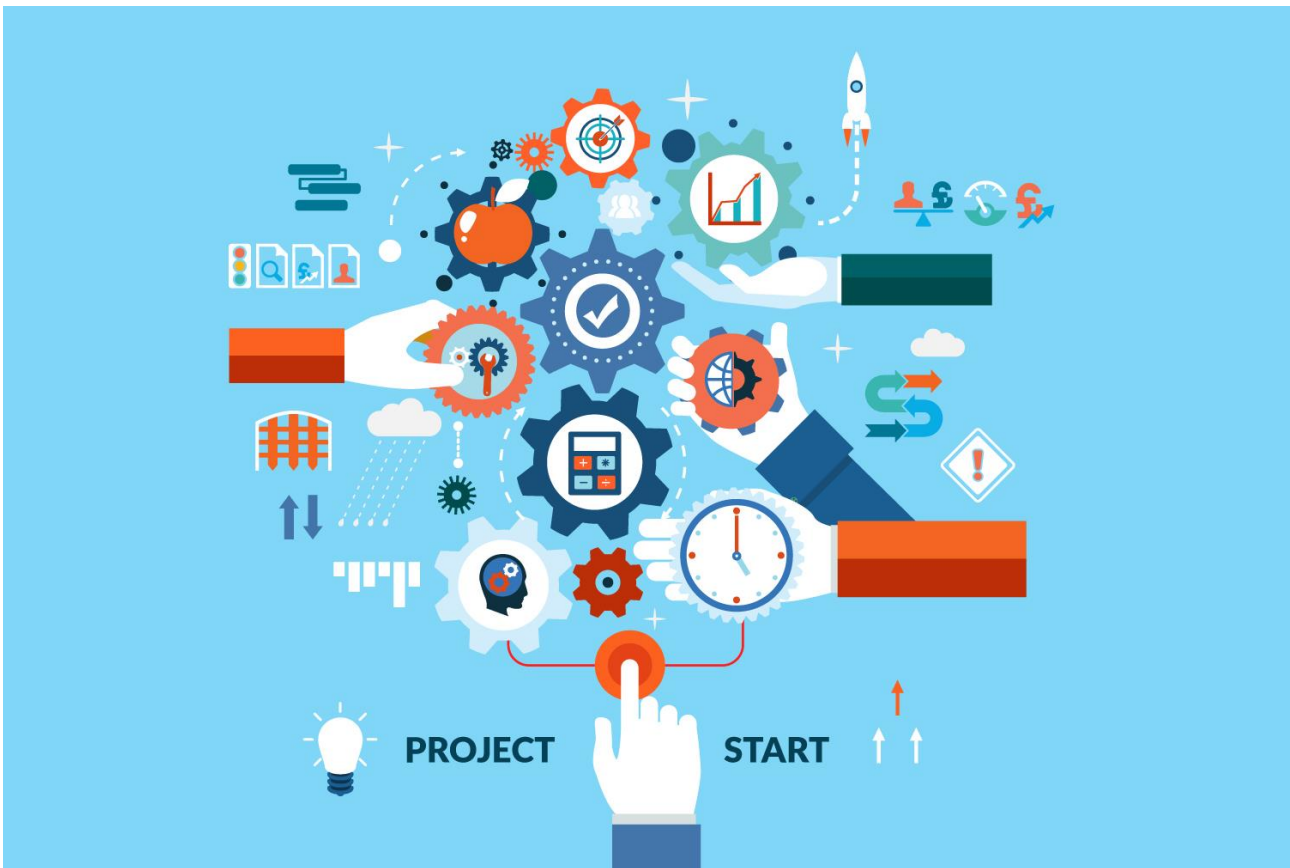




Intelligent Project kick-off : don't waste your time planning



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T: 01753 885864
E: info@bestoutcome.com
Europa House, 11 Marsham Way, Gerrards Cross, Bucks SL9 8BQ
www.bestoutcome.com



Introduction

Project kick-off is the most important phase of a project, bar none.

There is a well-worn saying about initiating projects :

*“you cannot guarantee success when you launch a project,
but you can certainly guarantee failure”*

Too many organisations waste time trying to produce a detailed, credible plan during kick-off when it just isn't possible.

This white paper describes a smart, proven approach to kicking off projects and programmes effectively, leading to an agreed, workable, measurable plan for delivering the work. Instead of wasting time planning, this outcome-driven approach optimises the time spent at kick-off by :

- ✔ Using **outcome-driven planning** to produce **two plans** :
 1. a high-level plan that shows the Key Milestones which the stakeholders focus on, which will lead to achieving the desired outcomes
 2. a detailed plan showing the activities needed to achieve the Milestones
- ✔ Not planning what you don't know. Use **rolling-wave planning** (for the detailed plan) to plan in detail for the next phase and in overview beyond that

Common mistakes at project kick-off

There are a number of ways that kick-offs can fail to be effective, including :

- By paying **insufficient attention** to project start-up, taking a “let's just get on with it” approach. This typically leads to disappointment, confusion, mis-directed effort and wasted cost because nobody is sure what they should actually do, when, or why
- By paying **too much attention** to project start-up, trying to nail down the scope, timeframe, costs, resources and benefits at the outset. The project gets stuck in the starting blocks
- When in-flight projects are **re-prioritised** many organisations fail to give the re-launch sufficient attention, and repeat the above mistakes

In all of these examples lots of time has been wasted planning, but there is actually no workable plan to show for all the effort.

Outcome-driven planning

Outcome-driven planning is a very simple but immensely powerful concept : before you rush off and start getting busy doing stuff take a step back and understand what everyone is trying to achieve with this project : what is your end-game, what outcomes are you trying to achieve?

Get the key stakeholders together for a kick-off workshop and spend time agreeing the outcomes :

- ✔ If you can agree the outcomes, build a high-level plan showing the contributing Milestones then go-away and build detailed plans for the next phase showing how you will achieve the Milestones
- ✔ If you cannot agree the outcomes then call a halt and abort the project because it will not succeed

Outcomes or outputs ?

Often when you ask a project manager “what’s the objective of this project” the answer will be “to deliver a great new service or shiny new product for the organisation”. However, that is rarely true: it isn’t the new service or product that is important, but what people can do with it that really matters.

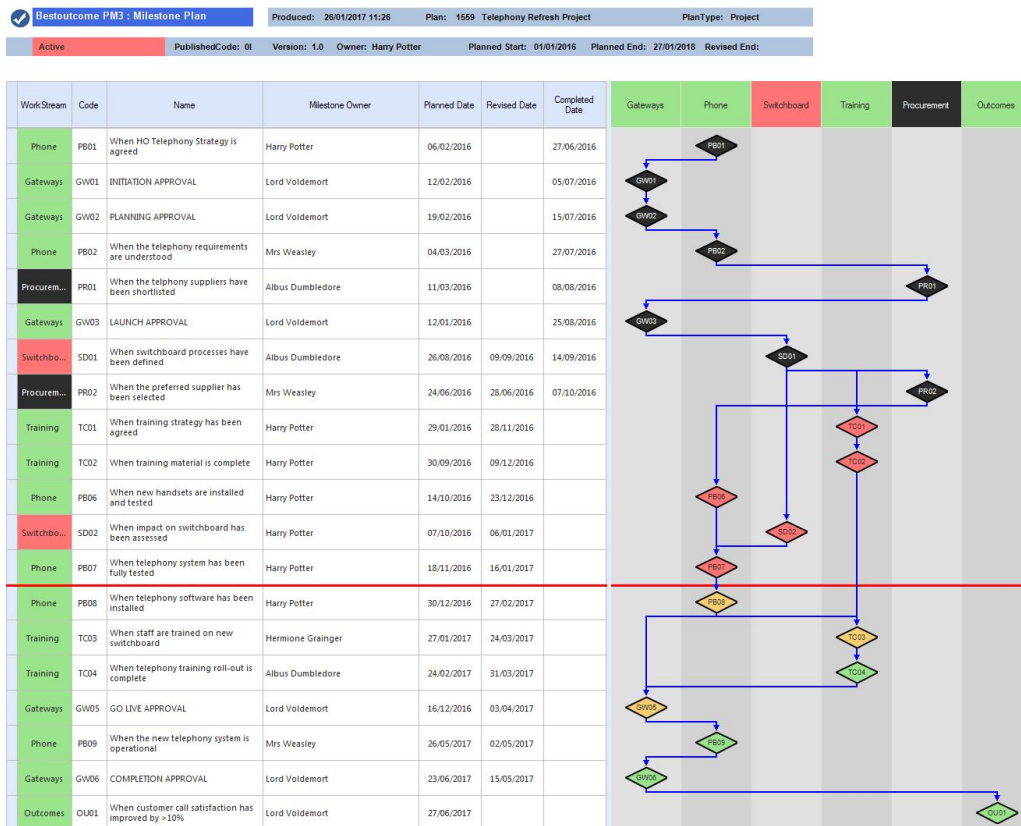
The diagram below illustrates the true value-chain in any programme or project:



- ✔ An **output** is created, for example a new web-based service
- ✔ This output gives the organisation some new **capabilities**, which people can then start exploiting
- ✔ Gradually, as more and more people exploit the capabilities a change in business behaviour happens. This is the true **business outcome** we are driving towards – this is the “big picture”
- ✔ Because new behaviours have been established we can now fully draw down the **business benefits** of working in a new way

High-level plan : Milestones and Outcomes

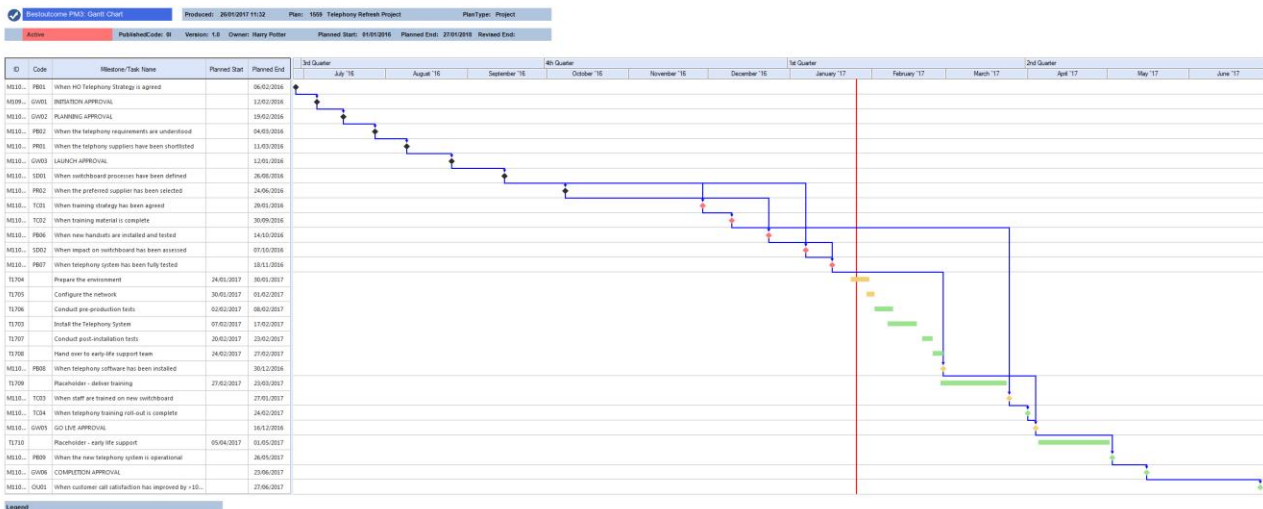
High-level, Milestone plans are perfect for communicating with senior stakeholders, because the plans are tightly focussed on overall Outcomes and interim Milestones and don’t overwhelm the stakeholders with detail. Here’s an example of a high-level plan :



Do not underestimate the power of the word “when” to describe a Milestone. It helps make the Milestone tangible and measurable, as shown above.

Rolling-wave planning : detailed plans

Rolling-wave planning says : instead of trying to produce a detailed plan for the entire project, plan in detail only for the next planning horizon (e.g. phase) and plan in outline beyond that. When you reach the end of this planning window repeat the process. Here is a detailed plan for the same project as above, showing detailed tasks for the first month and placeholder tasks beyond that.



Conclusion

Using an outcome-driven approach will guarantee that you kick-off projects in a full-disclosure way, and sets you up for success. It is a simple yet extremely powerful approach that is being used successfully in many organisations, large and small, regulated and unregulated, in both the public and the private sectors.

For further information on intelligent project kick-off, adopting an outcome-driven planning approach and using PM3 please contact: info@bestoutcome.com