

What is a Project ?

According to the PMBOK (Project Management Body of Knowledge) 3rd edition, A project is defined as a “temporary endeavor with a beginning and an end and it must be used to create a unique product, service or result”. Further, it is progressively elaborated. What this definition of a project means is that projects are those activities that cannot go on indefinitely and must have a defined purpose.

A project is an activity to meet the creation of a unique product or service and thus activities that are undertaken to accomplish routine activities cannot be considered projects. For instance, if your project is less than three months old and has fewer than 20 people working on it, you may not be working in what is called a project according to the definition of the term.

It has to be remembered that the term temporary does not apply to the result or service that is generated by the project. The project may be finite but not the result. For instance, a project to build a monument would be of fixed duration whereas the result that is the monument may be for an indefinite period in time.

A project is an activity to create something unique. Of course, many of the office buildings that are built are similar in many respects but each individual facility is unique in its own way.

Finally, a project must be progressively elaborated. This means that the project progresses in steps and continues by increments. This also means that the definition of the project is refined at each step and ultimately the purpose of the progress is enunciated. This means that a project is first defined initially and then as the project progresses, the definition is revisited and more clarity is added to the scope of the project as well as the underlying assumptions about the project.

What are the basic phases of a project and their purposes ?

The phases of a project make up the project life cycle. It is convenient for the project managers to divide the project into phases for control and tracking purposes. Each milestone at each stage is then elaborated and tracked for completion. The basic phases of a project are dependent on the kind of project that is being carried out. For instance, a software project may have requirement, design, build, test, implementation phases whereas a project to build a metro or a building may have different names for each phase.

Thus, the naming of the phases of a project depends on the kind of deliverables that is sought at each phase. For the purpose of definition, the phases may be divided into initial charter, scope statement, plan, baseline, progress, acceptance, approval and handover. This classification is according to the PMBOK. Thus, the phases of a project are closely correlated with that of the project cycle.

The purpose of each phase of the project is a set of deliverables that are agreed upon before the project starts. For instance, in a software project, the requirement phase needs to generate the requirement documents, the design phase the design document etc. The build phase in a project delivers the completed code whereas the test phase is about the completed testing for the deliverables.

Each phase of the project is associated with a certain milestone and the set of deliverables that each phase is expected to deliver is then tracked for compliance and closure. The Project Life Cycle consists of the initiating, executing, controlling and closing processes of the framework as described in the PMBOK. Each of these processes is necessary to ensure that the project stays on track and is completed according to the specifications.