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**White Paper**

**From Ready, Fire, Aim**

**To**

**Ready, Aim, Fire**

**Project Agency**

**Working to increase the probability of project  
management success**

# From Ready - Fire – Aim to Ready - Aim - Fire

## *A White paper from Project Agency*

### 1 Introduction

During [The Perfect Project](#), a two day training course, one delegate suggested that instead of the logical “ready, aim, fire” process for delivering projects, their company seemed to have rewritten this to “*ready, fire, aim*”. The person who came out with the quote said that their whole organisation lacked focus around project management and needed a stronger project management culture.

This document is designed to help you start your journey towards creating a project management culture where your chance of delivering projects will be greatly enhanced. We also provide you with some hints and tips along the way, all designed to help identify the project management culture in your organisation.

This document was first written in 2010 with [Dr Mike Clayton](#) and has now been brought up to date in version 2.

**Do you have a good record of delivering  
on time and to budget?**

### 2 Developing a Project Management Culture

Many of the participants on our [Perfect Project](#) course have looked at what their organisation requires to deliver projects more effectively. In discussions there is usually a lot of talk about the need for ‘process’ - to have a project management approach, to ensure project risks are identified and managed’ to have a deliverable plan. But, it was clear to many that the delivery required more than this. The ‘how’ was missing.

This White Paper points to how you can create a stronger project management culture in your organisation which I believe will greatly enhance your ability to hit project dates, budgets and contribute to the delivery of your strategy.

#### **What is a project management culture?**

There is no *one* answer here. Exactly what makes an effective project management culture varies for each organisation, but most share these features:

- **effective project management delivery**  
is a habit for everyone throughout the organisation
- **excellent use of resources**  
to deliver your projects
- **robust project governance (or accountability)**  
- policies, procedures and responsibilities that define the control of projects,

In a project management culture, performance management is geared towards delivering projects effectively. Importantly, senior managers not only support this process, but they take the lead in its implementation: reviewing and supporting projects, and changing internal processes as appropriate.

### 3 How do you develop a project management culture?

#### 3.1 Ensure that senior managers are “on board ”

Yes, it is worth repeating that senior managers must be “on board”, taking ownership of project management within your organisation. They must lead your transformation to a project culture. Unless senior managers see the change as imperative and urgent you won’t achieve this new culture.

John Kotter expresses this really well in “Leading Change: Why Transformational Efforts Fail”. He said:

*“When is the urgency rate high enough? From what I have seen, it is when 75% of a company’s management is honestly convinced that business as usual is totally unacceptable”*

Harvard Business Review March/April 1995

**Senior Managers must lead your  
transformation to a project culture**

In this case, “business as usual” is an ad hoc approach to project management where delivery to time, to budget and to specification is as a much a matter of good fortune as good practice.

Senior managers need to ensure that projects are properly commissioned, risks are identified and managed and that the benefits set out in the business case are really delivered. They also need training to ensure they fulfil their roles in projects effectively.

An oft repeated phrase on our Project Management courses from delegates is that senior managers do not support projects in their organisations because:

- they set **impossible** deadlines
- they **steal** project resources
- they **change** the scope of the project not recognising the implications for delivery
- they **fail** to play their role effectively

So while senior managers need to own project management at the strategic level; at the day to day level they must also play their part.

In other words, **continuing to do projects as we have done them before is not acceptable.**

**Is there clear accountability in all projects?**

### 3.2 Collect data so you know how you are doing

How well are projects managed in your organisation? How many strategic projects are there? How are projects progressing? Are project budgets adhered to?

These are only some of the questions that you need to have answered. You need data to manage the big picture and you need mechanisms for capturing this data:

- ensuring you are working on the right projects – are all your projects linked to your strategy?
- checking that you are delivering what you said you would deliver
- spotting links between projects, potentially saving valuable time, money and resources
- checking you have the capacity to deliver all you have committed to deliver
- ensuring that, having delivered a project, your management team crystallise the planned benefits

**Do you know whether you are  
working on the right projects?**

### 3.3 Do the Right Things

#### What are your project priorities?

What are your project priorities? Who has agreed them and who knows what they are? Organisations often try and deliver every “great idea” that someone has.

However, if you try this, there is a real risk that you will lose focus on your most valuable projects. If some projects fail for lack of resources, will they be the least valuable?

You may well need to abandon some of the “great ideas” for those that have a clearer priority and a greater impact on your business.

You need to create a clear statement from senior managers of the priority projects. This list needs to be regularly reviewed.

**Case Study:** *One very large organisation was frustrated by a continual inability to deliver its projects. Not only were many late and over-budget: some just never got delivered. By reviewing their project portfolio against their “vital few” business strategies, we recommended a radical cull of projects, giving them the capacity to deliver those on which they were deeply reliant with far greater assurance of success.*

### 3.4 Do the Right Things Right Create your own Project Management System (PMS)

This involves your organisation having a written approach as to how projects will

be planned, managed and delivered. It is effectively your organisation's rules of the road for delivering projects effectively.

Your PMS should list out the processes you need to go through for effective delivery of projects. It should also contain a list of project management tools and reference points within the organisation. Any training that needs to be carried out should be based on this document.

**Case Study:** *Working in a large public sector body we were able to ensure that projects were delivered on time and to budget through the development of a PMS. This PMS was designed to keep things as simple as possible for project teams. We then used it as the basis for a rollout of training for staff working on key projects.*

**Do you have one overarching Project Management methodology for the business .....which works?**

### **3.5 Ensure you have trained the right project staff**

Project Agency runs many project management training events. One thing constantly amazes us: the high proportion of people who are not working on a project, and are unlikely to in the near future is high.

We believe you can get better value for money by spending your training budget on people who will use the training as soon as they return to work. How will this work for you? Look at your key organisational projects (see point 3.3 above):

- who are your project sponsors?
- who are your project managers?
- who are your project team members?

These should be the people you target for training. Later on, you may wish to focus on other groups such as:

- key stakeholders
- key support functions (HR, Finance etc.)

**Are you investing in training the right staff with project management courses?**

Ensure the training isn't simply a tour around your project management system. Make sure it includes opportunities for your staff to develop their practical project management skills.

You may need to run different courses for various groups. For example, for project managers, team members or support staff. You may also want to put people onto certification courses. This white paper cannot advocate which qualification fits which group - however, we would be more than happy to have a conversation with you if you feel it is appropriate.

**Case Study:** *We worked in an organisation to develop their project management system. This led to some formal project management training with identified project managers. The result was a more confident group of people who were more knowledgeable and started to deliver projects more effectively. We also worked with project sponsors which saw a real benefit in project delivery.*

### **3.6 Who owns project management in your business?**

Someone senior needs to own project management within the business. What do we mean by this?

- they are the link to the executive board. This shows the seriousness, the intent of the organisation that project management is part of the culture
- they oversee all promotional activities around project management e.g. ensuring training is carried out, marketing of the PMS, encouraging interaction between project managers (such as a community of practice)
- looking for project management areas to strengthen e.g. maybe risk is not as strong as it could be or maybe one part of the company is not using the PMS in the 'approved' way. The senior manager ensures corrective action

The list is endless, the principle is very important for a strong project management culture.

**Is Project Management being led effectively  
by your senior managers?**

### **3.7 Create strong and effective Project Boards**

Many effective project organisations have Project Boards - sometimes called Steering Groups. These are small groups (5 people is ideal, 7 maximum) who:

- provide direction and oversight
- make critical project decisions
- can access and commit resources

Project boards play a significant role in larger projects and it is important to ensure that:

- you have the right level of people on Project Boards
- the Project Board are very clear about their role
- they add real value to the project
- Board members have the right skills to play their role effectively

While this clearly overlaps with Trained Senior Managers it is an essential pre-requisite to creating a strong and accountable project management culture in your organisation.

NOTE: not every project needs a project board.

**Are your Project Boards really adding value to your project management process?**

**3.8 Ensure there is clear Corporate Governance or Corporate Accountability**

One over-riding element of a project management culture is the need for strong and effective Project Boards as a part of your organisation's corporate accountability. This process will ensure that projects sit within the overall 'rules' of the organisation and serve its greater objectives.

"Governance refers to  
....." Association for Project Management

The governance of projects is a necessary part of organisational governance. It gives an organisation the required internal controls, while externally; it reassures stakeholders that the money being spent is justified.

Good governance is increasingly demanded by shareholders, government and regulators. An organisation will often have to comply with external regulations and legislation (e.g. the UK Corporate Governance Code). The governance of projects should support compliance in these areas.

Two areas where your Project Board can enhance good governance are:

- overseeing project performance and supporting remedial interventions
- accountable decision-making derived from full and timely information

**How much time does your Senior Management team spend on overseeing projects as a percentage of its available time?**

**3.9 Create a Project Office**

The Project Office can be the eyes and ears of the company as well as a useful ally for supporting people in the business.

In one company, the project office may be advisory. In another it may control project management, while in another it takes a facilitation or planning role. You will need to identify the specific role for any project office you consider setting up.

We mentioned in 3.3 the need for clear project priorities. The project office can also help to create the overall portfolio of projects for the organisation. They ensure that the portfolio is acted upon, that links and dependencies are clear, and investment goes to the right projects.

**Do your staff have the right support to help them to deliver?**

## 4 Conclusion

We hope this document has helped to stimulate your thinking about the need for a strong project management culture. How it works in your organisation will depend on many, many factors and it will need to be engineered, honed and adapted to your circumstances.

This document has been designed to be brief and it cannot answer all of the questions you may have. We would be delighted to hear from you if you want to talk about any specific needs you may have, or if you simply want to comment on the ideas we've presented. Contact us on +44(0) 208 446 7766, click [here](#), or go to <http://projectagency.co.uk/contact/>

## 5 Next Steps

### **What are the steps you could take that would really make a difference?**

Here is our Five Step Programme:

- Step 1. Why not take this document to the person with most influence over the success of project management in your organisation?

Ask them to comment on this White Paper. Feel free to circulate it to other colleagues in your organisation.

- Step 2. If you are a senior manager, ask your training department what development activities are available for project staff, project managers, project board members and sponsors.

And, if you are a project manager why not ask the training team what training there is for you and your team?

- Step 3. Contact your Project Office (if you have one) and understand what they do and what impact they can have on your projects.

- Step 4. Plan how you will develop your project management culture. Work with other people in your company to understand your organisation's strengths and, importantly, where you need to focus your efforts.

- Step 5. Contact Project Agency for a free consultation on 020 8446 7766. We would be pleased to hear from you.

## About the Author

Ron Rosenhead is a seasoned project management consultant; an expert in project management training, speaking and coaching and he:

- runs project sponsorship & management training events
- speaks at conferences and internal events
- works with companies to help them improve the probability of project success
- coaches project managers and senior
- writes articles and blogs and is a published author



You can find out more about Ron Rosenhead and Project Agency by visiting:

[www.projectagency.co.uk](http://www.projectagency.co.uk) or [www.ronrosenhead.co.uk](http://www.ronrosenhead.co.uk)

## About the Company

We work with companies and individuals to give them an increased probability of project success. Our focus is the professionally qualified; people who have risen through the ranks and find themselves involved in a project despite not having been trained in this area.

We develop project management approaches for companies and through practical project management training we have seen companies significantly improve project delivery.

We are passionate about project management – a tool that can help companies deliver their strategy and we will work with you to ensure this is carried effectively.

We also work with you to ensure learning is shared across the company so that good practice can be copied and the same mistakes are not made time after time!

Our specialities: project management training, project sponsor training, developing in house project management approaches, speaking at conferences and internal management meetings, coaching.

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## Project Agency

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