

Projects are usually split into phases often along the lines of initiation, control and closure. During each phase a number of documents are produced as part of the project control process.

Initiating a Project

All projects start with **an idea for a product**, service, new capability or other desired outcome. The idea is communicated to the project sponsor using the mandate. The **mandate** provides a structured **approach** to proposing a project and contains the project's **business case**.

Once the mandate has been approved a further document is prepared that explains the project in greater detail. The project **definition** report is used to provide this information. This document is used as a key part of the assessment when deciding whether the project should be undertaken.

In particular it outlines the goals, objectives, scope, deliverables, assumptions, constraints, risks, issues, key people, benefits, costs and duration. If **authorisation to proceed** is given, the contract is used to obtain formal agreement from the project sponsor and budget holder to start the project. This signifies the end of the initiation phase.

Controlling a Project

The control phase involves managing and tracking the project. To do this a project plan is developed. The **project plan** is most commonly expressed in the form of a **Gantt chart** and identifies the **stages**, tasks, timeline and **resources**. A good plan will include regular milestones that act as a measure of progress and keep the project team focused on short-term goals. Project plans may also include information about costs and dependent projects. A tracking Gantt chart can be used to **monitor progress**.

Once you have planned the project it is important to identify any factors that could have an impact on it. This is done using the **issues log** and **risk log**. The issues log is used to record issues and a plan to address them. The risk log is used to record and grade risks with an associated action plan to mitigate them. Often confused, risks and issues are defined as follows:

Risk: The likelihood of the occurrence of an event, usually a negative one that may adversely affect the successful completion of a project.

Issue: A **concern raised** by any stakeholder that needs to be addressed, either immediately or during a project.

Key to good **project management** and a successful project outcome is effective communication. The progress report is used to communicate progress on a **regular basis**, typically weekly or monthly, to all stakeholders of the project. The control phase ends once the project has **achieved its goals** and **objectives** as detailed in the project definition report. A project may be stopped prior to completion for a variety of reasons, including changes within a business, lack of resources or higher priorities.

Closing a Project

Project closure is an important aspect of **project management** that is often overlooked. A project that is not closed will continue to consume resources, albeit slowly.

To receive acknowledgment from the customer that the project has ended the customer acceptance form is used. Once signed off the project team is disbanded and no more work is carried out. At this point it is important to know whether the project has achieved its goals and objectives. This is done using the project closure report. This document communicates how well the project has performed against its original business case, **quality criteria**, costs, duration and **tolerances**.