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**From  
Ready – Fire – Aim  
to  
Ready – Aim – Fire**

A close-up photograph of a dartboard with three orange darts. The darts are clustered in the center bullseye. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green.

**How to improve project delivery,  
on time and to budget, every time**

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

## *A White paper from Project Agency*

### 1 Introduction

During one of our training courses, *The Perfect Project* 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”. Many people on the programme said their companies were like this. Indeed, the delegate who came out with the quote said that their whole organisation lacked focus around project management and needed a stronger project management culture.

Which process does your organisation use?

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

This document is designed to help you start your journey towards a project management culture where you can be confident you will deliver projects successfully. We also provide you with some hints and tips along the way as well as a questionnaire to help identify the project management culture in your organisation.



### 2 Developing a Project Management Culture

Delegates on *The Perfect Project* looked at what their organisation needed to deliver projects effectively. They concluded they needed to develop a stronger project management culture across the breadth of their organisations. They queried how this is best done.

The rest of this White Paper points to how you can create a project management culture in your organisation which will greatly enhance your ability hit delivery dates and budgets

#### **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)**  
within your organisation

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.

Senior managers commit the need for project management to be part of the organisational culture.

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

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

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

Yes, it is worth repeating that senior managers must be “on board”, taking ownership of project management within your organisation. And 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

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 much a matter of good fortune as good practice.

Senior managers need to ensure that projects are properly commissioned, are delivered effectively, 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:

*Is there clear accountability in all projects?*

- they set impossible deadlines
- they steal project resources
- they change the scope of the project at senior management level 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.**

### 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?

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

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
- ensuring that, having delivered a project, your management team crystallise the planned benefits

### 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)

*Do you have one overarching Project Management methodology for the business*

*... which works?*

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.

Research from KPMG shows that ***those organisations that keep to the rules of their PMS have a higher project success rate than those who have no such system.***

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.

To find out how to develop your own Project Management System, go to [www.projectagency.co.uk/word/templateapproach.pdf](http://www.projectagency.co.uk/word/templateapproach.pdf).

**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 – but no simpler. We then used it as the basis for a rollout of training for staff working on key projects.*

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

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

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

We believe you can get better value for money by spending your training budget on people who will use it. How will this work for you? Look at your key organisational projects (see point 3.3 above) and identify who the various project managers and key team members are, and target them for organised training.

Ensure the training isn't simply a tour around your PMS or, worse still, someone else's. 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 such as PRINCE2, ITIL, or PMI.



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

### **3.6 Develop project management leadership skills of your senior managers**

We mentioned the need for senior managers to be “on board”. You also need to ensure that senior managers play their leadership role in project management effectively. Senior Managers will set the tone of the project management culture and will need (as many people on our courses request) to lead by example.

This group need to be trained and developed to:

- sit on Project Boards
- act as a Project Sponsor
- ensure project governance and accountability is effective (monitoring and control processes)

With trained senior managers leading your project culture, the organisation has a solid example to follow.

### **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 – we suggest 7 as a maximum) who:

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

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

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.

### **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 must be led by the most senior tier within your organisation. It doesn’t matter whether you work in a large corporate environment, a public sector body, a charity or in the

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

*How much does your organisation spend on projects as a percentage of revenue?*

voluntary sector; corporate accountability is a vital part of project management.

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

### **3.9 Create a Project Office**

This is (usually) a central point within a company which:

- owns, reviews and updates your Project Management System (PMS)
- checks projects are using the PMS and applying good practice
- acts as an internal adviser on projects, for example, how to start up a project, managing stakeholder, or building a risk register

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

The Project Office can be the eyes and ears of the company as well as a useful ally for 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 on board a facilitation 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.

For further information about a Project Office click [here](#) or go to [www.projectagency.co.uk/word/PSO.pdf](http://www.projectagency.co.uk/word/PSO.pdf)

## 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 [www.projectagency.co.uk/contact\\_us.htm](http://www.projectagency.co.uk/contact_us.htm)

## 5 Next Steps

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



Here is our Five Step Programme.

*Are your project risks identified and well managed or do they impact negatively on delivery dates and budgets?*

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 Authors**

Ron Rosenhead is Director of Project Agency. He has been involved in project management for many years and he:

- speaks at conferences
- coaches project managers or senior managers
- runs project management events
- writes articles and blogs frequently – all on the topic of project management



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## **About the Company**

Project Agency was created in 1995. Our philosophy was developed early in our formation and is still with us today:

- demystifying project management for professional staff – solicitors, accountants, social workers etc
- developing core skills - of Project Managers, their teams and Project Sponsors
- providing guidelines and protocols for staff to follow
- helping those involved in the project management process to recognise the need to further develop their “people skills” as well as their project management skills.

Much of our work is customised to meet client needs so call us on +44(0) 208 446 7766 or click [here](#) or go to [www.projectagency.co.uk/contact\\_us.htm](http://www.projectagency.co.uk/contact_us.htm)

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