

Project Management Q&A

Views from a Global PM Expert

Following the webinar "[A Introduction to Managing Projects - Ensuring Project Success!](#)" some of you raised some great questions, which presenter John Humphries has kindly offered to answer, using his 25 years of experience in Managing Projects.

About your Global PM Expert

John Humphries, an instructor with ESI International, has more than 25 years of experience in managing projects and teaching risk and project management in the public and private sectors. His areas of expertise range from Microsoft® Project to training needs analysis and courseware development and customisation. John has an MBA in technology management, is a member of the PMI®, is a Prince2™ practitioner and an APMG-registered consultant in the management of risk. John has worked throughout the Americas and EMEA and has delivered training worldwide.

The webinar is a snapshot of our '[Managing Projects](#)' course; which is an essential project management foundation course, designed to be a great starting point for your development.

Through our Managing Projects course, you will learn to:

- Master fundamental project management skills, concepts and techniques
- Link project goals and objectives to clear, compelling stakeholder needs
- Develop work breakdown structures
- Set realistic, measurable objectives and ensure positive results
- Estimate project costs and schedules using simple, proven techniques
- Establish a dependable project control and monitoring system

[View Course Description](#)

Upcoming course dates in central London

21-23rd April • 17-19th May • 14 - 16th June • 12 - 14th July
[More dates »](#)

Change Management

Q: How would you set up a project to deal with organisational change?

JOHN: For organisational change, a programme would be a preferable way of making it happen because it is bringing about longer term outcomes over a variable timeframe rather than a definite result in a defined timeframe.

See ESI's webinars '[Managing and Saving Programmes in a Changing World](#)' and '[Taking Charge of Organisational Change](#)'.

Q: Change management is a difficult task to implement. How does the present global scenario address this issue? Is there a change management approach/process standard you follow?

JOHN: If you mean change management from an organisational viewpoint then programme management is a more appropriate approach.

See ESI's article '[The Change Management Life-Cycle](#)'.

Q: What is best practice: Is the project manager responsible for change management activities him/herself or should the project manager bring a change management team on board?

JOHN: Work as part of the change management team. If your question relates to requirements changes then a change control board outside of the project should make change decisions. The project manager will make recommendations.

Q: How can an integrated change control system play a positive role in a project success?

JOHN: It can play a positive role by having business level approvals for changes and only making changes which support the business objectives. When changes are introduced the original plan must be updated.



John Humphries

Senior instructor with ESI International and Project Management and Risk Expert

Technical and Professional Skills

Q: How do we control cross communication while managing the project?

JOHN: We need to understand the stakeholders and build a communications plan.

See ESI's podcast '[The Miscommunication Gap](#)'.

Q: Is it necessary for a project manager to be a technical expert in order to manage a project and bring it to successful completion?

JOHN: No, but some technical awareness is very useful. Likewise, it is also useful to have business skills to support your technical awareness.

For more information on the technical basics, take a look at ESI's whitepaper '[Establishing Clear Project Management Guidelines](#)' and our podcasts on Earned Value Management - [part 1](#) & [part 2](#).

For more on essential business skills, take a look at ESI's webinar '[Outside the Box: Business Skills for Technical Professionals](#)'.

Managing Expectations

Q: How do you deal with unrealistic customer expectations when the customer doesn't want to understand why there's a problem with something?

JOHN: I would seek assistance from the sponsor or other suitably qualified senior manager who is good at explaining/negotiating with customers. As a project manager you may not have the authority to be able to do this.

For more information, take a look at ESI's podcast [Getting to Know "No"](#).

Q: How do we create a sense of urgency to use these project management techniques and convince the management of this necessity?

JOHN: Explain the benefits of using them as opposed to not using them. Planning helps you understand the costs, resource requirements and realistic timeframes.

Q: How do you handle the so called "Nike syndrome", i.e. "Just do it!" coming from the management?

JOHN: If you do not plan then it's unlikely you will be in control and the project is likely to cost more due to rework and defects (A leading auto manufacturer just did it - in rushing to respond to consumer demand it failed to adequately train some key workers).

Project Management Tools and Methodologies

Q: I understand professional practitioners use a variety of methodologies - be it PMBOK, Prince2, 6 Sigma, etc - depending on circumstances and needs. What are your views on this?

JOHN: That's right, practitioners use a variety of methods and they would work with their clients to identify the most appropriate methodology for the project.

Q: Why is the PMBOK covered here instead of the other methodologies such as Prince2 or APM not covered in the PM syllabus?

JOHN: ESI is aligned with the PMI and PMBOK®. It is straightforward methodology to learn and put into practice. We can assist with PRINCE2 and APM if required.

If you want to know how the methodologies work together, take a look at our article '[Comparing the Differences and Complementary features of PRINCE2 and the PMI PMBOK® Guide](#)'.

Q: What kind of collaborative Project Management and Project Portfolio Management tools have you used/do you recommend if any at all?

JOHN: Microsoft Groove, LiveMesh, SharePoint. GotoMeeting and Webex are great tools also. Easy administration and access control is essential whatever you use.

For more information on Project Portfolio Management, have a look at ESI's webinar '[Project Portfolio Management in a Time of Significant and Rapid Change](#)' and '[Hammer and Nails - The Tools of PPM](#)'.

Q: What is considered the ideal communication platform for keeping visible project charter, planning and records for geographically dispersed team-members? This is often a practical problem to balance maintaining visibility, accessibility, version control, etc.

JOHN: Microsoft Sharepoint is a tool in common use for this. There are other products such as CA Clarity, Planview, Asta TeamPlan and so on. The view has to be easily accessible by all stakeholders.

Structure, Roles and Responsibilities

Q: This sounds all very bureaucratic, how is this done in less formal organisations?

JOHN: Projects need a level of formality for tracking and control, but it is up to the customer and organisation on how bureaucratic it needs to be. The documents identified in the webinar are a basic, essential subset. In less formal organisations, the project charter information and project requirements may be rolled up into the overall project management plan but there's still a need to have this written down. How else can you show that the project has done its job and can end?

Q: What role does the project manager play in defining the business benefits of the project?

JOHN: Defining business benefits is really the job of business managers and business analysts. It's a case of looking at 'if we solve this business problem how will our organisation benefit' in terms of saving costs, improving profit, reducing competition and complying with regulations. The project manager may be able to assist depending upon how much they understand of the business.

Q: What person should be the project sponsor? Is it the internal executive manager within the organisation working on the project or is it an external person such as a customer representative?

JOHN: The project sponsor should be the person with responsibility for the business success of the project. The Project Manager is responsible for the success of the deliverable, to time and budget.

Q: Whose responsibility is it to maintain the 'Lessons Learnt Log'? Is it the responsibility of the project manager, the quality manager or someone else?

JOHN: Is it the responsibility of the project manager along with the PMO/project administrator.

The Project and the Project Life-Cycle

Q: Can creating a Project Management Office (PMO) in an organisation regardless of its structure, influence the project success?

JOHN: A PMO can be a great asset to project teams, regardless of an organisation's structure, as long as it is set up correctly.

See ESI's webinar '[PMO in Hard Times - Adding Value or Adding Cost](#)'.

Q: Is it necessary to implement all the 42 process across the project life-cycle?

JOHN: No, not in every case. 'Select and scale' as appropriate for different size, type, cost, visibility and complexity of the project being undertaken.

Q: What is the most effective way to estimate cost and schedule task or activities?

JOHN: If similar projects have been done then use their information as a basis for your estimates. If it's a new project try and get realistic independent views for duration, resource type and cost. Estimation is a team-effort.

For more information, take a look at ESI's course [Scheduling and Cost Control](#).

Q: What are the differences between a Project life-cycle and a Product life-cycle? Can we use exactly the same approach?

JOHN: A project has a single deliverable, whereas a product may go through several versions (deliverables).

Risk Management and Testing

Q: As a risk specialist, what risk "families" do you define for project management?

JOHN: Risk "families" can be identified and used with a risk breakdown structure. It depends on your industry but as a start you could use the knowledge areas as top level prompts to explore risk. PESTLE is a good set of prompts in the absence of anything else. But for projects, risk families are usually: Technical, Resource, Organisation, Dependencies, Customer, Supplier, Location, and Clarity.

Q: You mentioned that risk management can get deeper than what you have covered or is covered by ESI training. Do you have any reading references/recommendations?

JOHN: Tom De Marco 's "Waltzing with Bears" is a great introduction to the subject.

Q: Requirements are never frozen. How do you go about requirements-based testing?

JOHN: Keep the requirements documents up to date and align testing with the current version. Always check traceability of any new requirement back to the business case.

For more information on Risk Management, take a look at ESI's webinar '[Leveraging Best Practices in Risk Management for Strategic Outcomes](#)'.