

Project Life Cycle * Sophie's Choice: What's in a Word? ¹

Dr. Kenneth F. Smith, PMP

The Project 'Life Cycle' is a generally accepted Project Management concept. But are you aware *there is no universal definition of – or standard for – a Project Life Cycle, nor how many Phases they have, or of what they consist?* Many extant definitions are variations on a theme, but some eminent organizations concatenate their '**Phases**' in different ways and lengths -- *sometimes even comprising different elements* -- as well as describing them with differing terminology. For example:

The American-based international **Project Management Institute (PMI)** – *of which I have been a long-time member* -- defines project life cycles in the following **five Phases**:

1. Initiation
2. Planning
3. Execution
4. Monitoring & Control (*which in addition to being a stand-alone 4th Phase, is also incorporated in each of the other Phases*)
5. Closeout

The British-based **PRINCE2 Foundation (P**ROjects **I**N **C**ontrolled **E**nvironments) -- *used and recognized all over the world* – also adheres to these same **five Phases**, but subdivides their first three, while -- *with 'Performance'* -- the fourth Phase embraces 'Execution' spillover from Phase three:

1. Conception and Initiation
2. Definition and Planning
3. Launch and Execution
4. Performance and Control
5. Project Close

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The at-large **World Bank Group** – *for whom I have consulted in the past* -- expands its project cycle with a hitherto-ignored **sixth Phase**, as well as describing the Phases with different terminology:

1. Preparation
2. Appraisal
3. Negotiation
4. Identification and board presentation
5. Implementation and supervision
6. Evaluation.

While the more limited **European Union (EU)** has only **four Phases** in its Project Management Cycle (PCM), but relegates Closure and Evaluation to others:

1. Planning
2. Preparing
3. Implementing
4. Monitoring and control

The Regional **Inter-American Development Bank (IADB)** has not one, but **two Cycles**; one with **four phases**, the other with **six!**

Model 1:

1. Preparation
2. Approval
3. Execution
4. Closure & Evaluation

Model 2:

1. Programming
2. Identification
3. Instruction
4. Financing
5. Execution
6. Evaluation

For its Project Cycle, the Regional **African Development Bank (AfrDB)** – *for which I once consulted* – has **nine Phases**:

1. Identification
2. Preparation
3. Appraisal
4. Loan Negotiation
5. Board presentation
6. Loan Signing
7. Loan Effectiveness
8. Implementation
9. Post Evaluation.

The Regional **Asian Development Bank (ADB)** – *with which I also consulted in the past* -- **five Phase** classification subsumes PMI's & PRINCE2's first two Phases into their first one; and assigns the World Bank's newly-identified Evaluation function to the fifth Phase,² as follows:

1. Identification, Design & Preparation
2. Approval
3. Implementation & Monitoring
4. Completion
5. Post-Completion Evaluation

The ISLAMIC DEVELOPMENT BANK has **eight Phases**:

1. **MCPS** (Member Country Partnership Strategy) Partner Identification
2. Preparation
3. Appraisal
4. Board Approval
5. Signature & Effectiveness
6. Implementation & Supervision
7. Completion
8. Post Evaluation

² Which I previously identified as a sixth Phase for PMI: Smith, K. F. (2018). Evaluation: The Project Management Cycle's Sixth Dimension; *PM World Journal*, Vol. VII, Issue X – October.

The bi-lateral (i.e. *Government-to-Government*) **US Agency for International Development (USAID)** – *with which I served for many years* -- currently defines **seven Phases**:

1. Identification
2. Preparation
3. Appraisal
4. Presentation
5. Implementation
6. Monitoring
7. Evaluation³

Whereas **UK's bi-lateral DFID (Department for International Development)** – *with which I formerly consulted on a couple of projects* – merged in 2020 with the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) uniting international development and diplomacy activities in a single **Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO)** and references the **5 Phase PRINCE2** model:

1. Conception and Initiation
2. Definition and Planning
3. Launch and Execution
4. Performance and Control
5. Project Close

The American Institute of Architects (AIA) has a **six-Phase Construction Lifecycle**

1. Pre-project Decisions
2. Planning & Design
3. Contractor Selection
4. Contractor Mobilization
5. Field Work (i.e. Construction)
6. Termination & Closure

³ It is significant that most of the Development Banks also concern themselves with post-project **evaluation** of their projects in their Project Cycles because they are concerned with the outcomes, whereas other institutions omit – *or neglect* – this function, as beyond the Project Manager's responsibility, and apparently after delivering the deliverables, no longer their concern.

Asana, a private construction & consulting company also has **six Phases**, albeit with different elements:

1. Initiation
2. Pre-construction
3. Project Execution
4. Commissioning
5. Occupancy & Warranty
6. Project Closure

The PM4DEV (Project Management for Development) Academy is an on-line training and consulting organization that asserts (*presumably on their own authority*) the project management cycle consists of **six phases**:

1. Initiate
2. Plan
3. Implement
4. Monitor
5. Adapt
6. Close

Still yet, another private company, **eSUB Academy** – *this one specializing in construction software tools, training and support* – asserts the project cycle has **five phases**:

1. Project Conception and Initiation
2. Project Definition/Planning
3. Project Launch/Execution
4. Project Performance/Control
5. Project Close

I could go on, but I'm sure by now you get the point:- somewhat analogous to beauty, *every entity has its own perception and description of what a Project Cycle is -- or should be -- comprised; but each is unique, with subtle variances defined by its creator!*

Precise definition of a criterion is essential to its attainment. Consequently, for a **discipline** that epitomizes precision – *some entities even maintain project management is a “profession” not just an amalgam of best practice tools, techniques, and guidelines* – this indifference to inconsistent criteria for a key concept is a startling aberration!

Nevertheless, given the lack of any universal standard or criterion, to avoid misunderstanding, mistakes and consequent confusion when it comes to terminology it is important to reaffirm -- *internally* -- that your co-workers are all on the same page.

Furthermore, since some people and organizations use **different words for the same meaning**, as well as **the same words but with different meanings**, *do not assume -- but verify -- you are indeed 'communicating'* with others outside your organizational environment, and not just talking past each other.

About the Author



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Initially a US Civil Service Management Intern, then a management analyst & systems specialist with the US Defense Department, Ken subsequently had a career as a senior foreign service officer -- management & evaluation specialist, project manager, and in-house facilitator/trainer -- with the US Agency for International Development (USAID). Ken assisted host country governments in many countries to plan, monitor and evaluate projects in various technical sectors; working 'hands-on' with their officers as well as other USAID personnel, contractors and NGOs. Intermittently, he was also a team leader &/or team member to conduct project, program & and country-level portfolio analyses and evaluations.

Concurrently, Ken had an active dual career as Air Force ready-reservist in Asia (Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Indonesia, Philippines) as well as the Washington D.C. area; was Chairman of a Congressional Services Academy Advisory Board (SAAB); and had additional duties as an Air Force Academy Liaison Officer. He retired as a 'bird' colonel.

After retirement from USAID, Ken was a project management consultant for ADB, the World Bank, UNDP and USAID.

He earned his DPA (Doctor of Public Administration) from the George Mason University (GMU) in Virginia, his MS from Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT Systems Analysis Fellow, Center for Advanced Engineering Study), and BA & MA degrees in Government & International Relations from the University of Connecticut (UCONN). A long-time member of the Project Management Institute (PMI) and IPMA-USA, Ken is a Certified Project Management Professional (PMP®) and a member of the PMI®-Honolulu and Philippines Chapters.

Ken's book -- **Project Management PRAXIS** (available from Amazon) -- includes many innovative project management tools & techniques; and describes a "**Toolkit**" of related templates available directly from him at kensmith@aol.com on proof of purchase of PRAXIS.

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