

On the Subject of Project Life Cycle Terminology¹

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

12 June 2023

Ref: Smith, K. F. (2023). Project Life Cycle * Sophie's Choice: *What's in a Word?* commentary, *PM World Journal*, Vol. XII, Issue VI, June. Available online at <https://pmworldlibrary.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/pmwj130-Jun2023-Smith-project-life-cycle-sophies-choice-2.pdf>

Sir,

I have three remarks I would like to add to the excellent article by Dr Kenneth Smith in the June edition of the *PM World Journal*².

As Dr Smith recommends, I will first state the definition of Life Cycle that I will use throughout this brief note: "the series of stages in form and functional activity through which an organism passes"³. The "stages" are conceptually equivalent to the "phases" referred to in Dr Smith's article. Now, my remarks.

My first remark concerns "Monitoring and Control". For an organism (in our case a project) to progress effectively through the stages of its life cycle, there needs to be a mechanism that is active throughout the organism's lifetime to ensure this effective and consistent progression. As such, therefore, the corresponding process has to be *external to the set of life cycle phases*⁴. Dr Smith touched on this in his first (PMI-related) example where he presented Monitoring and Control (M&C) along with the following remark (in bold in the original) "[...] in addition to being a stand-alone 4th Phase, [Monitoring and Control] **is also incorporated in each of the other Phases**". I would go further and contend that, although M&C is a distinct project management process required for life cycle management, it is neither a phase in its own right nor is it incorporated into other phases because, amongst other features, it is required for ensuring the initiation, progression and closure of the actual project phases. This role of M&C leads to my second comment.

There is one key feature of every project life cycle that is often overlooked: the transition from one phase to the next. This transition is not automatic. A phase cannot start itself

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² Smith, K. F. (2023). **Project Life Cycle * Sophie's Choice: *What's in a Word?*** commentary, *PM World Journal*, Vol. XII, Issue VI, June. Available online at <https://pmworldlibrary.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/pmwj130-Jun2023-Smith-project-life-cycle-sophies-choice-2.pdf>

³ Based on Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/life%20cycle>. Accessed 3 Jun. 2023

⁴ Just as the immune system is not a phase in the life cycle of living organisms.

spontaneously any more than a living organism can arise directly from nothing⁵, nor should a phase end without effective verification and controls. A phase should only be authorized once all of the prerequisites are in place for its effective execution and the associated risks have been evaluated and accepted. Similarly, a phase cannot be designated as complete until all of the corresponding actions have been completed, and a controlling body has given its approval. These two separate approvals, i.e., the approval to close one phase and the approval to open the following phase, should be distinct⁶, although they can, in certain cases, be granted during a single review meeting. This additional transition-related life cycle management function is one of the responsibilities of the Monitoring and Control process. The need for controlled transition into or out of a phase also explains and supports my contention that Monitoring and Control is a project management process, distinct from the set of project phases.

My final comment is that I do not see a problem with the fact that different bodies and professions have defined different life cycle models. In fact, this situation is very understandable because a life cycle has to correspond to the specific environment in which it will apply, such as engineering, banking, architecture, etc. The situation is similar for animals – think of the contrasting development stages of insects, amphibians, birds and mammals.

In a similar way, one certain set of units (e.g., metric or Imperial) may be better suited than another to a given engineering project. It is important, however, to state that, as Dr Smith emphasizes, such a situation in the project domain increases the risk of misunderstandings that can lead to spectacular and costly failures⁷. Mitigating this risk is one of the responsibilities of the Monitoring and Control process.

For every project, whatever the structure of its chosen life cycle, reviewing and reinforcing a common understanding for all stakeholders of the relevant project management criteria should be a core Monitoring and Control activity that is carried out at every phase initiation meeting.

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⁵ For our classicists: “ouden ex oudenos”. (Parmenides).

⁶ A phase can, however, be authorized to start before the previous phase has been completed and closed.

⁷ As an example, see: <https://www.simscale.com/blog/nasa-mars-climate-orbiter-metric/>