Overview Project Change Control Process

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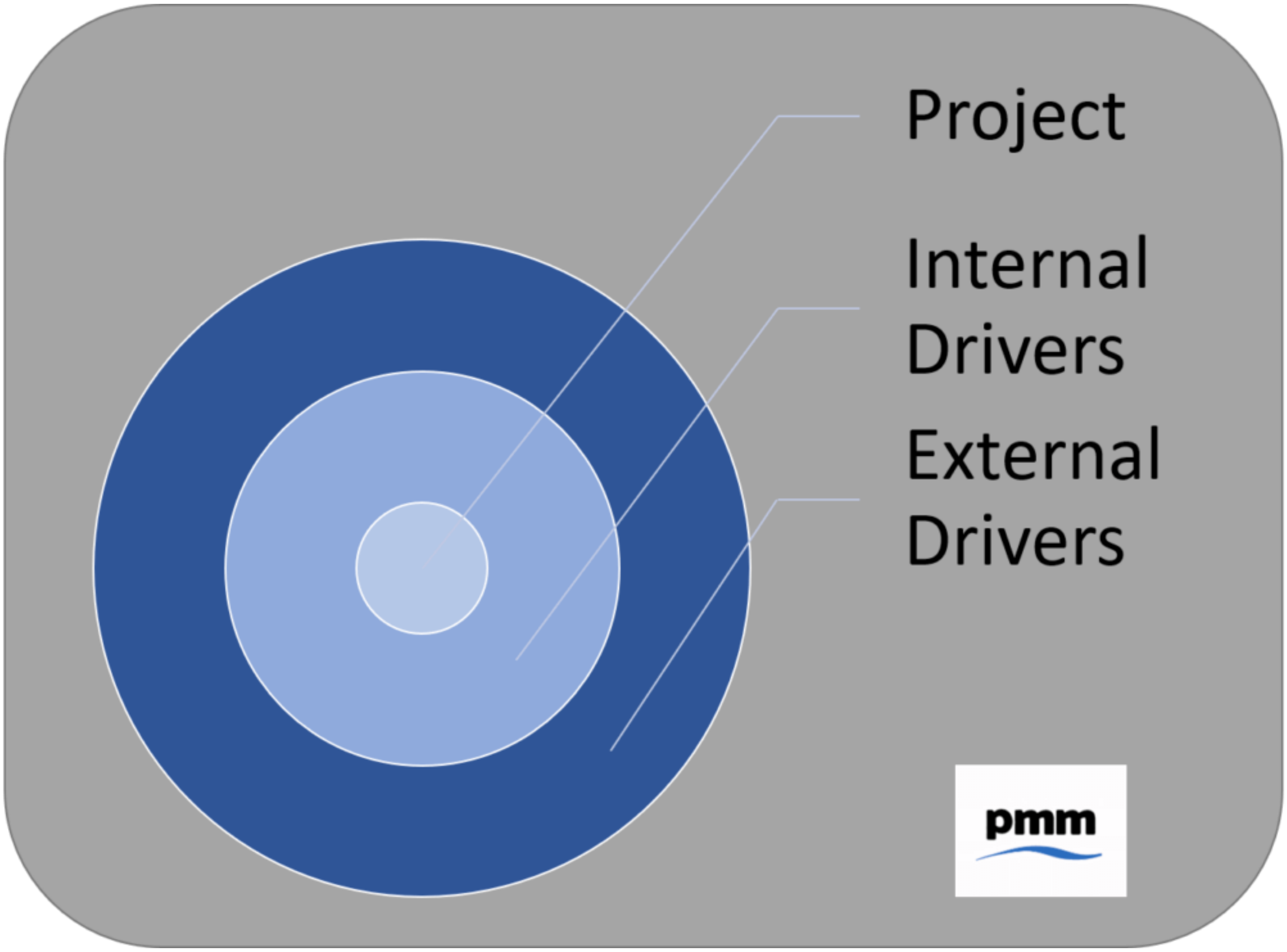
Overview Project Change Control Process

It is normal for a project to change at least once, or indeed many times over the duration of the project.

This is logical as the project is subject to a number of internal and external factors, many of which are not under the direct control or influence of the project manager.



Internal Examples

- Project estimates of time incorrect
- Tasks not identified
- Costs higher / lower than estimated
- Approach not appropriate requiring change

The principle drivers for internal change is normally down to the estimates of the scope, time or cost not being correct. The objective of the project has not been impacted by external drivers i.e. the sponsor changing scope.

External Examples

- Vendor / supplier changes costs mid project
- Organisation changes strategic goals
- Government introduces policies i.e. increased minimum safety requirements
- Exchange rates change due to economic issues

The principle drivers for external change are influences of external factors on the project, which the project cannot influence or control.

What is true about internal and external drivers is that they can all require a change to the project.

Change Control Overview

The change control process is the method by which the project manages change in the scope, time or cost.

This helps ensure that when a potential change is identified, the impact is correctly assessed so that an informed decision can be made on accepting or rejecting the change. If accepted the change can then be incorporated into the project.

Why it is Important

A project is the mechanism to deliver an agreed outcome within agreed parameters in respect of time, effort and budget.

If change is accepted into a project without agreement from the stakeholders of the impact, this will potentially mean that the delivery of the outcome takes much longer and / or costs more.

If this increase in time and cost is not agreed with the sponsor, they will quite rightly be unhappy.

The change control process ensures that any change is only accepted with the full understanding and agreement of all stakeholders. It can be seen as protecting the project from dissatisfied stakeholders.

Change Control Process Steps

There are 5 core steps in a change control process:

Overview Project Change Control Process

1. Identify change
2. Impact assessment
3. Review change request
4. Approve / reject change
5. Implement change

Identify Change

This is the method of how a potential change to the project is identified. This can come from within the project team, the sponsor or other internal / external stakeholders.

Information concerning the change, including driver(s), will normally be captured in a change request template.

Impact Assessment

This is where the project team takes the change request and then identifies the impact on the project of incorporating the change. For example, consider how the change can be completed, the resources that will be required, the effort and indication of cost.

Review Change Request

When the impact assessment has been added to the change request template, the change request can then be reviewed by all stakeholders (not just the project team). The purpose is to ensure common understanding, allow for any questions to be answered and ensure it is accurate.

Approve / Reject Change

When the change request template is complete and has been reviewed, it can be formally presented for approval at the appropriate governance forum.

Based on the information, a decision can be made if to accept, reject or defer the change. It is also possible that further questions will be raised requiring further work on the impact assessment.

Implement Change

If the change is approved, then the project plan, financials, scope, etc should be updated to reflect the change in the project. This will result in a new baseline used to measure project performance.

PMO Role in Change Control

The PMO plays an important role across the entire change control process:

Overview Project Change Control Process

- Defining process
- Providing templates / tools
- Executing the change control cycle
- Providing independent review
- Facilitating forums i.e. change board meeting
- Keeping a record of requests
- Ensuring communication flow between stakeholders
- Ensuring plans are updated to reflect change

Summary

Change control is an important process to manage the scope of a project. It helps ensure that change is accepted in a structured and transparent manner.

Change Control Resources

If you are looking for resources to help define and set-up and change control process, you may be interested in the PMO Template Framework that contains a module on implementing the change control process. This includes guides, templates and video training.

Step 1: Identifying project change requests

Every project will be subject to some form of change over its lifecycle. In the post, *Overview of project change control process*, I covered the 5 core steps:

1. Identify change
2. Impact assessment
3. Review change request
4. Approve / reject change
5. Implement change

This post is going to expand on step 1, Identify Change.

Who can raise a project change?

The simple answer is that anyone should be able to raise a change against a project. This makes sense as a driver for change can come from any number of internal or external sources.

The reality is that change will come from a much narrower set of people who are close to the project.

Why is this important?

It is important to have the principle that anyone can raise a change, as this helps protect the project from missing an important change in circumstances that will impact the successful delivery of the project.

It also helps reduce the risk of the project team not paying attention to concerns being raised from outside the project team.

For example, if a project has a very tight deadline, they may not be receptive to someone trying to raise a change if it will impact the delivery. However, there is no benefit to meeting the delivery deadline if what is delivered does not meet the required outcome.

Word of caution

While it is a good idea to allow anyone to raise a change, it does need to balance the time required to review and impact assess potential changes.

As with most things in project management, you must adopt a pragmatic approach.

Identifying project change process

Step 1: Identifying project change requests

It is important that there is a structured method on how change is identified across the project.

In order to support this, it is critical that there is a published change control framework, that has been communicated, for the project.

This should include details on how an individual can raise a potential change.

As there is not a set time when a change may occur, it is important that all stakeholders are made aware of the process for raising a change.

Tip: it is a good idea for the PMO to have a regular agenda item for formal and informal meetings to ask if there are any new changes.

Change request form

When a potential change is identified, it should be raised on the defined change request template. This should allow the capture of:

- Change request title
- Name of requestor
- Date
- Project
- Brief overview of change
- Reason for change
- Impact of not implementing change
- Date change required

The aim is to allow for the change to be understood and to allow the impact assessment to be completed.

Change request identification triage

It is likely that some changes will not progress or not even be true change requests. Therefore, it is a good idea to implement a triage process.

The PMO can help by implementing a process where any potential change is discussed first to see if it is appropriate. If so then the change request form can be completed.

Step 1: Identifying project change requests

The next phase of triage is after the change request form is populated. A further check can be made to see if it still makes sense to progress. If it does this acts as the QA step to ensure the change is ready for impact assessment.

These checks can save a lot of time for the project. However, they must also ensure that genuine requests can be raised.

Proceed to impact assessment

If the template is complete and deemed a change, it can then be captured on the change log and be sent for impact assessment.

Summary

The most important points of identifying change requests are:

- A structured change request process
- A change request template to capture the change
- Regular communication of the process
- Triage process to help ensure only genuine requests are raised

Step 2: Impact assessment of project change requests

This week's post is going to cover step 2 of the project change control process, Impact Assessment.

1. Identify change
2. **Impact assessment**
3. Review change request
4. Approve / reject change
5. Implement change

You can read the overview post by visiting *Overview of project change control process*, where I covered the 5 core steps of project change control.

Purpose of Impact Assessment

In the majority of cases, a change to the project will have an impact on one or more of the scope, budget, timeline and benefits.

The purpose of the project impact assessment is to conduct sufficient analysis to identify the impact.

Why is this important?

The consequence of the proposed change needs to be understood so that the stakeholders can make an informed decision if they wish to approve the change (or not).

This is logical, how can a sponsor or stakeholder agree to a change, if they do not understand the impact it will have on the project.

For example, the sponsor requests that an additional report is added to an application. While the request may sound simple, it could involve a complete rework of the database and input screens to accommodate the additional information, resulting in 6 months extra work.

Understanding the increased timeline and budget, the sponsor may decide that the report is not worth the impact.

Who conducts the impact assessment process?

The impact assessment should be conducted by team members with the appropriate skills in respect of both the change being requested and, the overall project.

This will typically be members of the project team. However, it is also possible that the change being requested requires input from teams outside of the project team. A good example being specialist technology teams.

Step 2: Impact assessment of project change requests

However, it is normal for the project team to manage and complete the overall impact assessment.

Step 2: Impact assessment of project change requests

Impact assessment template

The change request template is typically in the form of a word processor or spreadsheet document with predefined fields to capture the key aspects of the request.

Some organisations may have enterprise wide project management platforms that have online forms for the submission of change details.

The principles are the same, a structured form that ensures the correct information is captured.

A change request template and change log template can be found in the PMO Template Framework.

Impact assessment process

The person(s) completing the impact assessment should conduct analysis to understand the impact of the change. Note: before you can conduct the impact assessment the identification and capture step of the change process must be complete (see *Identifying project change requests*).

It is a good idea to capture the impact in a structured manner and, where appropriate, detail the specific impact in respect of:

- Scope
- Budget / Costs
- Schedule / Timeline / Plan
- Benefits / Outcomes
- External to Project

It is worth spending a moment on the last item, "external to project". It is possible to have a change that does not impact or even assists the project. However, it could have an adverse impact on an external project.

For example, a project may be delivering a new piece of functionality for online and telephone sales, in doing so there is a need to upgrade the security infrastructure. If a decision is made not to implement the online sales element, then the security infrastructure upgrade may no longer be required. This could impact another project that was dependent on the security upgrade.

Cost of change

Step 2: Impact assessment of project change requests

While the impact on budget is one of the areas to consider in assessing the change, it is sensible to capture this in a separate field to ensure the cost of the change is fully understood.

If it is a complex change, it may be necessary to work up a complete cost breakdown. This will then allow the sponsor and stakeholders to understand the impact in detail and to allow further scrutiny. A change request is no different to when you complete the planning and budgeting step at the start of a project. The principles are very similar. You are looking to achieve an understanding of scope, the timeline and costs.

Impact of not making change

This is important. In order to make an informed decision, you should include details of the consequence of not accepting the change.

For example, if not including the requested change means that an audit point cannot be closed, the sponsor and stakeholders need to fully understand that they accept the consequence of this by not approving the change.

Change deadline

When considering the change, you should include the deadline by when a decision is required on the change request and, if known, the date the change should be implemented.

Again, this is to make it very clear to the sponsor and stakeholders that a decision is required by a specific date, if not again they are accepting the consequences.

Important consideration

When capturing the impact of not making the change and the deadline, do not over state the impact in an attempt to gain approval.

If the sponsor realises this, 1. they will not be happy and 2. they will not trust future requests. It is critical to only state the facts to the best of your knowledge.

Sign-off and submission

Before the completed impact assessment form is submitted, it should be reviewed by the project manager. If the information is correct, the project manager should sign-off the impact assessment and formally submit the request for review.

Step 2: Impact assessment of project change requests

It is a good idea for the project manager to discuss the change and impact with the sponsor before submission. This allows for any final adjustments. Plus, it does not make sense to submit if the sponsor does not agree or is not supportive.

Step 2: Impact assessment of project change requests

Summary

The impact assessment step is the process for identifying the impact of the change on the project.

Using a change request template should allow the structured capture of all of the relevant information.

The objective is to allow the sponsor and stakeholders to make an informed decision.

Step 3: Review of project change requests

This week's post is going to cover step 3 of the project change control process, Review of Project Change Request.

1. Identify change
2. Impact assessment
3. **Review change request**
4. Approve / reject change
5. Implement change

You can read the overview post by visiting *Overview of project change control process*, where I covered the 5 core steps of project change control.

Purpose of Review

When a project has a change in scope, this can have an impact on:

- Stakeholders to the project
- Stakeholders dependent on or who have commitments to the project

Therefore, it is very important that all stakeholders are given the opportunity to review any proposed change and provide feedback.

If not, there is a risk that a change request will be approved that will impact one or more of the stakeholders.

For example, if the change will mean that a team will need to take on additional work because the change is to remove automation from the scope. This team needs to be able to provide the feedback of the impact and even refuse to accept the change.

If they are not consulted as part of the impact assessment, this would probably cause major challenges when the project is delivered. Suddenly the team will find themselves overwhelmed with additional work they were not aware would be coming into their team.

The purpose of the impact assessment is to ensure that all stakeholders can provide feedback in order that an informed decision can be made on accepting or rejecting the proposed change.

Why is this important?

If all stakeholders are not engaged, there is a very high risk that there will be negative consequences resulting from the change.

Imagine if a change had been implemented, then in 6 months when the project manager tries to obtain sign-off to go-live, only to find that stakeholders will not sign-off due to the change that was implemented.

This would potentially mean 6 months wasted time, effort and budget. Additionally, the further cost of correcting the position.

This would not be a good position for the project manager.

Who conducts the review process?

At the simplest level, it is all stakeholders to the project.

The reality is some stakeholders have a bigger interest or closer alignment to the change than others. Those who will be impacted by the change must review to ensure that all known impacts have been captured and assessed.

This is an important point. Just because the impact assessment step has been completed, it does not mean all of the impacts have been captured.

There are situations that there may be upcoming changes in the strategy that the team who conducted the impact assessment were not aware. Having the impact assessment reviewed by the manager within the area should help mitigate this risk.

A good project manager (or PMO) will no the most relevant stakeholders who need to review and will ensure that they have had the opportunity to review and feedback.

Change Request review template

While a specific change request template can be used, a better option is to include a review section within the change request / impact assessment template.

This will then allow each reviewer to provide feedback on their copy of the form.

The project manager / PMO can then review all of the individual feedback and consolidate as appropriate so all important themes and points are captured on one form.

It is also a good idea to include a section that lists all of the teams / functions who could review a change. This can then be used to indicate who needs to review and who is not applicable (N/A). It can even capture the name of who conducted the review for a given team and date.

The advantage of this is it reminds the person who is raising the change of all the areas that they need to engage.

A change request template and change log template can be found in the PMO Template Framework.

Step 3: Review of project change requests

Impact assessment process

Very simply this is where each team reviewing the proposed change, review the proposal and known impact assessment to:

- Ensure they understand the proposed change
- Check information is correct to the best of their knowledge
- Ensure that any known impact is identified and correctly explained

This process allows for any points to be clarified and missing impacts to be captured.

The aim is that the reviewer is able to fully understand in order to make a decision to agree or reject the change.

Tip: If there are many questions arising, it might be worth holding a review session with the interested parties to allow the points to be discussed. This can be an efficient process when a number of parties have questions concerning the change.

Don't forget to set a deadline for the reviews to be complete. The PMO can help ensure that all reviewers complete their reviews by the deadline. If not this will delay when the change request can go forward for formal approval.

Review completion

When all parties have reviewed and provided feedback, the change request is ready to go for formal approval.

Review of project change requests

Summary

- Creating the project change request and conducting an impact assessment is only part of the process. You must ensure that the request and identified impacts are reviewed before the change request can be formally approved.
- Having a structured review process will ensure that all parties have the opportunity to provide feedback on a change request.
- The review process can save time and money by identifying challenges before a change is approved.
- The outcome should be a change request proposal that has been reviewed by all stakeholders and captures all of the relevant information. In turn allowing for an informed decsion to be made.

Step 4: Approval / Rejection process of project change requests

This week's post is going to cover step 4 of the project change control process, **Approve / Reject Project Change Request**.

1. Identify change
2. Impact assessment
3. Review change request
4. ***Approve / reject project change request***
5. Implement change

You can read the overview post by visiting *Overview of project change control process*, where I covered the 5 core steps of project change control.

Purpose of Approve / Reject process

This is an important step in the project change control process. It formalises the decision in respect of the change request.

By having a formal process for making the decision, this means that it is easy to demonstrate that any change request decision has been made with the appropriate governance.

It also means that there is a very clear audit trail to demonstrate the decision. This can be useful if a question is ever raised why the scope of the project was changed and who approved the change.

Why is this important?

If there is no formal process to allow for the decision to be made, this creates a risk that any accepted (or rejected) change does not have the full mandate of all stakeholders.

This can cause many problems including:

- Teams who need to contribute the change will not make the required changes without the official approval
- Stakeholders may question why changes were made / budget spent at a future point

Who conducts the approve / reject process?

This process should typically be managed by a central PMO or central function.

Step 4: Approval / Rejection process of project change requests

This will ensure that the project details are presented in the correct format. More importantly the PMO can ensure that the change is presented so that it can be understood by all stakeholders.

The central PMO can ensure that all stakeholders who need to be part of the decision process are engaged and provided with the appropriate information.

Approve / reject process

The process is very simple. All stakeholders required to make the decision need to have the change request details shared with them so they can make a decision.

It is important that the process is documented including, how a decision can be made. For example what if there are 10 stakeholders who need to make the decision.

If 6 vote "yes" is that sufficient? What happens if 5 vote "yes" and 5 vote "no"? Who is responsible for a deciding vote?

Then is could be that all 10 have to vote "yes" for a decision.

You need to think what is appropriate for your organisation.

Tip: It is a good idea for the PMO to organise a central Change Board. This then allows for all project change requests to be presented with all stakeholders present. The change request can then be presented (normally by the project manager) and a debate can then take place to reach consensus.

By issuing a terms of reference for the Change Board, this will ensure all parties understand the governance for decisions.

The added benefit is the meeting can be captured in the minutes of the meeting as an official record of decisions.

What to do where a decision is not made?

It is worth spending a moment on what should be done where a decision cannot be reached.

During the meeting, it is important to gain an understanding of all of the concerns. Then agree a time scale for when the change request will be represented.

This avoids time being wasted when a decision will not be reached. It ensures the concerns are captured. This allows the project team to provide the additional information ahead of the change request being represented.

Step 4: Approval / Rejection process of project change requests

Approve / reject template

There is no specific template required for the review / reject step of the process.

However, it is a good idea to have a central register of change requests. This can be used to produce a meeting pack for the Change Board to allow the project change requests to be reviewed.

This is a good approach as it minimises the need to create additional documents. The PMO should be able to copy and paste the appropriate part of the change request register.

The meeting material should then be published at least 24 business hours, ideally 48 hours ahead of the meeting to allow for the material to be reviewed by the stakeholders.

A *change request and change request register template* can be found in the PMO Template Framework.

Change request decision

When a decision is reached, it should be recorded and communicated to all relevent parties.

This is where making the decision using a governance body like a Change Board can be really useful.

The minutes can be used as the mechanism to communicate the formal decision.

Summary

- It is critical to have a mechanism for recording the formal approval / rejection of project change requests
- It is a good idea to set-up a regular Project Change Board for the approve or rejection of project change requests
- Minutes of the project change board provide the evidence and audit trail for decisions
- Using project templates, like those in the PMO Template Framework can help establish the change request process

Step 5: Implementation of project change request

This week's post is going to cover step 5 of the project change control process, **Implementation of Project Change Request**.

1. Identify change
2. Impact assessment
3. Review change request
4. ***A***pprove / reject project change request
5. ***Implement project change request***

You can read the overview post by visiting *Overview of project change control process*, where I covered the 5 core steps of project change control.

Purpose of Implement Change Request Process

The purpose of the process is to ensure that any change request that has been approved is incorporated into the scope of the project.

Why is this important?

If a project change request is agreed, but then not incorporated into the scope, this will mean that the project will not deliver the agreed outcome.

This will highly likely result in the sponsor and stakeholders to be upset as the agreed deliverables will not be met.

It could also result in additional time and budget to be spent to incorporate the agreed changes.

Step 5: Implementation of project change request

Who conducts the implement change request process?

The 2 key areas responsible for the process are:

- Project Manager: needs to ensure that the scope is updated to reflect the agreed change and plan includes the required activities to implement the agreed change.
- PMO: needs to ensure that the change register captures the agreed change request and that approval is provided to update timelines and budget to support the change request.

Implement project change request process

When a decision has been reached concerning a project change request, there are a number of actions for the PMO:

- Ensure that the change request template and any supporting information is stored so that there is a record of what information was used to reach the decision.
- Ensure that the decision from the Change Board is clearly communicated to all relevant stakeholders. This is especially important for the project manager / project team who needs to implement the change.
- Update the change control register to record the outcome of the decision.
- Update any financial records in respect of updated budget. Note: this may also require an update by the finance team.
- Update any centrally held plan dates. A good example is where an organisation uses an enterprise project planning tool like Clarity. Changes to baselined milestones might only be able to be changed by the central PMO.
- Update any other central record, report, etc where the timeline, budget, scope, etc is recorded and reported.

The project manager and / or project team will need to:

Step 5: Implementation of project change request

- Ensure change decision has been communicated across project team.
- Update scope of project to reflect agreed change.
- Update project plans with revised dates and activities to support change.
- Update financial tracking with new budget.
- Update reports with revised timeline, budget and scope.

Implement project change request template

There is no specific implement change request template.

However, it is a good idea for the PMO to include fields on the change request template and change register to allow a date to be recorded that all of the necessary steps have been taken to action the change request.

A *change request and change request register template* can be found in the PMO Template Framework.

It is also a good idea to create a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) – a checklist, to ensure that all steps are completed consistently when a change request is agreed.

You can find out more about SOP in the post, The Power of PMO SOP's.

Summary

- It is not good enough to agree a project change control, it must be incorporated into the project.
- Implementing a project change control process will ensure all changes are incorporated.
- The Project Manager and PMO play important roles in the process.
- The use of templates and SOP's can help ensure a robust process.