

Successful project management in social work and social care: managing resources, assessing risks and measuring outcomes.

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Introduction to Project Management

Introduction

This book seeks to provide a practical and practice guide to social work and social care professionals on project management. The role of project manager is often different from other roles that you might be involved in as part of your work, and as you work through this book, you may reconsider what this role is. We hope that the book will therefore challenge you to consider the extent of differences in activity, and reflect on the tools used and how these might influence or help you to ensure good and effective services.

The book has been written with recognition that people have a wide range of experience and knowledge in project management and that by helping to demystify the process and facilitate practitioners' knowledge and experience then you may feel more confident in managing projects. As a result, we provide relatively short and straightforward chapters that explain principles and apply those principles to the social work and social care sector. The book provides an opportunity to reflect on the experiences of those managers and professionals who have been involved in projects, and aims to facilitate and consolidate the development of your own project management skills.

This chapter will start by identifying what we mean when we talk about project management and will provide an explanation of the differences between projects and operations management, which should help to clarify when and why project management techniques should be used. One of the key issues discussed in this chapter is the use of projects in promoting change, and the challenges this brings. We shall finish by looking at these challenges in a more positive light, for example by identifying what factors enable and facilitate project success.

Project management in social work and social care

Prior to the Second World War, social care was largely provided under the auspices of Poor Law, which provided the only public-funded care for older and physically disabled people (Thane 2009). Following the establishment of the welfare state in 1948 all health services were 'free at the point of delivery' and local authorities became responsible for social care.

Before 1979 the ideas of 'performance' and 'management' were seldom heard and were mostly associated with the business world. State welfare services were largely provided through 'bureau-professional regimes' through social services departments which were established following the Seebohm Report in 1968 (Harris and Unwin 2009, p.9). Bureau-professional regimes were concerned with ensuring impartiality, enabling professional discretion and ensuring that legal requirements were met. The rise of neoliberalism and new public management resulted in changes to the control of professions, increased use of the private sector (Hafford-Letchfield 2007) and a greater emphasis on learning from the business sector about how to provide public services.

This chapter considers this specific context and seeks to explore the role of project management within the unique circumstances of social work and social care. It draws on a successful methodology widely used in business and the public sector to undertake change and deliver projects, and seeks to apply this within the social work and social care sector. In doing so, we will be making use of case examples to illustrate both methodology and tools. As there are very few case studies that can illustrate all the complexity and aspects of a project, in this book we have sought to use multiple case studies. Chapters 2 and 4 specifically speak from the voices and experiences of those actually involved in delivering projects, and we seek to link these case vignettes to the principles and tools explored so that you have the opportunity to consider the direct application of project management in social work and social care. These case studies have not been edited but illustrate some of the practical realities by enabling those in the case studies to tell their own story.

What is project management?

Project management is the process of managing a project, and whilst the nature of projects and the areas in which they are undertaken may vary, the process of delivering them is largely similar. Projects are work activities that

are undertaken within organizations to produce outcomes, and will have a defined start and a clear end. Examples of projects that you are likely to have come across may include:

- changing the culture of care
- undertaking research or audit (Marshall and Hughes 2008)
- development of new services or the decommissioning of old services
- installation and implementation of new technology, for example IT systems
- changes to the supply chain for care, for example outsourcing of goods and services to external providers of those services
- outsourcing of key processes involved in delivering care such as training, finance and human resource management
- ensuring that best practice is implemented throughout care services and facilities
- commissioning and construction of new buildings
- changing protocols used in the provision of care to service users.

There are a number of different methodologies that are used in managing projects and there is a range of literature on general project management (Charvat 2003). However, there appears to be significantly less work published on project management applied to social work and social care. One key framework used for project management within the UK is the PRINCE2 methodology. This is a highly structured approach, which uses a standardized methodology and is used in many large corporations, as well as the UK government. It relies on a well-structured and documented approach (OGC 2011) which:

- demands clarity on the business rationale for the project
- supports structured approaches to project management
- identifies the 'product' the project is delivering
- specifies which stages and processes can be controlled
- proposes methodology to be applied at different levels of the project.

Many of these attributes will be discussed in this book in order to support your knowledge development in project management.

The differences between project and operational management

You will notice that projects are clearly different from what might be termed 'operations' and that all organizations may undertake either or both of these functions. In thinking about the differences, by 'operations' we mean activities that are ongoing, perhaps even repetitive, and that might be considered part of the day-to-day functioning of an organization. These 'operations' are not one-off but are routine activities. Examples here might include:

- ongoing delivery of care services
- the assessment and review of support services provided to service users and carers
- undertaking financial assessments and the processing of the administration linked to this.

To help explain the difference, Table 1.1 illustrates some of the key differences that might be evident between operations and projects.

An example of a project might include the implementation of a new records management IT system in a large social work or social care agency setting. The new system is seen as a way to support front-line practice, improve standards and consistency, improve care quality, reduce the burden of performance management data collection and decision-making, and increase cost savings. In this example the organization believes that front-line practice can be improved through greater use of standardized practice, automated generation of documentation for funding and care decisions, and making information more widely available for all workers dealing with a service user or carer. This consistency is seen as contributing to and therefore improving the quality of care (Munro 2011). Information would be used to support service planning and delivery, and reduce duplication for users, families and workers. Their initial calculations suggest that this will result in improved efficiency, less time for administration and reduced duplication. Management savings would result from improved data collection, reduced administrative duplication and effective use of information.

Table 1.1 A comparison between operations and projects

	Operations	Projects
Features	Planned, implemented and managed, normally involving resource constraints	Planned, implemented and managed, normally involving resource constraints
Function	Maintain and grow organization	Achieve objectives and then end the project
Time requirements	Ongoing processes	Limited timescales. Clear start and end
Product	Achieve specified goal	Ongoing provision of services, products
Human resources	Teams are normally aligned to organizational structures	Teams are generally more dynamic and made up of people with the necessary skills to complete the project. Not normally aligned to organizational structures
Manager's role	Direct and formal lines of accountability	Varies, but normally the line manager has no direct role

The project is complex, as a result of the significant change required:

- Changes to software and training are required to operate the new system.
- Computer hardware changes might be required as a result of the new software requirements.
- Computer networks need upgrading as a result of the new hardware and software demands, but also the operational teams are geographically dispersed.
- New software and standardization of processes requires review, negotiation and adjustments to be made to work processes and software. This may require understanding of the work and professional practice, analysis, development of models to replicate this, debate, and negotiation to ensure that professional, service user and organizational needs and requirements are met.
- Procurement of all the necessary equipment and support staff is required. This may involve the development and issuing of tenders, followed by evaluation and successful 'letting'.

- Pilots of revised practice models, software, hardware and networks need to be undertaken, and adjustments and changes made as appropriate.
- Accuracy of data on existing systems must be checked, and protocols developed and checked to support data transfer from the old legacy system to the new software.
- Staff need to be trained to use the new systems.
- The new system needs to be rolled out and a 'go-live' date agreed.
- Data must be transferred from the legacy system, with contingency plans in place in case of problems.
- Once fully implemented, the old system needs to be removed and surplus equipment disposed of.

Whilst this example is of a large project, it has been used to illustrate the complexity and interrelationships between different aspects of the project. You will recognize that this project is far wider than what initially might be viewed as a change of software. In project management this is often the case.

Table 1.1 showed that projects differ from day-to-day operations in a number of key areas, including being focused on their task, the time frames and resourcing. A project may be a single initiative that is being undertaken in isolation. It is important to note that often the organizational line manager may have no direct role in managing the project manager. The project process is often very formalized, with documentation supporting all the processes, to help ensure that everything that is important is dealt with. Keeping formal records which document the process, although time-consuming, is viewed as critical in project management regardless of the framework you use, as it helps ensure clarity, transparency, accountability and quality in delivery. Chapter 8 further explores the role of project governance in more detail and the importance of this documentation.

A number of different terms are used to refer to project management. 'Programme management' involves a number of interrelated projects which may have a number of interdependencies. 'Business programme management' refers to a number of programmes and projects all being undertaken simultaneously. The management and skills required to manage each of these successfully may vary considerably in magnitude.

The 'On the Spot' activity in Box 1.1 is aimed at enabling you to start to consolidate your existing knowledge and understanding, help you clarify

the differences and begin to ease you into using these management activities. It may be difficult to identify absolute differences between some aspects of projects and operations in social work and social care, for instance if the product is similar in both approaches. We hope that this activity will help you to place yourself in the shoes of a project manager, particularly as you approach the remainder of the book.

Box 1.1

‘On the Spot’ – Project or operational management?

1. Identify in your own workplace activities that you might consider are ‘operations’ and those that are ‘project’ management.
2. Using the points you have identified, write down your rationale for each of the points you have identified.
3. Are there any points that you feel might be debatable? Reflect on the reasons for this.

Project management in context

All organizations and services have challenges in the way they work or the services that they deliver. Importantly, the social work and social care contexts in which projects are undertaken often seek to improve the efficiency, structure, process, quality or extent of services in the sector. Key criteria within which the project needs to be delivered and what might influence its success are important aspects that the project manager needs to be mindful of, including:

- understanding the political context
- who the key stakeholders are (this includes service users, professionals and other agencies)
- clarity about the purpose of the project
- project-critical success criteria and timescales
- the resources available.

The role of project manager can be challenging but also fruitful, and the use of project management tools and techniques can help support the changes being sought. Some who have not used project methodology might define

it as ‘the art of creating the illusion that any outcome is the result of a series of predetermined, deliberate acts when, in fact, it was dumb luck’ (Kerzner 2009, p.4). This is an interesting point as sometimes people claim to be making use of project management methodology when they are actually making use of a haphazard series of tools and techniques which are not being applied systematically. This would be considered by experienced project managers as very risky.

A clear challenge within social work and social care is that project expectations and requirements might from time to time be fluid and change as a result of government or regulatory requirements, evidence from research or best practice, or following service user or professional recommendations. These can pose challenges for project managers who have responsibility to deliver a project to an agreed cost and specified outcomes. Project managers must therefore understand which changes may need to be made, but that increasing the number of changes made make it less likely that the project will be delivered efficiently, effectively and even successfully. It goes without saying that continuing to proceed with delivering a project when the outcomes do not meet the project’s regulatory, best practice or original requirements would be costly, a waste of valuable resources and possibly even have ethical and moral considerations. Given the risks that this poses both to projects and those seeking to deliver them, Chapter 7 will go on to explore ways that this can be managed, although if changes are significant it may be necessary to consider whether the project should continue.

Why use project management?

Social work and social care organizations, whether in the public or independent sector, are often required to improve performance with fewer resources (Evans, Hills and Orme 2011). As a result they are constantly being asked to be more productive and efficient and respond to an ever-changing environment, and consequently are under pressure to innovate. Project management is one of the tools that we can use to try to meet these challenges as the methodology offers the opportunity to:

- provide a controlled and useful structure and process to respond to the environment they operate in
- utilize the creativity and innovation available in the organization by focusing efforts and communication on a specific issue for a limited period of time

- use resources as effectively and efficiently as possible to manage change
- engage with stakeholders to gain acceptance of change
- provide a clear structure and information to support management decision-making
- help the organization to be more 'efficient' by ending poorly performing projects earlier rather than waiting for them to come to their natural end.

Theoretically, the benefits of project management do not only accrue for the organization or service, but those involved in project management might also benefit personally from the use of this methodology as it:

- enables the individual to ensure that their skills and expertise are used appropriately for the improvement of services within an organization
- enables the individual to clearly demonstrate their own skills and development as part of their career development
- provides a range of challenges and opportunities, leading the person to demonstrate leadership and actively be engaged in developments
- offers the individual an opportunity to influence the future direction of the service or organization.

The challenges of innovation

From your own experience and from your reading of this chapter so far, you may be aware of the challenges and difficulties of delivering a successful project:

- Most projects have multiple stakeholders, each of whom may have their own needs and expectations of what the project might deliver.
- Each project is unique.
- Often the project team has been assembled to work together for the first time and the project may involve new technologies or new service processes. The team may be drawn from a range of stakeholders, who need to learn to work together and understand differing perspectives on common issues. The project manager may play a critical role in facilitating this teamworking and discussion.

- Communication may need to be across internal organizational boundaries and stakeholders, and should include robust governance on the progress of the project.
- There may be competing demands. Projects must be clearly defined with clear deliverables, exacting timescales, approved resourcing and agreed quality levels, and must meet established stakeholders' requirements.
- Projects can involve working across the organization and meeting organizational governance requirements (e.g. for authorization of payments). Financing is a key issue, particularly as in large projects it is likely that funding may extend over financial and budget years and often will require the project manager to ensure that all governance and probity requirements are met.
- Estimating the resources, time and level of work involved in a project is often difficult. This is because each project is unique; the project team may never have worked together and may not have previous project experience. This all increases the risks to successful delivery.

Projects as a way of facilitating change

Projects are increasingly being seen within organizations as a strategic management tool to actively encourage and manage change. This can range from the introduction of new technology to broader process and service changes, for example assistive technology to maintain independence for frail users of services. Whilst project management skills were previously concentrated in industries such as engineering and computing, due to its importance as a strategic management tool, the constant change in the social care sector highlights its importance as well. The ability of staff to manage projects ensures that the organization is more likely to be able to respond quickly to changes in its own service environment.

No organization has a monopoly on good ideas and initiatives, with many of these being generated by their staff, service users or other stakeholders. The challenge for most organizations is to identify which initiatives to progress through investment in order to deliver improvements. If the organizations you work for are anything like the ones that we have, then it is likely that they will:

- not have sufficient resources (time, people, money, management capacity) to undertake all suggested initiatives

- have ideas for projects that may not easily fit with the organization's strategic focus and therefore may divert valuable attention and resources away from the organization's agreed direction of travel.

As a result, for many organizations those projects most likely to be considered and approved for development are likely to:

- link clearly to the strategy of the organization, for example a domiciliary provider deciding to expand its services into a new geographical area or Deborah's project in Chapter 2, in which her agency is seeking to increase the role and extent of volunteers in the delivery of services to unaccompanied children
- demonstrate tangible benefits for service users, staff and the organization
- help to resolve difficulties or gaps identified in the organization's business or service delivery plans, for example recognizing a deficit in staff skills such as infection control or vulnerable adult protection, or the lack of adequate management information.

It is important to recognize that your project may not be the only one being considered, so to maximize the possibility of it being selected you should align it synergetically with other projects. It is also important to be aware of the differences in role between the key architects in a project, namely:

- the *project sponsor*, who is normally concerned with ensuring that the benefits of any project align with the priorities of the organization and who is ultimately responsible for the delivery of the project
- the *project manager*, whose primary focus is on ensuring successful delivery of the project.

You might find it surprising that the project sponsor is the person ultimately responsible for the project; this is because whilst the project manager has day-to-day responsibility for the operation of the project, the project sponsor is a key decision-maker with access to resources and the organization's senior management.

What might a successful project look like?

In describing the success of a project we should be mindful that there is no universal definition of project 'success', or that for some projects the full extent of the success criteria have not been agreed by all stakeholders.

Projects may even be considered a 'success' for political reasons even when all the requirements previously agreed have not been met. Normally, a successful project will have the following characteristics:

- It has been completed on time, achieved all deliverables, stayed within budget and met all the required performance and quality specifications.
- It has met all its goals and outcomes.
- It has met all stakeholders' expectations.

It is important in measuring success that service users, carers and staff are also involved in the measurement of outcomes for success (Mitchell *et al.* 2011). This will be explored in further detail in Chapters 4 and 9. For the purpose of this book, the term 'stakeholder' will include service users, carers, staff and other organizations including public service organizations involved in delivering care.

However, despite our best efforts, sometimes not all projects are seen to be successful. This makes it really important for us to document all the agreements reached about the criteria that will be used to judge success. Outcomes in social work and social care are important, and this is underlined by standards such as the proposed Professional Capabilities Framework (Social Work Reform Board 2010).

When projects fail

In discussing projects and changes within services, we should also recognize that change is difficult and the experience of stakeholders might be of failed previous initiatives. Previous failed initiatives can be damaging to change as stakeholders who had earlier been involved might expect that efforts may result in similar disappointment. It is therefore important for project managers to be aware of the reasons and the context for previous project attempts, if any. For many organizations involved in failed projects the reasons may involve the following factors:

- Not being able to control the change being undertaken. This might be as a result of poor communication and stakeholder engagement, unclear objectives and inappropriate resourcing.
- Lack of clarity on what needs to be done. This may link directly with projects not being embedded in the strategy of the organization or service or the decision-making within the project being unclear.

Projects involve time-limited allocation of resources to deliver a specified change. To be successful it is important to identify the need for this change or improvement, and establish the change and process required to make the change.

Identify what needs improving

Stage 1 – Project planning

We can see from the issues explored so far that for many organizations there are areas that they could improve, whether its their service, systems, processes, structure, technology or people. At the start of any project you will need to identify the improvement or change that needs to be made and why this needs to be undertaken. This would normally be fully documented in a Project Planning Document (PPD) and will be used in discussions with stakeholders to obtain their agreement and commitment to the project. The development of the PPD signifies the organization's initial commitment to invest resources in the change process and that the process has been formally recognized. The benefit of developing the PPD is that it:

- helps to clarify in writing the ideas and starts the process of communicating these ideas
- signifies the start of the project and helps in the development of the Project Initiation Document (PID). The PID helps to inform and establish the agreements, scope and deliverables of the project.

The planning document is normally a brief but clear document which establishes the reasons why the project is necessary, the proposed outcomes from the project, how it fits with current organizational strategy, the benefits, the costs and impact, resources required and any challenges in delivery.

It is important at this stage that any project being considered aligns strongly with the organization's strategy and plans. Failure to do this might mean that the plan will not obtain commitment and agreement to progress to the next stage. An example might be a project to expand preventative emergency hospital admission programmes due to budget allocation reductions. It would also normally be important at this stage to have the support of a senior member of the organization's management who has seen the proposals and agrees with them. This person would normally become the project 'sponsor' and would be involved in ensuring that the senior management team is coordinated around the project, making sure that there are no other plans for a similar organizational project, ensuring that suitable

resourcing is available and also seeking to smooth out difficulties as they are encountered in the organization. The project sponsor is likely also to be the person who confirms the project manager in their role, and who would be responsible for the development and approval of the PID.

Stage 2 – Developing the business case

The PPD clearly sets out the business rationale for the project, although at this stage it is not a fully worked-out proposal but has sufficient detail that the project is able to move towards its next stage. As a result the document clearly answers the following:

- Why the project is necessary, including the needs of stakeholders.
- Which options need to be considered to meet the needs identified.
- How the project should be undertaken.
- Who is responsible to ensure it develops beyond an idea.
- What resources are required to make the project happen.
- What the strategic links are between the proposals and the organization's strategy.

It is usual at this stage that a project given the go-ahead by the project sponsor will also assemble appropriate people to be involved in the scoping and delivery of the project. It is this group that then starts to work on the PID.

The 'On the Spot' activity in Box 1.2 helps to identify that positive aspects of a project may include being inclusive, valuing contributions, having sufficient resourcing and having clear and agreed outcomes and responsibilities. Negative aspects may include the opposite of those positive aspects: lack of communication, suffering from poor organization and failing to deliver outcomes. Chapter 4 highlights the experiences of stakeholders who do not feel the project was a true partnership, were disempowered, and suffered from poor communication and attempts to maximize some outcomes at the expense of others.

Box 1.2**‘On the Spot’ – Exploring perspectives on projects**

1. Identify two projects you have experience of, either as a project manager or as a participant.
2. Reflecting on the project, write down the positive and negative aspects of the project from your perspective.
3. Now place yourself in the position of another stakeholder in the project (preferably someone on the receiving end of the change that was undertaken). Considered from their perspective, write down what they may perceive as the positive and negative aspects of the project.
4. Reflect on what might have helped mitigate the challenges and further enhanced the benefits.

Challenges in interdisciplinary and multi-agency environments

Utilizing the dynamic and diverse skills from interdisciplinary and multi-agency environments is necessary to support the effective scoping and planning of projects. This is important as few people in social work and social care have simple needs; most have complex needs involving multiple agencies or multiple disciplines. As a result, engagement with service users, carers, partner agencies and staff is key to understanding the needs of all stakeholders, and this understanding, together with their contributions, is essential to assist efforts to resolve difficulties and preparedness. Examples of this can be found in Performance Inspection Reviews such as that undertaken in Fife (SWIA 2006). By widening planning to include non-traditional planning partners, for example young people, those with complex and multiple needs and minority ethnic groups, it increases access to at-risk and hidden populations which are often difficult to engage in project planning (Danforth *et al.* 2010).

Interdisciplinary and multi-agency perspectives utilize local experience and knowledge, engage with different perspectives, facilitate ownership and decision-making, and enable regular feedback loops to be established and further changes to be based on reviews of experience and best practice

evidence (Jenkins and Jones 2007). The use of systems thinking in project management facilitates consideration of the interrelatedness between different aspects of the project, the problem it is seeking to resolve and the other components of a system. As a result it recognizes the interaction, interconnections and co-dependencies of the various aspects of a project. By this we mean that individual components of a project may behave differently when separated from the project compared with when they are included. Thus the success of a project is not dependent on the success of each component part alone, but is also dependent on the relationships between the parts that make up the whole.

Chapter summary

This chapter has provided a number of key concepts for you to start considering when developing your project. Before reading the next chapter it would be useful for you to consider the key skills you have developed and how you might consolidate your skills in this regard. For example, understanding why projects may succeed can help to ensure that you build on this knowledge to support you to manage projects more successfully. In particular you should be clear about the differences between successful project and operations management and what the expectations of a project manager would be in any new project. You should recognize the importance of identifying the rationale for commencing a project as well as the possible challenges in successful delivery. Projects, although challenging for all involved, also offer the opportunity to make a real difference to users of care services, their families, social workers and social care staff, and other stakeholders and the organizations they work in. These opportunities also enable project managers to develop their own skills and expertise, their sense of work satisfaction, and develop their careers for future opportunities.

Action checklist

- Reflect on the purpose of the project and identify how you will know if it has been successful.
- Considering the purpose of the project, identify the problem or change the project resolve.