# HOW TO SET UP A **PROJECT BOARD**

BY JEREMY SNEDDON

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# Introduction

If you're part of a client organisation responsible for a capital project or a change management programme, you need project management to ensure that you get the right results, on time and within the agreed budget.

Good project management fosters efficient, collaborative working between the client, their advisers and contractors. This should be orchestrated by the project manager, who is responsible for planning and communicating what needs to be done, in which order and by whom.

In order to promote an understanding between all participants in a project, we have produced a series of booklets that describe how key elements of every project should be managed.

There is no doubt that a project needs strong leadership and good, fast decision-making if it is going to be successful. One of the best ways to deliver this is by setting up a strong project board.

I know from experience how important this is and have witnessed the adverse effects if a project board fails to perform. I would like to share this experience with as many client organisations as possible so that they can incorporate good practice into all of their projects.

Best wishes

Jeremy Snedden

# What is a project board?

A project board is usually given an appropriate level of delegated authority by the main board of the organisation and is therefore authorised to issue instructions, make decisions and give approvals on behalf of the client.

In short, they help to keep a project running efficiently by dealing with the day to day issues raised by the project manager, whilst the rest of the organisation can carry out business as usual.

Unless you are an individual acting as the client for a project, the chances are that you will need a project board (sometimes called a project team).

This is a group of people responsible for:

- Providing all of the briefing and other information needed for the project.
- Making decisions required by the people you have appointed.
- Signing and approving all formal documents.
- Creating a management and meeting structure that will ensure that both the high level decisions and the detail are managed in the most efficient manner.
- Deciding on the frequency and detail of progress reports.

# Managing the different stages of your project

There is no need to have the project board the same throughout the project. Initially, you will assemble a small team of people from the client organisation.  It will typically include the following:

1. The internal project sponsor or project director.
2. A senior person from Finance.
3. Major users or heads of departments, to provide briefing information.
4. Any key external advisers such as a project manager.

This is usually enough to get you through the preparation of the brief and preparing a business case.  It is worth remembering that you can always second people to the project board for specific purposes or carry out the detailed work outside of the project board meetings.

As you go through other stages of the project you will bring in other specialists appropriate to the stage you are involved in.  For example, a building project requires the following additional disciplines:

1. Architect
2. Quantity surveyor
3. Structural or civil engineers
4. Services engineers
5. Environmental consultant
6. Specialist equipment suppliers

And then during the construction phase you will add:

1. Contractors
2. Sub-contractors
3. Specialist sub-contractors
4. Suppliers of critical materials or specialist plant

# Overlapping stages of the project

It is important to remember that the stages of a project overlap considerably. When you are in the construction period you will want to ensure that major users of the building are fully engaged with progress as they will be responsible for ensuring that:

a) Fittings, furniture and client supplied equipment is specified and ordered.
b) Recruitment plans are prepared.
c) Plans are made to install client supplied items.
d) Orientation plans are in place to ensure that people know their way around the building very soon after it has been handed over.
e) Maintenance staff are fully trained to take over the building safely.
f) Training plans are in place for users to familiarise themselves with all equipment.
g) Utilities such as telephones and energy contracts are planned and ready to go.

# The golden rules for running a project team

At various stages of the project, the project board will have to deal with a number of matters of detail. However, there are three matters of principle to be considered at all stages of the project. We called these the golden rules for running a project board, which are:

1. **Obtain the maximum delegated powers from the board or organisation's senior management structure.** Running a project is different from running an organisation. The project team will have to report back to management for certain matters but progress will be better if it has good delegated authority.

2. **Keep the project team as small as possible**. You need the right people at each stage to make decisions and provide information, but do not make the team any larger than it needs to be, as this slows things down. Remember, you can always bring other people in, but it is more difficult to take people off the project team if they have been appointed.

3. **Always keep 'half-a-stage ahead' when it comes to the composition of your project team.** During the briefing and initial feasibility stages, give some thought to bringing in designers and cost specialists. During design, start bringing in construction advice. During construction, start thinking about equipping, staffing, commissioning and training.

4. **Keep excellent records of all project team meetings and project documentation.**

A project board which follows these golden rules invariably retains flexibility and identifies priorities, keeping on target at every stage of the project.

# How to manage the project board

When you have set up your project team, ensure that you get the most out of it by implementing the following:

1. Appoint a chairman that will have authority with the other members of the team and with the ability to draw the best of people out in discussions.
2. Book meeting dates as far ahead as possible to ensure that people allocate time to the project.
3. Do not hold a meeting on the allocated date if there are no issues.
4. Similarly, if you have urgent business, do not wait for the next meeting date – hold an interim meeting.
5. Keep meetings strictly to a timetable – strike a balance between managing the business effectively but not providing time for un-focussed discussions.
6. Always have a detailed agenda for the meeting.
7. Ensure that meeting papers are sent out to all attending no less than 48 hours before the meeting.
8. Have a standing item on the agenda for progress against the programme.
9. Have a standing item on the agenda for monitoring the costs.
10. Have a standing item on the agenda for health and safety.
11. Circulate the minutes of the meeting no later than 48 hours after the meeting.
12. Keep excellent records of all project team meetings and project documentation.

# About Provelio

In our experience, most organisations in both the public and private sectors have the same broad objectives, which are:

*To deliver their core services and control their three biggest assets (and costs), which are people, buildings and technology*

To achieve these objectives, it is sometimes necessary to carry out a capital project or a change management programme.

We provide professional management services to carry out such projects, ensuring that our clients can go through this transition phase as smoothly as possible, whilst being able to carry out 'business as usual'. These services include:

- Strategic Management
- Project Management
- Change Management
- Cost Reduction
- Procurement and Contract Management

We believe that management is not just about processes and best practice. It is about fostering good, motivational relationships between people. We therefore deliver management solutions with integrity, transparency, clarity and a constructive style.

You will find more details and a substantial number of downloadable guidance notes from our website:

**www.provelio.com**

# How to Setup a Project Board

Good governance is vital in every organisation and this is particularly so during the course of a project, when the client has a lot of extra work to do in addition to running their day to day activities.

A project board is therefore essential to the success of a project. It acts as the decision-making body and can carry out the detailed work with as much delegated authority as appropriate.

In this booklet, Jeremy Sneddon, a Director of Provelio Limited, sets about the key factors that you need to take into account when setting up a project board and explains how things should be managed during the project, including:

- The key functions of a project board
- The need for flexibility at different stages of the project
- The essential rules for running project boards
- How the project board should be managed

Jeremy's advice comes from his considerable experience of setting up and working with project boards. He has managed major capital projects and capital programmes across the UK.

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