Introduction to CiCS Projects for Board Members

CiCS Programme and Project Unit

If you are taking part in a project, perhaps for the first time, you may find this document useful.

The industry-standard PRINCE2 methodology is used as the basis for running all projects in CiCS. We have adapted it to the needs of the University, using the minimum level of bureaucracy necessary for getting the job done well. That's what is summarised here.

You might also find the graphical view on the Project Management System - Overview page of interest.

If a magic formula existed for managing projects and getting it right, there would be no newspaper headlines about government projects delivering years late and over budget. But effective project management can increase the chance of success and reduce the cost of failure. These are some key aspects:

It's your project
Everything done by and produced by a project is agreed and 'owned' by the Project Board (or Project Group - just an alternative name). The Project Manager doesn't 'own' the project - they are one of the team, there to co-ordinate the project and make sure it is run properly. So if you're not happy with something, say so - it's your project.

Start Right
The project must have a good, agreed Project Definition with clear roles and objectives and realistic timescales [see Start-up below].

Good Communication
It is important that everyone on the project is kept up to date and involved. The Project Manager will play a key role here, but obviously everyone needs to keep lines of communication open.

Face up to problems
If something is going awry, or a new issue has arisen, the sooner it is dealt with the better. The worst time to flag up that something is running late is at the point it should have been finished [see Change Management below].

Clear results
The CiCS project management method focuses on deliverables that can be signed-off, ie actual achievements. For instance 'Analysing requirements' might mean very little unless it results in a report that can be agreed by the Project Board. And software is only of use if it is complete and can be tested and signed-off.

1. Start-up

If everyone hasn't agreed at the start what their project is supposed to be doing, it is likely that the project will fail.

Project Definition

Every project has at the outset a Project Definition stating what is being done, when, for whom, by whom, and what might go wrong on the way. This document is crucial to the success of the project. It is essential that you read the draft carefully and raise anything that you are unsure about or feel is wrong or missing.

Be clear about your role within the project - if you are not happy with your responsibilities (detailed in the Appendix) raise it now.

Project Plan

Most projects have a Project Plan, which will be updated regularly. It will provide a graphical view of how all the tasks fit together, highlight problems if a task runs late etc.

The project will take up your time - look at the Project Definition and/or Project Plan to see where your effort will be concentrated. How much time is needed from you, and the people for whom you are responsible? Is that OK?

Risk Assessment

Most projects have a Risk Log document, which defines potential risks to the project and strategies for dealing with them. Half an hour's brainstorming here could save weeks of work later.

Quality

You will want to know that what the project produces is good enough to do the job. Usually the Customers and/or Users are the key people to sign off the deliverables. In a larger project there may be a 'Quality and Test Log' which

defines how things are to be approved, and logs the tests as they occur.

2. Change Management

All projects have problems and/or new issues arising. Successful projects face up to them. So it is essential that the Project Manager is told if things are running behind schedule, or if you are aware of a new requirement etc. Perhaps shifting resources around can resolve the problem, or re-scheduling some tasks, or dropping minor requirements. But whatever needs to be done can only be considered and agreed when the problem has been raised.

As you would expect, all significant changes to a project, whether to the schedule or the deliverables, must be agreed by the Project Board. There's nothing wrong with extending a project as long as the appropriate resources and time are agreed and allocated, but uncontrolled 'creep' can cripple any project.

The Project Manager might use an Issues Log document to log issues that have been raised. Significant changes which have been agreed will go into a new version of the Project Definition, which has a Change History section at the front to make it easier to see how the project has changed over its life.

3. Closure

Every project must be closed properly. There is a formal Project Closure document for every project, detailing what was delivered, any outstanding minor issues, how the system will be maintained and so on. Again this must be agreed by the Project Group.

Usually a few months after closure there is a formal review of the project. This gives you an opportunity to review the project's outcomes and identify future developments. A Post-Implementation Review document details what has been agreed.

4. Further Information

Project Management System - Overview

CiCS Projects

The rest of the CiCS Projects web site includes further information and resources.

If you would like more information please contact CiCS Project Support:

email: CiCS Programme and Project Unit