

GOVERNANCE & THE BUSINESS ANALYST

Governance is primarily a project management concern. However, the Business Analyst needs to be aware of the various structures in common use and their relevant functions, so that they can ensure that these structures are in place as required in their project. Otherwise, the analysis is likely to be an expensive failure.

THE STEERING COMMITTEE

The first aspect of project governance is in respect of project management. The Steering Committee is a body set up to ensure that the project addresses the interests and concerns of all the major stakeholders.

One of these interests will be for the successful completion of the project. Accordingly, the Steering Committee will have capacity to resource the project in human, financial or physical terms, to resolve interfaces with other activities and projects, and to vary the constraints on the project, so that the project can adapt to changing conditions over its life. From this it follows that the Steering Committee members will be drawn from those stakeholders that can significantly impact the project, including through provision or withdrawal of resources.

The key concern of stakeholders goes to the very heart of the project—that is, the implementation of change. Change always has side-effects, ripple-on effects, impacts that may or may not be predicted, but which will disturb the status quo in organisational, social, technological or other ways, and which will therefore provoke defensiveness and inertia among those who perceive they will be negatively impacted. To address these concerns the Steering Committee is also empowered to approve priorities, deliverables and quality requirements. That is, the Steering Committee is a means to enable negotiation and agreement between the stakeholders on these significant matters.

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The functions of the Steering Committee are as follows:

Steering Committee

- *Business case review and approval*
- *Change control: approval of changes to project staffing, schedule, outputs, priorities, etc*
- *Risk management for the project*
- *Approval of project outputs*
- *Approval of project strategy and interim deliverables, including the Business Requirements Specification and the Benefits Realisation Review*
- *Quality management for the project*
- *High-level communication between the project and those it impacts, be they stakeholder groups or other projects*
- *Decisions (including modification of constraints such as budget and delivery date) needed to address emergent pressures that have varied the assumptions behind the business case*

To ensure that decisions about resourcing and constraints of the project are made rapidly, the members of the Steering Committee must be senior enough to make a decision on the spot, and make it stick. Every time a Steering Committee decision is adjourned pending an out-of-session decision, the project timeline slips, with all that that entails in extra costs, missing a "window of opportunity" or legislative constraint, loss of confidence...

However, the success of the deliverables will depend on adequate accuracy in specification. Clearly a senior person on the Steering Committee does not necessarily have the time to deal adequately with the detailed requirements of the project. Accordingly, a second group is typically tasked to focus on the detailed business requirements.

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THE REFERENCE GROUP, OR WORKING PARTY

This other group is there to assist the Business Systems Analyst in their development of the Business Requirements Specification. There are two models available here. The first is the creation of a project-specific Working Party, which will be dissolved on completion of the project. The second is to task a standing committee, or Reference Group.

Both models have advantages and disadvantages. The Reference Group is an efficient model, if one exists, and if that Reference Group represents the interests of all the relevant stakeholders. It can be very successful in bringing task-specific corporate memory to the project. The Working Party is a flexible option that can be tailored to the needs of any specific project, but of course often a core of people are nominated to several Working Parties, with consequent meeting overload, while matters outside the scope of the project may not be as well represented as in a Reference Group context.

Regardless of which model is used, the group will meet to a schedule agreed among themselves so as to assist the Analyst to meet the project timeline. This can assist the Analyst to avoid the invidious position of trying to "herd cats".

The Analyst needs to use every graphical tool and communication technique available to them to ensure that the discussion and decisions about transactions, workflow and data cover the complete scope of the project. If agreement is not reached on a specific requirement, and there is no strategy for reaching agreement, then the project is out of control. In the event that the group can not agree on some matter, then the Analyst will need to ensure that it be escalated rapidly via the Project Manager to the Sponsor and Steering Committee.

The Steering Committee and the Reference Group or Working Party are two different aspects of the governance of the project, and they have different areas of focus. One works with the Sponsor on how the project will proceed; the other assists the Business Analyst to define precisely what the project will deliver.