

People

The Missing Line in the Project Plan

A people-centred approach to project management

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PROJECT PLAN

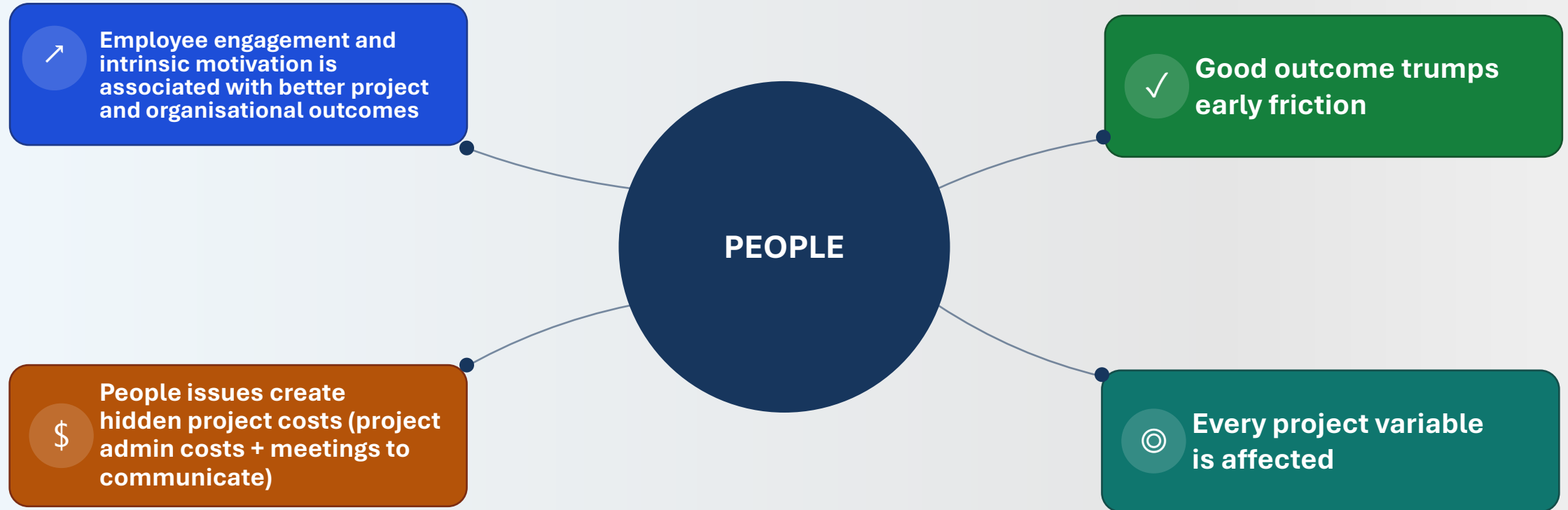
- ☒ Scope
 - ☒ Budget
 - ☒ Timeline
 - ☒ Quality
 - ☒ Risk
 - ☒ Benefits
-

☐ **People**

Why is the people dimension important?

Projects are delivered by people - not just managed through plans. Another way to put it:

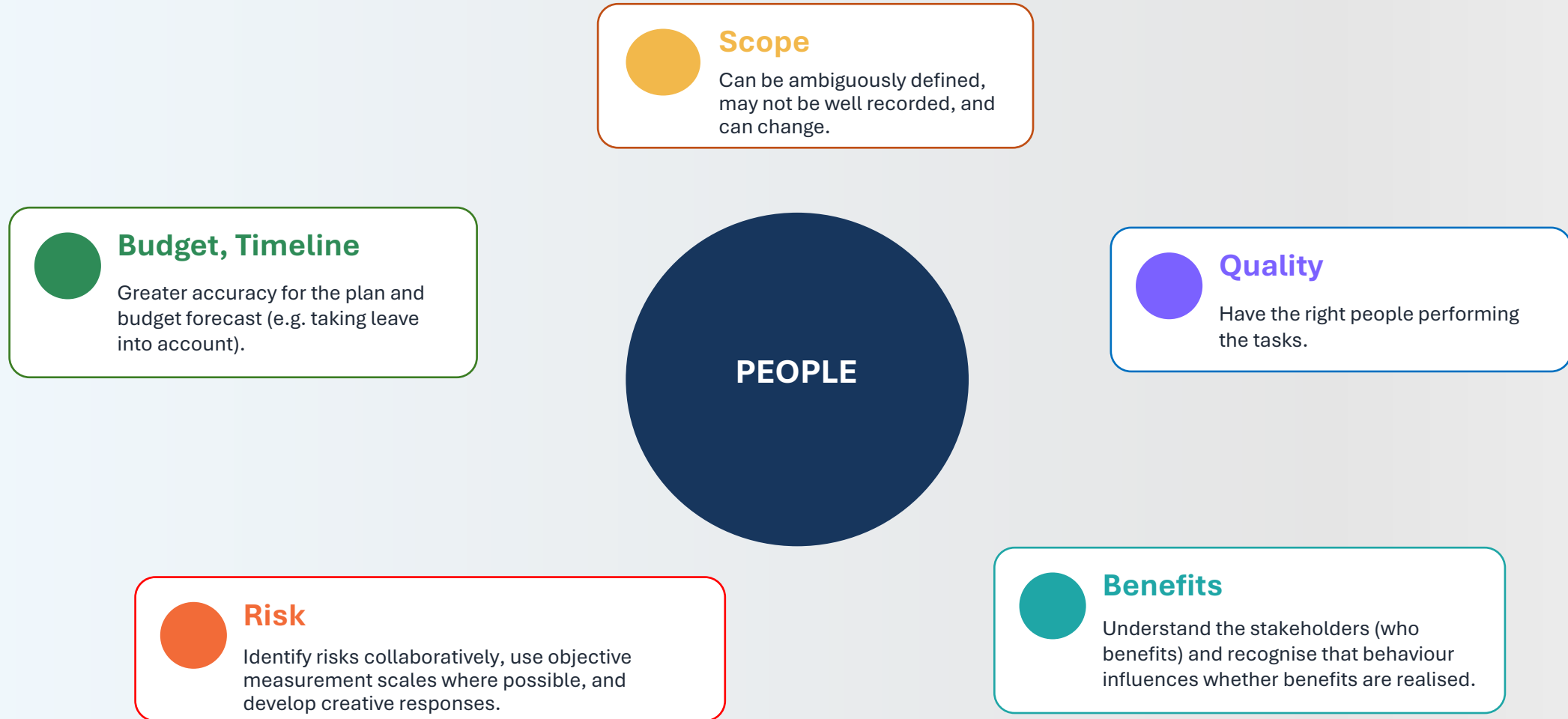
Ignore the people variable at your own peril!



People influence every aspect of project delivery.

Project Variables, as defined by Prince2

People influence every project variable.



People are the common thread running through every project variable.

Project Phases

Project Management Methodologies

PMBOK	PRINCE2	Description	Simplified Phase
Initiating	Starting Up a Project	Justify why the project should happen, do a feasibility check, and get initial authorisation to proceed	IDEA
Initiating	IP: Initiating a Project	Define objectives, scope, business case, and formally authorise the project to begin	DISCOVERY
Planning	(part of IP, repeated in SB)	Develop the detailed roadmap - schedule, budget, resources, risk, quality, and communication approach	PLANNING
Executing	Managing Product Delivery	Carry out the planned work and produce the actual deliverables	DELIVERY
Monitoring & Controlling	Directing a Project + Controlling a Stage	Track progress against the plan, manage risks/issues, approve changes, and make key go/no-go decisions	
(less formal - change/phase gates)	SB: Managing a Stage Boundary	Review what's been completed, confirm it's acceptable, and approve the plan for the next stage before proceeding	
Closing	Closing a Project	Confirm deliverables are accepted, release resources, capture lessons learned, and formally end the project	CLOSE

The remaining slides explore each simplified phase in more detail.

IDEA

PROJECT QUESTION

Should we do this project?

Answering this properly means asking whether the solution fits the people it is intended for and whether it can be used successfully for its intended purpose.

Key considerations

Does the solution fit the people who will use it?

Can it be used successfully for its intended purpose?

Are there social, behavioural or organisational barriers to adoption?



Real-world example: Google Glass

What happened?

Google developed impressive technology but focused on what it could do rather than whether people actually wanted to wear it.

What was overlooked?

People felt uncomfortable being recorded.

Wearers became known as "Glassholes".

Many businesses banned the device.

The value was not worth the social cost.

Result: consumer version discontinued after about two years.

Lesson A technically impressive product can still fail if it does not fit user lifestyle or social expectations.

DISCOVERY

PROJECT QUESTION

What are we building, and who are we building it for?

Answering this properly means understanding the people involved in the project - not just the documented process.

Key considerations

Identify and understand all stakeholder groups.

Observe how people actually perform their work.

Validate assumptions with end users.

Consider exceptional scenarios, not just the ideal process.



Real-world example: London Ambulance Service CAD

What was overlooked?

Developers underestimated how dispatchers actually worked under pressure.

Call handlers, ambulance controllers and radio operators.

Real emergency workloads and exceptional situations.

The system assumed an ideal process instead of messy reality.

Result: crashes, incorrect dispatches, operational disruption and withdrawal.

Lesson People do not work like process diagrams. Good discovery observes real work, not idealised work.

PLANNING

PROJECT QUESTION

How are we going to deliver this project successfully?

Answering this properly means ensuring the right people are available, can work effectively together, and that critical knowledge is retained throughout the project.

Staffing

Permanent employees, contractors, consultants and outsourcing.

Team Formation

Skills, experience, dynamics and personalities.

Onboarding

New people take time - and existing people support them.

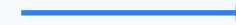
Offboarding

Capture knowledge, documentation and handover.

Critical knowledge must stay with the organisation



Contractor knowledge



Operational readiness



Real-world example: Queensland Health Payroll



What went wrong with people planning?

High contractor turnover and heavy dependence on consultants.

Poor knowledge transfer, limited documentation and weak operational handover.

Support staff were not adequately prepared.

When experienced contractors left, much of the system knowledge left with them.

Result: years of issues, extensive rework and remediation costs over A\$1 billion.

Lesson If critical knowledge walks out the door with contractors, the project is not ready for delivery.

IDEA →

DISCOVERY →

PLANNING →

DELIVERY →

CLOSE

DELIVERY & CLOSE

PROJECT QUESTION

How do we maximise the chances of project success + leave the organisation stronger when the project finishes?

Answering this properly means creating an environment where people can perform at their best, then capturing what they have learned before the project ends.

DELIVERY

Environment	Remove obstacles and support collaboration.
Tools	Hardware, software, access, and training.
Structure	Clear priorities, timely decisions and communication.
Empowerment	Trust subject matter experts and delegate decisions.
Continuous improvement	Retrospectives, open dialogue and psychological safety.

CLOSE

Celebrate success	Recognise the team's contribution.
Communicate outcomes	Share achievements with the team and stakeholders.
Capture knowledge	Lessons learned, documentation and handover.
Leave the team stronger	Carry knowledge into future projects.

Lesson Projects succeed when people are given the environment, support and trust to deliver.

Project Focus vs People Focus

The people dimension does not replace project management - it strengthens it.

Variable	Project Focus	People Focus
Budget	Plan, monitor and control spending, exceptions and administration.	Account for leave, training, celebrations and other people-related costs.
Timeline	Develop and manage the schedule / plan.	Account for leave, people moving in and out of projects, new starters and departures.
Scope	Define what will and will not be delivered and manage changes.	Understand how scope affects people and how scope is affected by people.
Risk	Risk management process: identify, assess, plan and implement.	People-related risks.
Benefits	Keep the project focused on delivering the business value.	Maintain focus on the benefits and communicate them.
Quality	Ensure the project deliverables meet agreed standards and are fit for purpose.	Understand what makes people do the right thing rather than cut corners.
Project management and people management are complementary perspectives.		

Interactive Discussion

A short scenario to apply the project and people perspectives.

You're the project manager.

Your project is forecast to exceed its approved budget.

1 Deliver the news

How would you communicate the budget overrun?

2 Decide what happens next

What corrective actions would you consider?

Two Ways to Approach the Same Problem

A budget issue is still a project issue - but people considerations change the quality of the response.

Project Focus	People Focus
Explain why the budget changed.	Understand what the budget change means for the people involved.
Present the revised forecast.	Listen to concerns before proposing solutions.
Present delivery options.	Understand people's priorities and pain points before deciding.
Reduce scope.	Understand which outcomes matter most to the people who will use or support the solution.
Compress the schedule.	Assess whether the team can realistically deliver sooner and what the human cost would be: fatigue, burnout, losing key people or reduced quality.

Every project phase asks a project question. The best answers include the people dimension.

End of Presentation

Time for team exercises

Each topic is meant to be a ~10-minute discussion and at the end the goal is to understand how the people dimension might affect the overall project.

Exercise A – Estimating the Schedule (Timeline)

Project Manager Task

You are the project manager for a small software project. Your task is to produce a high-level delivery schedule.

Project Information

The backlog contains **40 story points**. Assume **1 story point = 1 developer day**.

You have:

- 4 developers

- 1 tester

Assume only **one sprint** is required.

Include time for:

- Sprint Planning

- Testing

- Bug fixing

Assume no deployment or production activities are required.

Deliverable

Produce a simple high-level timeline total project duration explain how you arrived at your estimate

Discussion Prompt

Once you've produced your schedule...

What changes if you deliberately consider the people dimension?

Think about things like:

- sick leave
- onboarding
- code reviews
- stand-ups
- collaboration
- estimation uncertainty

You do **not** need to calculate a new schedule.

The objective is to identify what a project manager should think about before committing to a delivery date.

Exercise B – First Month Activities for a Team

Project Manager Task

You are the project manager for a new software project.
Your project starts next Monday.
Your task is to prepare a simple plan for the first month.

Project Information

You have:

- 4 developers
- 1 tester

Assume:

- Everyone is available.
- The project has already been approved.
- The requirements have already been agreed.
- The team has never worked together before.

Deliverable

List the activities you would include during the first month.
Do **not** create a detailed schedule. Just identify the important activities.

Discussion Prompt

Now deliberately think about the people dimension. What activities would you add to your plan?

Examples might include:

- Team introductions
- Defining ways of working, setting team expectations
- Knowledge sharing
- Regular retrospectives

Remember...

People-related activities don't stop delivery.
They enable delivery.

Exercise C – Scope Change

Project Manager Task

Your software project is halfway through delivery.
A senior stakeholder requests an important new feature.

Project Information

The feature:

- adds approximately two weeks of development
- the deadline cannot move
- The stakeholder believes the feature is essential.

Ignore any impact on the budget.

Deliverable

As project manager, decide:

- what would you recommend?
- how would you communicate your recommendation?

Discussion Prompt

Now consider the people dimension.

Questions to think about:

- What effect would this have on the team?
- Is sustained overtime realistic?
- Would quality suffer?
- Could you lose key people?
- How might users view removing another feature instead?
- Are there alternatives that balance project and people outcomes?
- How would your proposed option affect the senior stakeholder?

Expected learning

Managing scope isn't only about timelines. It's also about understanding the impact on the people delivering and using the solution, and how that might affect the project itself.