



Great big list of project management words!

Accountability -

The obligation to report on one's actions.

Activity -

Any work performed on a project. May be synonymous with task but in some cases it may be a specific level in the WBS (e.g., a phase is broken down into a set of activities, activities into a set of tasks). An activity must have duration and will result in one or more deliverables. An activity will generally have cost and resource requirements. See Task.

Actuals -

The cost or effort incurred in the performance of tasks. Also, the dates tasks have been started or completed and the dates milestones have been reached.

Analogous Estimating -

Estimating using similar projects or activities as a basis for determining the effort, cost and/or duration of a current one. Usually used in Top-down Estimating.

Assumption -

Something taken as true without proof. In planning, assumptions regarding staffing, complexity, learning curves and many other factors are made to create plan scenarios. These provide the basis for estimating. Remember, assumptions are not facts. Make alternative assumptions to get a sense of what might happen in your project.

Authority -

The ability to get other people to act based on your decisions. Authority is generally based on the perception that a person has been officially empowered to issue binding orders. See Power.

Baseline -

A point of reference. The plan used as the comparison point for project control reporting. There are three baselines in a project—schedule baseline, cost baseline and product (scope) baseline. The combination of these is referred to as the performance measurement baseline.

Bottom-up Estimating -

Approximating the size (duration and cost) and risk of a project (or phase) by breaking it down into activities, tasks and sub-tasks, estimating the effort, duration and cost of each and rolling them up to determine the full estimate. Determining duration through a bottom-up approach requires sequencing and resource leveling to be done as part of the scheduling process.

Budget -

The amount allotted for the project that represents the estimate of planned expenditures and income. The budget may be expressed in terms of money or resource units (effort).

Business Case -

The information that describes the justification for the project. The project is justified if the expected benefits outweigh estimated costs and risks. The business case is often complex and may require financial analysis, technical analysis, organization impact analysis and a feasibility study.

Calendar Date -

A specific date shown on the calendar (e.g. July 3, 2010) as opposed to a relative date. See Relative Date.

Change -

Difference in an expected value or event. The most significant changes in project management are related to scope definition, availability of resources, schedule and budget.

Change Control -

The process of managing scope, schedule and budget changes to the plan. See Scope Change Control.

Change Request -

A documented request for a change in scope or other aspects of the plan.

Client -

The person or organization that is the principle beneficiary of the project. Generally the client has a significant authority regarding scope definition and whether the project should be initiated and/or continued.

Closing -

The process of gaining formal acceptance for the results of a project or phase and bringing it to an orderly end, including the archiving of project information and post-project review.

Consensus -

Unanimous agreement among the decision-makers that everyone can at least live with the decision (or solution). To live with the decision, one has to be convinced that the decision will adequately achieve objectives. As long as someone believes that the decision will not achieve the objectives, there is no consensus.

Constraint -

A restriction or limitation that influences the project plan. For example, a target date may be a constraint on scheduling. A schedule may be constrained by resource limitations.

Content Expert -

See Subject Matter Expert (SME).

Contingency Reserve -

A designated amount of time and/or budget to account for parts of the project that cannot be fully predicted. For example, it is relatively certain that there will be some rework, but the amount of rework and where it will occur in the project (or phase) are not known. These are sometimes called "known unknowns".

The purpose of the contingency reserve is to provide a more accurate sense of the expected completion date and cost of the project (or phase). Some PMs separate contingency reserves from management reserves while others combine the two into a single reserve. Reserves for changes and issues may be part of the contingency reserve or separate reserves.

Controlling -

The process of monitoring, measuring and reporting on progress and taking corrective action to ensure project objectives are met.

Critical Path -

The path(s) in a project network that has the longest duration. This represents the series of activities that determines the earliest completion of the project. There may be more than one critical path and the critical path(s) may change during the project.

Debate -

A discussion in which the participants exchange information for the purpose of supporting or refuting one another's positions. Debates are win-lose discussions, as opposed to dialogues, which are win-win discussions.

Deliverable -

Any item produced as the outcome of a project or any part of a project. The project deliverable is

differentiated from interim deliverables that result from activities within the project. A deliverable must be tangible and verifiable. Every element of the WBS (activity or task) must have one or more deliverables.

Dependency -

A relationship between two or more tasks. A dependency may be logical (see Logical Relationship) or resource based (see Resource dependency). Also see Link.

Dialogue -

A discussion in which the participants share their thoughts and gain a better understanding of the subject and, possibly, reach consensus. This is contrasted with debate.

Duration -

The length of time required or planned for the execution of a project activity. Measured in calendar time units—days, weeks, months.

Early Start -

The earliest time a task can begin. The time at which all the tasks' predecessors have been completed and its resources are planned to be available.

Effort -

The amount of human resource time required to perform an activity. Measured in terms of person hours, person days, etc.

Estimate -

An assessment of the required duration, effort and/or cost to complete a task or project. Since estimates are not actuals, they should always be expressed with some indication of the degree of accuracy.

Estimate to Completion -

The expected effort, cost and/or duration to complete a project or any part of a project. It may be made at any point in the project's life.

Executing -

The process of coordinating the people and other resources in the performance of the project or the actual performance of the project.

Float -

The amount of time available for a task to slip before it results in a delay of the project end date. It is the difference between the task's early and late start dates.

Functional Manager -

A manager responsible for the activities of an organizational unit (department, work group, etc.), which provides some specialized products, services or staff to projects. For example, the manager of an engineering group, testing department or procedures development department. Also called a line manager.

Functional Group -

An organizational unit that performs a specialized business function (e.g., design, Human Resource management, etc.) and may provide staff, products or services to a project.

Gantt Chart -

A bar chart that depicts a schedule of activities and milestones. Generally activities (which may be projects, operational activities, project activities, tasks, etc.) are listed along the left side of the chart and the time line along the top or bottom. The activities are shown as horizontal bars of a length equivalent to the duration of the activity. Gantt Charts may be annotated with dependency relationships and other schedule-related information.

Goal -

A desired end result, often synonymous with objective. May be a high-level objective that has less-than-complete definition. See Objective.

Implementation -

May be a phase in the project life cycle in which a product is put into use. Also a term used as a synonym for development.

Incremental Delivery -

A project life cycle strategy used to reduce risk of project failure by dividing projects into more manageable pieces. The resulting sub-projects may deliver parts of the full product, or product versions. These will be enhanced to increase functionality or improve product quality in subsequent sub-projects.

In-house Projects -

Projects performed primarily by performers who are part of the same organization as the client. For example, a product developed by a manufacturing company's own Engineering Department is an in-house project. If an outside contractor developed the same product, the project would be externally sourced. Note that vendors might be used in in-house projects depending on the degree to which they are responsible.

Initiating (Project) -

The process of describing and deciding to begin a project (or phase) and authorizing the Project Manager to expend resources, effort and money for those that are initiated.

Kick-Off Meeting -

A meeting at the beginning of the project or at the beginning of a major phase of the project to align peoples' understanding of project objectives, procedures and plans, and to begin the team-building and bonding process.

Late Start -

The latest time a task can start before it causes a delay in the project end date.

Leveling -

See Resource Leveling.

Link -

A relationship between two or more tasks. See Logical Relationship.

Logical Relationship -

A dependency relationship between two or more tasks or between tasks and milestones, such that one cannot start or finish before another has started or finished.

Management Reserve -

A designated amount of time and/or budget to account for parts of the project that cannot be predicted. These are sometimes called "unknown unknowns." For example, major disruptions in the project caused by serious weather conditions, accidents, etc. Use of the management reserve generally requires a baseline change.

See Contingency Reserve.

Multi-Project Schedule -

A schedule of all the work (projects, operational activities, etc.) planned for an individual or organization unit. The purpose is to ensure that resources are not overburdened by inadvertently scheduling project or other work without regard to previously scheduled work. The Multi-Project Schedule is also used to determine the impact of slippage in one project on other projects assigned to the same resources.

Matrix Organization -

A business structure in which people are assigned to both a functional group (departments, disciplines, etc.) and to projects or processes which cut across the organization and require resources from multiple functional groups.

Metrics -

Metrics are quantitative measures such as the number of on time projects. They are used in improvement programs to determine if improvement has taken place or to determine if goals and objectives are met.

Milestone -

A point in time when a deliverable or set of deliverables is available. Generally used to denote a significant event such as the completion of a phase of the project or of a set of critical activities. A milestone is an event; it has no duration or effort. It must be preceded by one or more tasks (even the beginning of a project is preceded by a set of tasks, which may be implied).

Murphy's Laws -

A set of laws regarding the perverse nature of things. For example:

1. Nothing is as easy as it looks. Everything takes longer than you think. Anything that can go wrong will go wrong. If there is a possibility of several things going wrong, the one that will cause the most damage will be the one to go wrong. Corollary: If there is a worse time for something to go wrong, it will happen then.
2. If anything simply cannot go wrong, it will anyway.

Network Diagram -

A graphic tool for depicting the sequence and relationships between tasks in a project. PERT Diagram, Critical Path Diagram, Arrow Diagram, Precedence Diagram are all forms of network diagrams.

Objective -

An objective is something to be achieved. In project management, the objectives are the desired outcomes of the project or any part of the project, both in terms of concrete deliverables and behavioral outcomes (e.g., improved service, more money, etc.).

Parametric Estimating -

Estimating using an algorithm in which parameters that represent different attributes of the project are used to calculate project effort, cost, and/or duration. Parametric estimating is usually used in top-down Estimating.

PERT—Program Evaluation and Review Technique-

A scheduling technique that makes use of dependency analysis and critical path to determine the duration of a project and slack to determine priorities of tasks. In PERT, task durations are computed as $(\text{Optimistic} + 4 \times \text{Most likely} + \text{Pessimistic estimates}) / 6$.

PERT Diagram -

A type of network diagram deriving its name from the PERT technique. The term is often used as a synonym for network diagram.

Phase -

A grouping of activities in a project that are required to meet a major milestone by providing a significant deliverable, such as a requirements definition or product design document. A project is broken down into a set of phases for control purposes. The phase is usually the highest level of breakdown of a project in the WBS.

Planning -

The process of establishing and maintaining the definition of the scope of a project, the way the project will be performed (procedures and tasks), roles and responsibilities and the time and cost estimates.

Post-implementation Review -

See Post-Project Review.

Post-Project Review -

An activity to assess and evaluate the way a project was performed, so as to learn from the experience and continuously improve project performance.

Power -

Power is the ability to influence the actions of others. Power may come from formal delegation of authority, reference power, subject matter expertise, the ability to influence rewards and penalties, as well as other sources.

Predecessor Task -

A task (or activity) that must be started or finished before another task or milestone can be performed.

Process -

A series of steps or actions to accomplish something. A natural series of changes or occurrences.

Product -

The project's material outcome. It maybe a service, event or any material object (e.g., a machine, computer system, new drug, building, etc.). The product includes all necessary aspects of the deliverable (e.g., training, documentation, etc.).

Product Life Cycle -

The time from the delivery of a product, until the product is withdrawn from use or sale. There may be many projects during the product life cycle.

Program -

A suite of related projects and ongoing operational activities managed as a whole.

Project -

An effort to provide a product or service within finite time and cost constraints.

Project Charter -

A document that describes the project at a high level of detail and is used to authorize the Project Manager to begin work. It may also be called a "Project Brief," or any number of other synonyms.

Project Life Cycle -

The full set of activities from the beginning to the end of a project. Generally associated with a set of phases, which are determined based on the major parts of project performance (e.g., requirements definition, design, construction, deployment) and the need for control by the Client organization (checkpoints for Go/No go decision-making).

Project Management -

The process of managing a project which requires the application of planning, team-building, communicating, controlling, decision-making and closing skills, principles, tools and techniques.

Project Manager -

The person responsible and accountable for managing a project's planning and performance. The single point of accountability for a project.

Quality Assurance (QA) -

Making sure standards and procedures are effective and that they are complied with. Note, in some organizations QA is used to refer to the quality control function.

Quality Control (QC) -

Making sure deliverables comply with acceptance criteria. Includes testing and reviews.

Ramp Down -

Ramp down is the effort required to close or suspend a task. It may consist of filing away information, making notes, clean-up, etc. Ramp down can be significant, depending on the task. For tasks that are suspended the degree of ramp down (e.g., notes and filing away information) performed will reduce the ramp up effort. See Ramp Up.

Ramp Up -

Ramp up is the work required to get ready to do a task. It consists of assembling materials, learning about the task (including new tools and techniques) and the time required getting into an optimum work pace. Initial ramp up can be significant, depending on the task. Each time a task is interrupted there is an additional ramp up—getting back to that optimal work pace. See Ramp Down.

Relative Date -

A date expressed as a number of periods (e.g., days, weeks, or months) from a reference point. For example, two months after the project start date. See Calendar Date.

Request for Proposal (RFP) -

A document that describes a need for products and/or services and the conditions under which they are to be provided. The purpose of the RFP is to solicit bids or proposals from prospective suppliers. Also called a Request for Quote (RFQ).

Requirements -

The statement of detailed product objectives that describes the features and functions and performance constraints to be delivered in the product. The requirements provide the basis for accepting the product.

Resource -

Any tangible support such as, a person, tool, supply item or facility used in the performance of a project. Human resources are people.

Resource Dependency -

A dependency between tasks in which the tasks share the same resources and therefore cannot be worked on simultaneously. Resource dependent tasks can be scheduled at the same time but are limited by the availability of the shared resources.

Resource Leveling -

Resource leveling is the part of the scheduling process in which the start and end dates of tasks are driven by resource limitations (e.g., limited availability of resources or difficult-to-manage resource levels). Among the scheduling objectives, is to ensure that resources are not overburdened (don't schedule more resources for a period than are available) and that (as much as possible) there are not significant peaks and valleys in the resource schedule.

Resource Loading -

The process of assigning resources (people, facilities and equipment) to a project, usually activity by activity.

Responsibility -

The obligation to perform or take care of something, usually with the liability to be accountable for loss or failure. Responsibility may be delegated to others but the delegation does not eliminate the responsibility.

Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RAM) -

A tool used to relate each project activity in the WBS with a responsible organization unit or individual. Its purpose is to ensure that every activity is assigned to one or more individuals (only one with primary responsibility) and that the individuals are aware of their responsibilities.

Risk -

The likelihood of the occurrence of an event. Generally, the event is a negative one like project failure, but may also be a positive event, like the early completion of a task.

Risk Assessment -

Part of risk management in which planners identify potential risks and describe them, usually in terms of their symptoms, causes, probability of occurrence and potential impact.

Risk Response -

Action that can be taken to address the occurrence of a risk event. Contingency plans are collections of risk responses.

Risk Response Control -

Responding to risk event occurrences throughout the project life cycle. Taking corrective action is an aspect of risk response control.

Risk Response Development -

Part of risk management in which planners identify and define actions to be taken in case a risk (positive or negative) occurs.

Schedule -

The project timeline, identifying the dates (absolute or relative to a start date) that project tasks will be started and completed, resources will be required and upon which milestones will be reached.

Scope -

Scope is defined in terms of three dimensions—product, project and impact. Product scope is the full set of features and functions to be provided as a result of the project. Project scope is the work that has to be done to deliver the product. Impact scope is the depth and breadth of involvement by, and effect on, the performing and client organizations.

Scope Change -

Any change in the definition of the project scope. Scope change can result from changes in client needs, discovery of defects or omissions, regulatory changes, etc.

Scope Change Control -

Also called scope change management. The process of making sure that all changes to the project scope are consciously evaluated and their implications to the project plan are considered in making a decision to make the change, postpone it or reject it.

Scope Creep -

The unconscious growth of the project scope resulting from uncontrolled changes to requirements.

Scope Definition -

Breaking down the project's major deliverables into small, more manageable components to make verification, development and project control easier. This may be part of requirements definition and/or design.

Scope Planning -

Development of a statement of the principle deliverables of a project along with the project's justification (business case) and objectives. Part of requirements definition.

Scope Verification -

PMI's PMBOK Guide defines this as the process to ensure that all project deliverables have been completed satisfactorily. It is associated with acceptance of the product by clients and sponsors.

Sequencing Tasks -

A part of the scheduling process in which the tasks are positioned serially or parallel to one another based on dependencies between them. Sequencing results in a task network.

Slack -

See Float.

Specifications -

Detailed statements of project deliverables that result from requirements definition and design. Specifications generally describe the deliverables in terms of appearance, operational constraints and quality attributes. Specifications are the basis for acceptance criteria used in scope verification and quality control. In some organizations and industries, specifications may be qualified as requirements specifications and design specifications. See Requirements.

Spiral Development Approach -

A project life cycle strategy in which prototypes and models are used early in project life to define requirements and design the product. Commonly used when the product being developed is new (as in Research & Development and e-commerce) and the clients do not have a concrete understanding of their requirements and design attributes.

Stakeholder -

Anybody and everybody with a stake in the project - clients, sponsors, performers, the general public and even the family and friends of direct participants can be considered stakeholders. Not to be confused with the guy that holds the stake when the vampire slayer slays the vampire.

Statement of Work -

A description of the scope of a project centered on the major deliverables and constraints.

Straw man -

A tentative decision or solution put forth as a point of reference for detailed critical analysis.

Sub-contractor -

A group or individual providing products or services to the project. Commonly, sub-contractors are considered to be vendors. However there is a growing understanding that any internal group that provides products or services (e.g., an internal technical writing department) is a sub-contractor to the project

manager. Of course in this broader usage, the agreement between the parties is not a legally binding contract but it is a contract nonetheless.

Subject Matter Expert (SME) -

An expert in some aspect of the project's content expected to provide input to the project team regarding business, scientific, engineering or other subjects. Input may be in the form of requirements, planning, resolutions to issues and/or review of project results.

Sub-task -

A breakdown of a task into the work elements that make it up. A task must be broken down into at least two sub-tasks for a meaningful decomposition.

Successor -

A task or milestone that is logically linked to one or more predecessor tasks.

Task -

A piece of work requiring effort, resources and having a concrete outcome (a deliverable). A task may be of any size (a project is a very large task). Sometimes the term is used to denote a piece of work at a particular level in a Work Breakdown Structure (WBS) hierarchy e.g., a phase is broken into a set of activities, and an activity into a set of tasks. Except for this hierarchical usage, activity is synonymous with task.

Task Dependency -

A relationship in which a task or milestone relies on other tasks to be performed (completely or partially) before it can be performed. Also referred to as a logical relationship.

Top-down Estimating -

Approximating the size (duration and cost) and risk of a project (or phase) by looking at the project as a whole and comparing it to previously performed similar projects. The comparison may be made directly using "analogous estimating," through an algorithm as in "parametric estimating", or from the memory of estimating experts.

Variance -

The difference between estimated cost, duration or effort and the actual result of performance. In addition, can be the difference between the initial or baseline product scope and the actual product delivered.

Vendor -

An organization or individuals providing products or services under contract to the client or to the project performance group. Also called outside contractors or sub-contractors.

Work Breakdown Structure (WBS) -

A hierarchical task list created by decomposing the project based on the breakdown of the product into components and the breakdown of the project process into increasingly detailed tasks. The WBS is depicted as a tree diagram (or hierarchy chart) or as a list in outline form with detailed items subordinated to higher-level items.

Work Package -

A task at a low level of the Work Breakdown Structure at which project accounting is performed. Usually a week or so in duration and performed by an individual or small work group.