

Life is a Project¹

Making it real! Ask, answer, write it down!

Neil Robinson

One of the primary objectives of the “Life is a Project” workshops was to test the feasibility of the concept that a logical, practical, set of life-based project management skills and techniques could be imparted to a non-technical, non-project-management audience. In effect, “demystifying” project management for the masses.

As professional Project Managers we have learned through experience that the process of articulating in writing a clear and concise description of our project’s purpose, scope, justification and high-level approach is a crucial element of every successful project initiation. In a formal project management context this may take the form of a Project Charter (PMBOK) or a Project Initiation Document (PRINCE2).

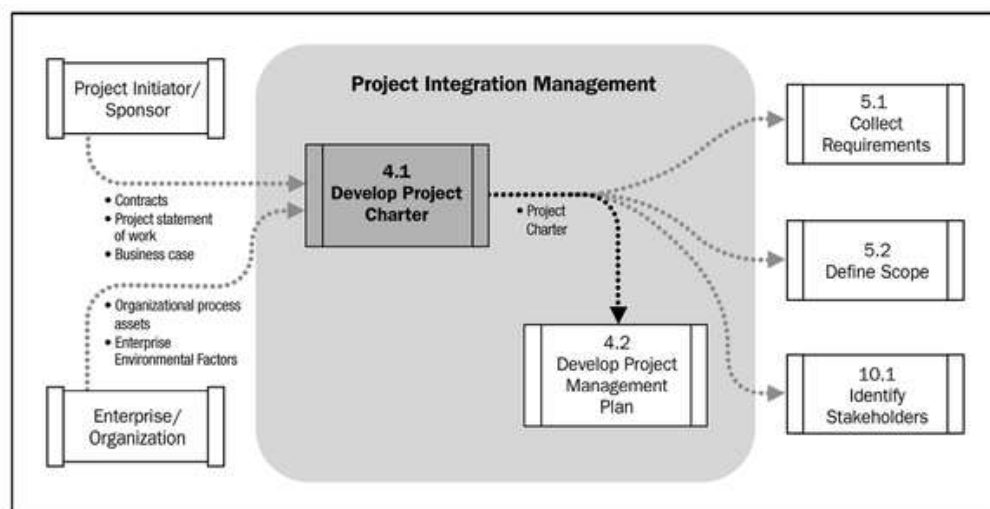


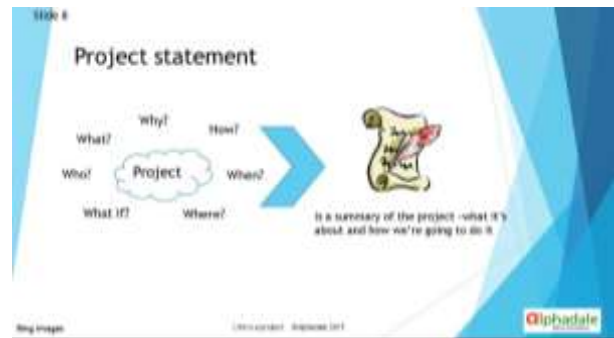
Figure 1: Develop Project Charter (Source: PMI, 2008, p. 74)

Just as critically, in the domain of life projects, through the process of documenting our bright idea, we make it real! As we ask ourselves the very same questions of what, why, when, how, who and what if, we bring focus and intent to our life goals, developing them from vague concepts into targeted plans, or projects.

¹This is the third in a series of articles by Neil Robinson, author of the award winning paper “[Life is a Project: Enabling Life Skills in Cross-Cultural Transitions](#)”, first presented at the 6th Scientific Conference on Project Management in the Baltic States, University of Latvia, April 2017. The paper was selected by the Project Management Institute (PMI®) for the 2017 James R. Snyder International Student Paper of the Year Award for the EMEA Region. The paper and this series of articles are inspired by the outcomes of the Life is a Project (LIAP) education initiative launched by the author to teach project management life skills to a group of ESL (English as a Second Language) adults in London.

Keep it simple

A project statement, in the context of everyday life, does not need to be a formal charter. It just needs to ask and answer those same key questions, in simple, everyday terms. During the LIAP workshops, participants brainstormed their ideas, selected a life project, analysed the key project questions and used a simplified template to document their own life project.



| Project Statement | |
|--------------------|--|
| Title: Camino Walk | |
| Description | What are we going to do/achieve? Walk across Spain, 770km on the Camino de Santiago. Raise money for charity. |
| | Where is it going to take place? Start in St Jean Pied de port (France) and finish in Santiago (Spain) |
| WHY? | Why are we going to do it? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore many Spanish towns and villages Raise money for charity Have fun |
| Method | How are we going to do it? Walk with a light backpack, stop in albergues (hostels), eat in villages. |
| Schedule | When are we going to do it? 1st of April (Spring). Estimate 30 days to complete. |
| Team | Who is going to do it? Who will be involved? Solo walk. There will be other walkers on the trail. Friends will sponsor. We stay in local houses. |
| Quality | How can we check if it's good? Pilgrim "stamps" will be stamped in every village as quality check of distance walked. |
| Risks | What if something happens? Injury or illness - insurance, a phone, medical kit, cash/food. Can't walk and travel home early. |

From fiction to fact

In the specific case of the LIAP London pilot, all participants were engaged in the navigation of a common life project – the process of cross-cultural transition as migrants in the UK. As noted during that initiative (Robinson, 2017) and more formal academic studies (Ward and Kennedy, 2009), the very act of engaging in “task-oriented planning” and documenting the project was observed as a very positive and active coping strategy, a critical step forward in taking a vague concept and making it real!

“A goal without a plan is just a wish.”
 - [Antoine de Saint-Exupéry](#)

Who’s doing what? Make it clear.

The LIAP workshops introduced participants to the primary roles and responsibilities of project participants. Initially they found the concept of role definitions unrealistic and too formal for life projects. However, as they worked together as practical project teams, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities, productivity and self-confidence accelerated, whilst ambiguity and the sense of helplessness evaporated.



As academic studies of project-based learning in schools have identified, clarity of team roles, even with children, is associated with higher levels of intrinsic motivation, self-determination, purpose and performance across the project team (Bell, 2010). In life, as in business, clarity of roles provides the best possible foundation for project team cohesion, understanding, accountability, and as required, positive negotiation. It's just common sense!

Breaking News: “Life is a Project” has gone global! Translated workshop materials are now available in the *Arabic* and *Polish* languages. Enquiries and ideas for project collaboration are welcomed by the author at alphadale@outlook.com

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About the Author



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Neil C. Robinson is an experienced Business and Technology Project Manager, consultant and trainer with global experience delivering complex projects, transformation programmes, and business solutions in diverse geographic locations. His experience as a practitioner includes Senior Programme/Project Management, IT Services, and Operational roles in the private and public sectors. His domain experience includes IT Management and Project Delivery roles in the Aviation, Technology, Oil & Energy, Health, Government, Insurance, and Education sectors. His regional Project Management experience includes on-ground delivery in 20+ countries across the UK, Europe, the Middle East, Australasia, the Americas and Asia.

Neil is PMP and PRINCE2 accredited and is currently undertaking research and academic studies in a Masters (Project Management) programme at Salford Business School. He has a special interest in social project management and initiated the “Life is a Project” concept in London, teaching project management life skills to ‘at-risk’ community groups. His further research interests include the roles of motivation and cultural intelligence in international project success.

Neil can be contacted at alphadale@outlook.com and welcomes global collaboration from practitioners, academics and students in his field of interest.