

Informative and opinion article

2021 IS INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF RESPONSIBLE PROJECT MANAGEMENT

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Responsible Project Management is a call to action for all project professionals to advocate for projects to deliver better outcomes for society and the environment, as well as for financial investors. Projects drive change around the globe. In the face of the range of grand challenges facing humanity, it is time for project management to “come of age” and take on a set of responsibilities to wider society. 2021 has been chosen as the International Year of Responsible Project Management because in many cultures 21 is the age when a young person takes on adult responsibilities. Many undergraduates complete their undergraduate degree at 21 and take up professional roles. Now is the time for all projects to be managed more responsibly. The project profession needs to take more responsibility for the impacts of projects beyond just delivering value to a narrowly defined set of stakeholders. Responsible Project Management focuses on the role that individual practitioners can play to ensure the project profession “comes of age”.

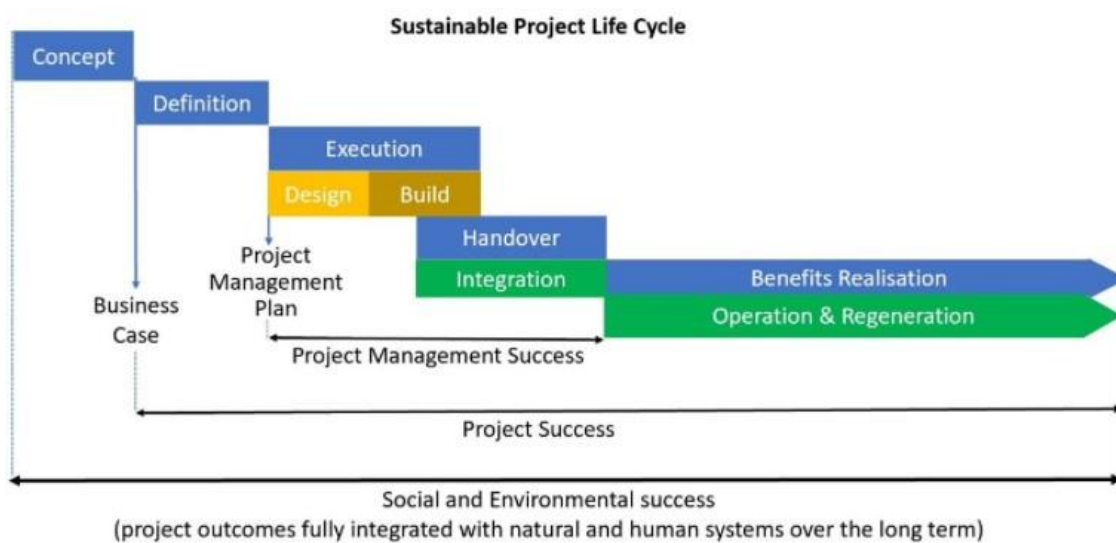
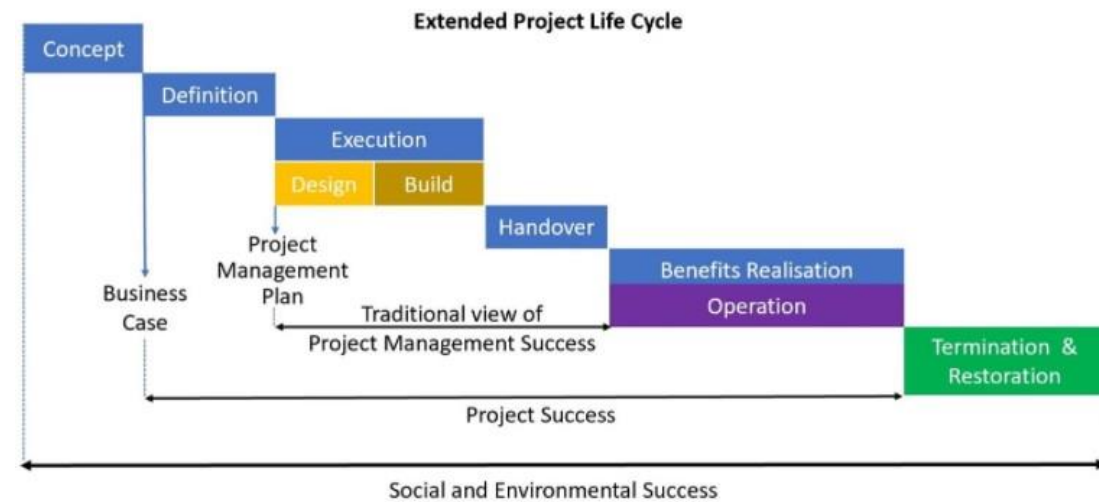
Why project professionals need to act?

Projects can either accelerate progress towards a better future, or recklessly consume natural resources, damage the environment or biodiversity, and exacerbate divisions between communities.

Recently António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, highlighted that humanity is currently on a “suicide mission” and the UN’s priority for 2021 is “making peace with nature” with emphasis on reducing greenhouse emissions to ensure the planet remains habitable for humans. 2021 is the year when the international agreements required to achieve the targets for carbon reduction must be secured, he declared.

Going forward many projects will be required to deliver solutions that integrate technology with the behavioural change to achieve “carbon neutral” communities. Governments in countries around the world are setting demanding targets for achieving net-zero carbon emissions. Many new projects will be required to achieve this vision of the future, while conventional projects will increasingly need to report on their expected environmental and social impacts over the short, medium and long term. Any doubt about a need for greater awareness of project impacts can be dispelled by disasters such as the fire that engulfed Grenfell Tower in the UK, or the storage explosion in Beirut, where project managers are being called to account for their actions long after the end of a project.

All project practitioners can develop their capabilities for raising awareness of new opportunities that have the potential for improving project outcomes for wider society and the natural environment. They can also develop and share insights to identify possible unpleasant project side-effects or long-term consequences. Project management that recognises an extended project life cycle, or a sustainable life cycle where a project and its outcomes enhance social and natural capital, may be useful for illustrating project scope.



Growth of Responsible Project Management

There is a range of successful initiatives on sustainability and ethics by many professional project management bodies around the world. Responsible Project Management (RPM) builds on these initiatives and is distinctive in focussing on the individual project professional.

Responsible Project Management (RPM) is underpinned by the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the UN's Principles of Responsible Management Education and seeks to balance the needs of people, planet and prosperity. Inspired by the way Agile PM began, RPM started with a Manifesto that articulated a set of values and principles. In July 2018, the wording for the Manifesto was developed in real-time during a two-day workshop at Bournemouth University that brought together educators, practitioners and researchers. By the end of the workshop, a consensus had emerged, and 20 professionals became the first signatories to the Manifesto for Responsible Project Management.

The Association for Project Management (APM), the Chartered Body for the Project Profession in the UK, was among the first signatories. Support from other project management professional bodies in Europe, the Association of Sustainability Practitioners, the Project Management Institute (UK Chapter) and the UK's Major Projects Knowledge Hub has been crucial to success. Eighteen months on and there are more than 145 individual signatories from 28 companies and 29 universities and 28 companies around the world from the UK, Europe,

Kazakhstan, India, India, China and the USA. In the summer of 2020, APM submitted to a UK Parliamentary Select Committee, that Government should “*focus on Responsible Project Management*”, citing the definition presented in the Guide to Responsible Project Management (2019): “*Responsible Project Management ... is the concept of managing projects with specific attention to the intended and unintended impacts of the project and its outcomes, in both the short and long term, thereby delivering economic, social and environmental benefits.*”

What is happening in 2021?

2021 represents a call to project professionals around the world to highlight the role of project management in steering humanity towards a better future. Driving change will require project professionals to develop new knowledge, skills and mindset.

During 2021 the RPM Team will collaborate with professional bodies to support project professionals and aspiring project professionals to develop the competencies required to advocate for beneficial change. A series of themed virtual events will engage practitioners, educators and researchers in developing the knowledge and competencies required to manage projects more responsibly. Research on the competencies required for managing responsibly and how they can be developed is an important theme for the RPM Team in 2021.