



The **vision**  
to stay ahead

MSP<sup>®</sup> – Sound Bites: “Dependencies  
unmasked

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MSP® Sound Bites are brief articles from the lead author of MSP® 07 + 11, Rod Sowden, where he looks at issues facing organisations using and endeavours to clarify, emphasis or challenge the way the framework is being interpreted or applied.

Effective Dependency Management is a critical element of change programme management but still remains a black art that few seem to achieve.

In the latest version of the OGC's Managing Successful Programmes (MSP®) clarified greatly the confusion over Blueprints, how to develop one and why they are so critical. Unfortunately, it did not bring clarity to the area of Dependency Management. If I had another 1000 words I would dedicate all of it to this topic.

## **So what is Dependency Management?**

There is a myth that Dependencies are between whole projects and programmes themselves and that is how they can be managed. The unfortunate fact is that the key Dependencies are quite often buried deep within each of the projects, and the criticality of the dependencies to the overall programme may not be visible to individual project managers.

A Dependency Network is needed to track the change interactions that create the potential and capability to achieve the intended outcomes.

MSP® has always been quite clever in these areas, seeing projects as black boxes which require inputs and outputs. The role of the Programme Manager is to take a helicopter view of projects and manage the dependencies. Unfortunately the project management vocabulary doesn't match up to this neat model of inputs and outputs. Hence, projects will use the terms that make it difficult to see the wood for the trees, e.g. product, deliverables (outputs) and assumptions (inputs).

Dependencies come in many shapes and forms, apart from being specific project outputs they can include policy statements, decisions, designs, BAU changes, resources, funding, plans, contracts and procurements are all examples in addition to the more obvious deliverables.

## **Nesting Dependencies**

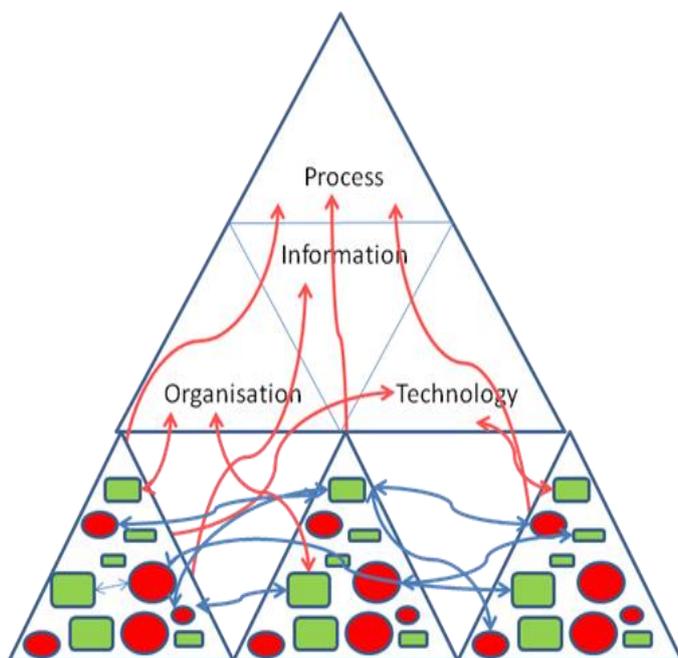
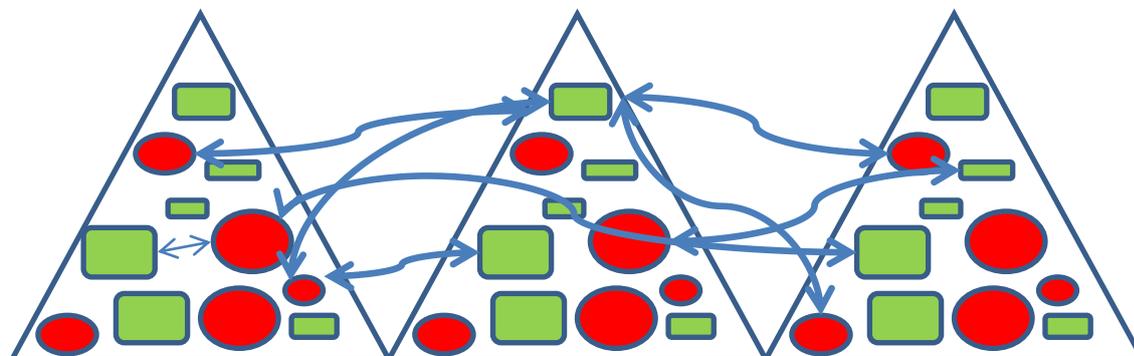
Many organisations have a number of programmes operating, and in some cases are establishing portfolio management as well, we need to recognise and standardise on our vocabulary. Portfolio Management will offer little benefit it cannot deliver effective dependency management.

There are basically three types of dependencies:

- a. Intra dependencies are those that can be managed within the boundary of an individual programme
- b. Inter dependences are those that extend beyond the programme boundary and into other programmes

- c. Extra dependencies are those that extend beyond the boundaries of all the programmes into other parts of organisations.

Prior to the establishment of the programme there are likely to be dependencies between individual projects. The green squares are outputs, and the red circles are inputs.

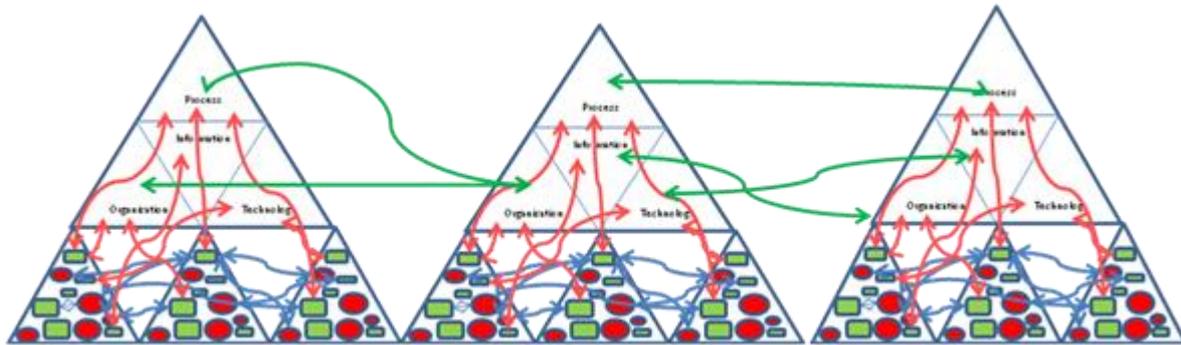


Intra Programme dependencies – these are dependencies that can be managed within the boundary of a single programme, and reflect how the project depend on each other to deliver the Blueprint and the benefits.

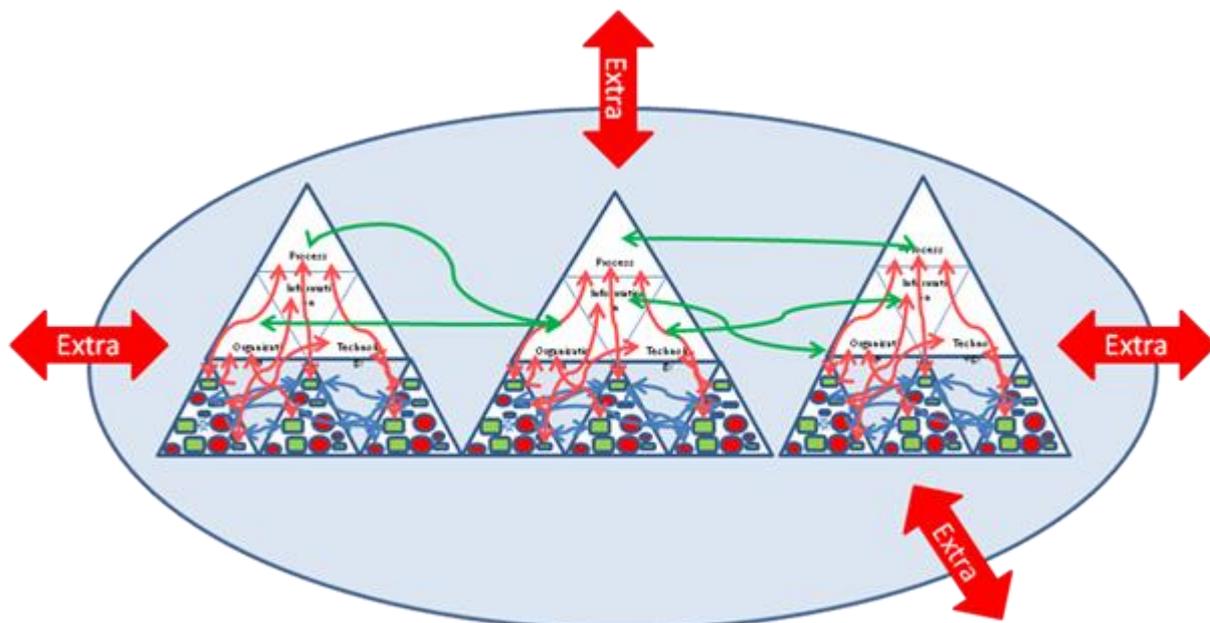
Projects with dependencies outside of the boundary should have these managed by the programme

Inter Programme dependences – these are the dependencies that are external to individual programmes but are still within the perimeter of the programme and project management environment, most likely linked to the scope of Corporate Programme Management Office.

Extra Programme dependencies – these are dependencies that are outside of the control of the PPM community, in particular BAU changes, external dynamics such as legislation and strategic decisions and approvals. In the future, the maturing of Corporate Portfolio Management will deliver a valuable dividend in the support of this.



In reality the dependencies that hold up most programmes are the Extra Programme dependencies. They can often be political or economic in nature, and may even be tracked through the Risk Register.



The new version of the OGC PPM Management Maturity Model (P3M3<sup>®</sup>) puts effective dependency management as a critical element for mature organisations. Early work we have undertaken with assessments using the new model has highlighted this as a particular area of weakness for many organisations, but why should something so important be proving so difficult to achieve?

Our experience has been that the inability to manage dependencies goes back to some very basic standards that are missing, namely planning. To have effective Intra Programme dependency management in place there needs to be common practices within the projects. PRINCE2<sup>®</sup> and other project management methods all highlight the value of output based planning and have it as a core concept, and yet when undertaking reviews we find project managers responding to questions about planning standards with the phrase “MS Project”. Much of the planning is activity based rather than product based and very few have critical paths defined.

Without this underpinning consistency we are trying to compare apples with pears. You can't identify and track project dependencies unless there is a clearly defined product set.

If you have MSP® in place, these standards should be defined in your Monitoring and Control Strategy. P3M3® not only recognises Dependency Management as a Level 3 maturity attribute, it also highlights planning and estimation as a generic attribute, common standards and practices are also a characteristic of Level 3 maturity.

The Intra Programme dependencies are well recognised as important, but rarely managed well.

At the Inter Programme dependency level the situation deteriorates. The likelihood is that the dependency management is happening through informal soft systems, communications and programme managers discussing the dependencies on various projects.

At this level it is not possible to track the dependencies down to the project level; we need to have a different currency to express our understanding the dependencies. We argue strongly that this currency should be the programme Blueprints.

The Blueprint is the end state that the programme will deliver, and in a multi programme environment there is always the risk that programmes are planning to change the same areas. A Blueprint expresses the organisations future state in terms of processes, people and structures, tools and technology and the management information that will be used to run it.

By overlaying the Blueprints to see the overall picture, individual programmes can see how other programmes can contribute to their “future state” and avoid duplication and gain a shared prioritisation criteria, and of course, their inter dependencies.

The problem here is that it is only since the arrival of MSP®07 that organisations are beginning to take on board the need for a Blueprint for each programme. Additionally the Blueprint will need to be developed to a consistent standard (defined by the Portfolio) to enable the overlaying of Blueprints. However, techniques like Outcome Relationship Modelling can establish a high level map of dependencies.

If Portfolio Management is not in place then Extra Programme dependencies will need to be owned individual programme boards to resolve.

### **First three steps to preparing for Dependency Management.**

- 1. Establish a standard approach to project planning.** This enables you to track the input and output relationship between projects.
- 2. Review all the current projects** and identify their assumptions and deliverables. Build these into a matrix so that you know who is going to be waiting for the deliverable (output) and who is owning the assumption (input). If nobody is waiting for the deliverable you may ask why resource is being dedicated to its production, and if nobody is owning the assumptions that you have an issue that needs to be managed.
- 3. Ensure that each programme has a Blueprint.** It is important that organisations have a common standard for developing Blueprints, or the problem of planning inconsistencies will move up to the programme level.

Aspire Europe Ltd can offer course and support to raise organisational performance and train individuals to improve the quality of their planning and develop coherent and consistent blueprints. Our courses are accredited by the Centre for Change Management with vocational qualifications at National Qualification Framework Level 4 awarded by ILM.

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