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**Why Blueprints steer good
programme delivery**

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The blueprint has been one of the key concepts within the Managing Successful Programmes framework since it was first released in 1999. In 2007 it had a chapter dedicated to it, which has been enhanced in the 2011 version. So why is it that so many programmes try to deliver without developing a blueprint?

There are a number of fundamental reasons for this, which can be summarised as:

a. Inexperience of the programme team and leadership who do not understand the need for it
b. 'Just do it' approach to programme delivery – let's get busy and see where we end up
c. Programmes being run by project people who have no experience or knowledge of business modelling or change
d. Lack of clarity, within the programme or the organisation, on where it is going and the process of blueprinting asks too many difficult questions

Using P3M3® terminology, these are the kinds of characteristics found in a Level 1 or 2 maturity organisation, which reflects most organisations that have been assessed, so it is a self-fulfilling prophecy.

To stop this article becoming a book, it will focus on four basic questions:

1. What is the blueprint?
2. Why is a blueprint needed?
3. What happens if there isn't one?
4. Where can you go for help?

1   What is the blueprint?

There has been a trend towards organisations developing target operating models. Within MSP® it specifically references target operating model as an alternative term for blueprint, so the situation was looking more hopeful, however, a number of these documents are proving to be far too high level or aspirational to be of any value in providing tangible direction. If you have a target operating model in your organisation, then you may have the foundations on which to build your programme blueprint, but don't bank on it.

The blueprint contains key sets of information upon which the programme design and delivery will be based.

1. The 'As Is' state – how the parts of the organisation that will be changed work at present
2. The 'To Be' state – how the organisation will work when the programme has been completed
3. Intermediate state – how the organisation will be working at major control points (Tranches in the MSP® manual) during the lifecycle of the programme.

The blueprint itself can be constructed in a number of ways, using organisation charts, flowcharts process diagrams, soft systems mapping, technical diagrams covering buildings, IT, information flows and so on.

The blueprint should contain four core sets of information, known as the POTI model:

- Processes – how the organisation delivers the services and products on which it depends.
- Organisation – the people, structures, capabilities used to deliver the products and services
- Tools – these are the tools, machinery, technology and buildings used to support the operations, often based on capital assets and the big cost in a programme
- Information – the knowledge used to run its everyday operations, will relate to performance, markets, strategy and relevant legislation.

Don't make the mistake of thinking these are four boxes into which to feed information. It is all driven by what the organisation does now and what it will do in the future, so there must be clarity about how the four elements fit together.

To deliver the strategic objectives, the programme must have as much clarity as possible about the destination as it will use this information to design the projects to deliver the capability and the calculation of the benefits and risk will be based upon the chosen destination.

In project terms, a project without requirements, a specification for the products to be created and the quality criteria for acceptance, is heading for failure. The blueprint provides the same context for a programme, so if you haven't got one, there is trouble ahead.

To draw a less technical comparison, if a yacht sets out on a journey, it must know its destination to set the course. During the journey, the winds and tides will change so it is unlikely to be a straight line, but it must have some idea of the destination before setting sail.

Map of First Voyage

When Columbus set out for the Americas he had a clear sense of direction (west) but not a lot of detail about the route to be taken. One of the issues for people new to programmes or have groups of projects being called programmes, is they focus too much on the planning the journey and constructing the boat and not enough on where they are going to end up.
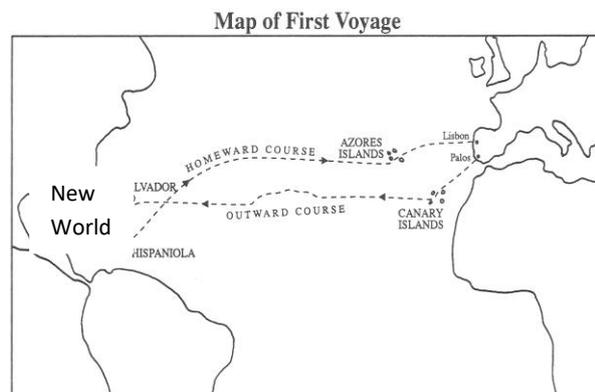
Swim lane diagrams are a very good tool for getting a high level view of how things work and fit together, they illustrate the parts of the organisations involved. The overall process can include information on the tools and systems and show information that is being created.

2   Why is the blueprint needed?

The blueprint has a very specific purpose; it is to identify the gap between where the organisation is today and where it will be in future. From this it will be possible to design the projects that are needed to deliver journey and calculate the benefits from the making the change.

The process of developing the optimal solution for the "To Be state" can be time consuming and may be seen by adrenalin junkies as paralysis by analysis, but the reality is that a programme cannot function without one.

Same challenges can be made of the 'As Is' mapping, for example, what is the point in mapping the 'As Is' if it is going to be changed? The answer is if you don't know where your starting point is how can you work out the journey.

Have you ever tried booking a holiday flight without specifying your departure airport? Same rules apply!
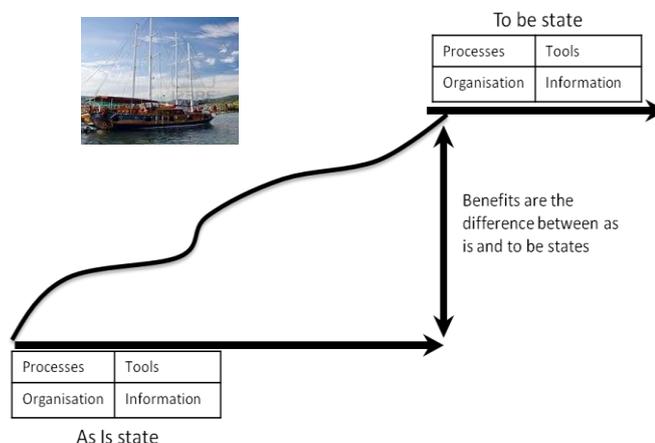
The diagram shows that both the 'As Is' and the 'To Be' states must be understood for two reasons:

a. Unless there is clarity on how the organisation and systems currently work and interface together you will not have the information to design what the projects must deliver. The blueprint provides the requirements for the projects, without a blueprint the requirements will be guesswork.

b. The 'As Is' state provides the current cost and performance data, whilst the 'To Be' will provide the best estimates of what this will be in the future. This provides the basis for calculating the benefits, so if you have no blueprint your benefits will, at best, be guesswork of mystical targets.

The Intermediate states have not been illustrated in the diagram, although are similar definitions, but for major milestones along the way, this really helps if a programme has a long lifecycle. Undertaking detailed analysis for something that will be delivered in 10 years' time would, to a large extent, be pointless, but having a detailed understanding of one year out, good clarity about two years out and reasonable clarity about the five year horizons, without this how can you plan delivery?

If we return to our nautical theme again, and use a yacht as the analogy, the components required for a successful trip are, sails to provide momentum, a keel to provide steerage and stability, and a rudder to set the direction. We also need a destination or a purpose for the trip.

If we translate this into programme language, the Vision Statement sets the destination and purpose, the projects are the sails, as they provide momentum and energy for on the journey. Benefits are the rudder, as they steer the programme in the direction that will provide maximum return and value from the investment. The blueprint is the keel, provides stability and direction when the going gets rough.

So, in answer to the question, why is a blueprint needed, the answer is:

1. It provides the detailed development of the Vision and underpins the options analysis in the business case
2. Creating the blueprint engages key stakeholders in building and understanding the future operating model for the organisation
3. It provides the basis for calculating benefits
4. It provides the detailed understanding of what is needed to define the project requirements
5. To understand the level of change and associated risk that the programme faces
6. It provides the basis for more effective decision making as the impact can be assessed
7. Gives better control through Intermediate states that enable clarity of direction and effective planning

3   What happens if we don't have a blueprint?

The consequences of not having a blueprint are often not immediately apparent to a programme. Hopefully there will be a vision and the programme will set off launching projects that will provide the energy to take them to the perceived destination. This happy state can last for up to a year, more sometimes. The organisation will be pleased about the apparent progress and the programme team will be motivated and energised delivering projects and reporting on their progress.

The problems begin to emerge between 6 to 12 months. The programme will appear disengaged from the organisation that it is changing, because it has little understanding of the organisation it is planning to change. The programme board will be focused on project delivery and if it did manage to appoint business change managers their role would be rather vague and ambiguous.

Decision making which was fast and energetic in the early days will become slower, problems more complex, with priorities and the basis for decisions being unclear, momentum will be lost and the programme will appear to become becalmed. This is not a bad thing to happen, as it is a chance to regroup, consider where the programme is going and put the appropriate controls in place. Many programmes experience this, and using the MSP ® framework as a point of reference, in reality, the programme has achieved the first step change in capability, as it has realised that delivering a programme through project techniques and lots of energy isn't enough.

This isn't always the case though. Some programmes that are short term (often a compliance programme) where there are big targets to hit with hard deadlines, can be successful in forcing a change through. The test of whether it is a true programme is whether that change sticks and the benefits come from the investment. History suggests this is very unlikely.

Back to our nautical theme, without the keel (blueprint) we will lose direction, the wind will drop from the sails (projects) so there will be no momentum and the lack of a rudder (benefits) means we will be unable to put ourselves back on course.

Becoming becalmed is probably the best case scenario for failure, because the other option is a headlong rush towards disaster as a result of gaining too much momentum and we crash or capsize. This can be characterised through too much upfront engagement of delivery focused consultants, commissioning projects that commit to large scale contracts leading to large amounts of money being wasted. The lack of clarity on how the outputs fit together results in operational and business performance disasters and they make great press headlines. The frightening thing about this scenario is that nobody can challenge the programme because it isn't clear what it is intending to deliver or when the benefits will appear, it hurtles out of control with wise stakeholders abandoning ship.

A programme with a well-constructed blueprint and clearly defined benefits is able to maintain a steady course and weather storms, react to changing environmental conditions and maintain direction and momentum towards the target operating status defined in the blueprint. It will have the basis for measured decision making and be able to accelerate or slow down the rate of project delivery where and when it is needed.

In summary, programmes without a blueprint are actually out of control, whether they know that or not is another matter, and these are characterised by:

1. Unexpected problems starting to occur within projects and firefighting becomes the modus operandi
2. Project issues dominating the programme board
3. Unidentified risks starting to materialise a bit too frequently
4. Benefits rarely discussed
5. The BCM lacking authority or purpose
6. Many uncontrolled or unclear dependencies between projects and other initiatives starting to manifest themselves
7. Decision making is ad-hoc, reactionary or just slow
8. Increasing Stakeholder resistance and programme losing support
9. Programmes either lacking momentum of feel like a roller coaster

4 Where can you go for help?

Finishing with another nautical reference, a programme is similar to an iceberg, it is not what you see on the surface that counts, it is what is going on below the surface and out of sight that will give you the biggest trouble.

If your programme is suffering from the symptoms of not having a blueprint, then Aspire can help. Here are some of the services we offer.

a. Programme health checks will help evaluate your current programme and advise on how to optimise delivery
b. Formal gateway reviews by our team of OGC accredited gateway reviewers
c. Consultancy services will help you design and populate your blueprint

d. Blueprinting workshops to support your own efforts
e. Accredited courses on Blueprinting and Benefits Principles
f. Accredited Business Change Manager courses
g. Accredited Programme Management courses

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We hope you found it useful – let us know if you did.