CareerFocus AREA

PMP exam prep · Glossary

Project Management Glossary

Predictive, agile and hybrid terms for PMP candidates, A to Z

A B C D E F G H I
J K L M N O P Q R
S T U V W X Y Z

Plain-language definitions of the terms that come up again and again in PMP study: planning and control on predictive projects, the roles, events and artifacts of agile teams, and the hybrid practices that sit between them. Each entry is short enough to read in a few seconds and precise enough to answer a scenario question with.

About this glossary

Plain-language definitions of the terms that come up again and again in PMP study: planning and control on predictive projects, the roles, events and artifacts of agile teams, and the hybrid practices that sit between them. Each entry is short enough to read in a few seconds and precise enough to answer a scenario question with.

HOW TO USE IT

- Terms are listed A to Z. Abbreviations follow the full term, for example Cost performance index (CPI).
- Formulas use the standard earned value symbols: PV, EV, AC and BAC.
- “See also” points to related entries in this glossary.

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A

Acceptance criteria

The conditions a deliverable or user story must satisfy before the customer or product owner accepts it. Agreeing them up front tells the team exactly when the work is finished.

See also: Definition of done (DoD)

Active listening

Giving a speaker your full attention, reflecting back what you heard and asking clarifying questions before you respond. It builds trust and catches misunderstandings early.

Activity

A distinct, scheduled unit of work in a predictive schedule, with its own duration, resources and dependencies. Work packages are broken down into activities.

See also: Work package

Actual cost (AC)

The cost actually incurred for the work performed during a given period. Compared with earned value, it shows whether the work is costing more or less than planned.

See also: Earned value (EV), Cost variance (CV)

Adaptive life cycle

A development approach in which scope is detailed and delivered in short iterations, with feedback shaping what comes next. Agile methods such as Scrum and Kanban are adaptive.

See also: Predictive life cycle, Hybrid approach

Affinity estimating

Sizing many backlog items quickly by placing them into groups of similar size, rather than estimating each one on its own. Useful for a first pass over a new backlog.

See also: Relative estimating

Agile Manifesto

A short 2001 statement of four values for software development: people and interactions, working product, customer collaboration and responding to change are prized over processes and tools, documentation, contract negotiation and following a plan. The items on the right still matter; the ones on the left matter more.

See also: Agile principles

Agile principles

The twelve principles that accompany the Agile Manifesto. They stress early and continuous delivery of value, welcoming change, close business and team collaboration, sustainable pace, technical excellence, simplicity, self-organizing teams and regular reflection.

Analogous estimating

Estimating the duration or cost of work from the actual results of a similar past project. It is fast and cheap but only as accurate as the comparison is close.

See also: Parametric estimating, Bottom-up estimating

Assumption

A factor treated as true for planning purposes without proof. Assumptions are recorded and checked, because one that turns out false can become a risk or an issue.

See also: Constraint

B

Backlog refinement
Ongoing work by the product owner and team to clarify, split, estimate and reorder backlog items so the top of the backlog is ready for upcoming iterations. Sometimes called grooming.
See also: Product backlog, Definition of ready (DoR)

Baseline
The approved version of the scope, schedule or cost plan against which performance is measured. A baseline changes only through formal change control.
See also: Integrated change control

Benefit-cost ratio (BCR)
The value of a project's expected benefits divided by its expected costs. A ratio above 1 means benefits exceed costs; higher is better when comparing options.

Benefits management plan
A document that describes which benefits a project is expected to deliver, when they will be realized, how they will be measured and who is responsible for them.
See also: Business case

Bottom-up estimating
Estimating each lower-level piece of work in detail and adding the results up to get the total. It is the most accurate estimating method and the most time-consuming.

Brainstorming
A group technique for generating many ideas quickly, with judgment held back until the idea list is complete.

Budget at completion (BAC)
The total approved budget for all the work on a project or control account. It is the planned value at the end of the project.

Burndown chart
A chart showing the work remaining against time. The line should trend down to zero by the end of the iteration or release; a flat line signals a problem.
See also: Burnup chart

Burnup chart
A chart showing work completed rising over time toward a separate line for total scope. Because scope has its own line, it makes scope changes visible.
See also: Burndown chart

Business case
A documented justification for a project that sets out its expected benefits, costs, risks and fit with strategy. It supports the decision to start, continue or stop the project.
See also: Project charter

C

Cause-and-effect diagram
A diagram that traces a problem back to its possible causes, grouped into categories along branches that resemble a fish skeleton. Also called a fishbone or Ishikawa diagram.
See also: Root cause analysis

Change control board (CCB)
A formally chartered group that reviews change requests and approves, defers or rejects them. Its authority is set out in the change management plan.

Change request

A formal proposal to modify a document, deliverable or baseline. It may be a corrective action, a preventive action, a defect repair or an update.

See also: Integrated change control

Colocation

Placing team members in the same physical workspace so they can communicate face to face. It speeds up collaboration and problem solving.

See also: Osmotic communication

Communication channels

The number of possible one-to-one communication paths in a group, calculated as n(n − 1) / 2, where n is the number of people. Adding people raises the count quickly.

Communication methods

The three broad ways to share information: interactive (a real-time exchange such as a meeting), push (sent to recipients, such as an email) and pull (placed where people fetch it, such as a shared site).

Conflict management

Handling disagreements so they help rather than harm the team. The common approaches are withdraw or avoid, smooth or accommodate, compromise or reconcile, force or direct, and collaborate or problem solve; collaborating usually gives the most lasting result.

Constraint

A limit on the project's options, such as a fixed budget, a deadline, a regulation or a required technology.

See also: Assumption

Contingency reserve

Time or money set aside for identified risks, the known unknowns. It is part of the cost baseline and is managed by the project manager.

See also: Management reserve

Continuous integration (CI)

The practice of merging every developer's work into a shared codebase frequently, often several times a day, with automated builds and tests that catch problems right away.

Control chart

A chart that plots process results over time against a mean and upper and lower control limits. Points outside the limits, or seven in a row on one side of the mean, suggest the process is out of control.

Cost baseline

The approved, time-phased budget for the project, excluding management reserve. Cost performance is measured against it.

Cost of quality (COQ)

All costs related to quality over a product's life. Costs of conformance (prevention and appraisal) are spent to avoid failures; costs of nonconformance (internal and external failures) are caused by them.

Cost performance index (CPI)

A measure of cost efficiency, calculated as EV / AC. A CPI below 1 means the work is costing more than planned; above 1 means it is costing less.

See also: Schedule performance index (SPI)

Cost variance (CV)

The difference between the value of work done and its cost, calculated as EV − AC. A negative figure means the project is over budget.

Cost-reimbursable contract

A contract in which the buyer pays the seller's allowable costs plus a fee or incentive. It suits work whose scope is uncertain, and places most of the cost risk on the buyer.

See also: Fixed-price contract, Time and materials contract (T&M)

Crashing

Shortening the schedule by adding resources to critical path activities, for example overtime or extra people. It usually increases cost.

See also: Fast tracking

Critical path

The longest sequence of dependent activities through a schedule, which sets the shortest possible project duration. Activities on it normally have zero total float.

See also: Float

Cross-functional team

A team whose members together have every skill needed to turn backlog items into finished, usable increments without waiting on outside groups.

Cumulative flow diagram (CFD)

A stacked area chart showing how many work items sit in each workflow state over time. Widening bands reveal bottlenecks and growing work in progress.

Cycle time

The time a work item takes from when work on it starts until it is finished. Shorter, steadier cycle times mean faster and more predictable delivery.

See also: Lead time

D

Daily standup

A short daily meeting, usually 15 minutes, in which the team checks progress toward its goal, plans the next day and raises impediments. In Scrum it is called the daily scrum.

Decision tree analysis

A diagram that maps the choices and uncertain outcomes of a decision, with probabilities and values on each branch. Working back through the tree gives the expected monetary value of each option.

See also: Expected monetary value (EMV)

Definition of done (DoD)

A checklist, shared by the whole team, of everything an increment must meet before it counts as complete, such as coded, tested, reviewed and documented.

See also: Acceptance criteria

Definition of ready (DoR)

The criteria a backlog item must meet before the team takes it into an iteration, such as clear acceptance criteria, an estimate and no blocking dependencies.

Deliverable

Any unique, verifiable product, result or capability that a project must produce to complete a phase or the project.

Dependency

A logical relationship between activities. Mandatory dependencies are required by the work itself, discretionary ones reflect preferred practice, and external ones involve parties outside the project.

See also: Finish-to-start (FS)

E

Earned value (EV)

The budgeted value of the work actually completed to date. It is the core measure in earned value management and is compared with planned value and actual cost.

Earned value management (EVM)

A method that combines scope, schedule and cost to measure project performance and forecast results, using planned value, earned value and actual cost.

Emotional intelligence (EI)

The ability to recognize and manage your own emotions and to understand and influence the emotions of others. It underpins leadership, conflict handling and team building.

Enterprise environmental factors (EEFs)

Conditions outside the project team's control that shape the project, such as company culture, market conditions, regulations and available infrastructure.

See also: Organizational process assets (OPAs)

Epic

A large body of work, too big for one iteration, that is split into smaller user stories before the team builds it.

See also: User story

Estimate at completion (EAC)

The expected total cost of the project when finished. A common formula is BAC / CPI, which assumes current cost performance continues.

Estimate to complete (ETC)

The expected cost of the remaining work, calculated as EAC − AC or estimated afresh from the bottom up.

Expected monetary value (EMV)

The probability of a risk multiplied by its financial impact. Opportunities give positive values and threats negative ones; summing them helps size reserves and compare options.

Extreme programming (XP)

An agile method focused on engineering practices such as pair programming, test-driven development, continuous integration, refactoring and small, frequent releases.

F

Fast tracking

Shortening the schedule by doing activities in parallel that were planned in sequence. It usually adds risk and rework rather than cost.

See also: Crashing

Fibonacci sequence

The number series 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13 and so on, used for story points because the widening gaps reflect growing uncertainty in larger items.

See also: Story points, Planning poker

Finish-to-start (FS)

The most common dependency type, in which one activity cannot start until another has finished. The others are start-to-start, finish-to-finish and start-to-finish.

Five whys

A root cause technique in which the team asks "why" repeatedly, about five times, until the underlying cause of a problem is found.

See also: Root cause analysis

Fixed-price contract

A contract in which the seller agrees to deliver defined work for a set price. It suits well-defined scope and places most of the cost risk on the seller.

See also: Cost-reimbursable contract

Float

The amount of time an activity can be delayed. Total float is the delay possible without moving the project end date; free float is the delay possible without delaying the next activity. Also called slack.

See also: Critical path

Functional organization

An organizational structure grouped by specialty, such as engineering or finance, where functional managers hold most of the authority and project managers have little.

See also: Matrix organization, Project-oriented organization

G

Gantt chart
A bar chart that shows activities as horizontal bars against a calendar, making dates, durations and overlaps easy to read.

Gold plating
Adding features or extras the customer did not ask for. It adds cost and risk without approved value, and is discouraged.
See also: Scope creep

Grade
A category given to products that share a use but differ in features, such as economy and premium. Low grade can be acceptable; low quality, meaning failure to meet requirements, is not.
See also: Quality

H

Herzberg's two-factor theory
A motivation theory that separates hygiene factors, such as pay and working conditions, which prevent dissatisfaction, from motivators, such as achievement and recognition, which create satisfaction.

Hybrid approach
A mix of predictive and adaptive practices chosen to fit the work, for example a predictive plan for hardware alongside agile iterations for software.
See also: Tailoring

I

Impediment
Anything that blocks or slows the team's progress. Removing impediments is a core duty of the Scrum master or agile team lead.

Increment
A usable, tested piece of the product delivered at the end of an iteration that adds to all earlier increments.

Incremental life cycle
An approach that delivers the product in a series of usable pieces, each adding functionality, so the customer gains value before the whole product is finished.
See also: Iterative life cycle

Information radiator
A large, highly visible display of project information, such as a task board or burndown chart, placed where anyone can see the team's status at a glance.

Integrated change control
The process of reviewing all change requests, approving or rejecting them, and managing changes to deliverables, documents and the project management plan in one coordinated way.
See also: Change control board (CCB), Change request

Internal rate of return (IRR)
The discount rate at which a project's net present value equals zero. When choosing between projects, the higher IRR is generally preferred.

INVEST
A checklist for good user stories: independent, negotiable, valuable, estimable, small and testable.
See also: User story

Issue
A current condition or problem that is affecting the project and needs action. A risk is uncertain and in the future; an issue is already here.
See also: Risk

Iteration
A timeboxed period, usually one to four weeks, in which a team plans, builds and reviews a set of work. In Scrum it is called a sprint.

Iterative life cycle
An approach that develops the product through repeated cycles, refining it with each pass based on feedback.
See also: Incremental life cycle

K

Kaizen
A Japanese term for continuous improvement through small, frequent changes rather than large, occasional ones.

Kanban
A method for managing flow that makes work visible on a board, limits work in progress and pulls new work only when capacity frees up. It has no fixed iterations.
See also: Kanban board, Work in progress (WIP) limit

Kanban board
A board with columns for each stage of the workflow, on which work items move from left to right. Column limits keep work in progress under control.

Kano model
A way to classify product features by how they affect satisfaction: basic needs customers expect, performance features they want more of, and delighters they did not expect.

L

Lag
A planned delay between two dependent activities, for example waiting three days after pouring concrete before building on it.
See also: Lead

Last responsible moment
The latest point at which a decision can be made before the cost of waiting exceeds the benefit. Deciding then keeps options open while the most information is available.

Lead
The amount of time a successor activity can start before its predecessor has finished. It overlaps activities and is the opposite of lag.

Lead time
The time from when a request is made until it is delivered. It includes waiting time before work starts, so it is always at least as long as cycle time.
See also: Cycle time

Lean
A way of working that maximizes customer value by removing waste, improving flow and building quality in. Many agile practices draw on it.
See also: Waste

Lessons learned register
A project document that captures what worked, what did not and what to do differently, recorded throughout the project so current and future teams can use it.

Little's Law

A flow rule stating that average cycle time equals work in progress divided by throughput. Reducing work in progress shortens cycle time.

M

Make-or-buy analysis

Deciding whether to produce work in house or purchase it from outside, weighing cost, capability, risk and control.

Management reserve

Budget held back for unforeseen work within scope, the unknown unknowns. It sits outside the cost baseline, and using it normally requires management approval.

See also: Contingency reserve

Maslow's hierarchy of needs

A motivation theory in which people satisfy needs in order: physiological, safety, belonging, esteem and self-actualization. Higher needs motivate only once lower ones are met.

Matrix organization

A structure in which team members report to both a functional manager and a project manager. In a weak matrix the functional manager holds more power, in a strong matrix the project manager does, and a balanced matrix shares it.

McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y

Two views of workers: Theory X assumes people dislike work and need close supervision, while Theory Y assumes they are self-motivated and seek responsibility. Agile leadership leans on Theory Y.

Milestone

A significant point or event in a project, such as a phase end or a key approval. A milestone has zero duration.

Minimum viable product (MVP)

The smallest version of a product that can be released to real users to test whether it meets their needs and to learn what to build next.

Monte Carlo simulation

A quantitative technique that runs a schedule or cost model thousands of times with random values drawn from each estimate's range, giving the probability of finishing by a given date or within a given budget.

MoSCoW prioritization

Sorting requirements into must have, should have, could have and won't have this time, so the team knows what to protect when time or budget runs short.

N

Net present value (NPV)

The present value of a project's future cash inflows minus the present value of its outflows. A positive NPV means the project is expected to add value; the higher the better.

O

Operations
The ongoing, repetitive work that sustains an organization, such as running a service. Unlike a project, operations have no planned end.
See also: Project

Opportunity cost
The value of the best alternative given up when one option is chosen. If two projects compete, the opportunity cost of picking one is the value of the other.

Organizational process assets (OPAs)
The plans, processes, policies, templates and knowledge bases, such as lessons learned from past projects, that an organization makes available to its projects.
See also: Enterprise environmental factors (EEFs)

Osmotic communication
Information picked up in the background when people work close together, such as overhearing a colleague solve a problem you will face tomorrow.
See also: Colocation

P

Pair programming
Two developers working at one workstation, one writing code and the other reviewing each line as it is written, switching roles often. It spreads knowledge and catches defects early.

Parametric estimating
Estimating duration or cost from a statistical relationship between historical data and a variable, such as cost per square foot or hours per unit.

Pareto chart
A bar chart that ranks causes of problems by frequency, highlighting the few causes behind most of the effect, often summed up as the 80/20 rule.

Payback period
The time a project takes to earn back its initial investment. A shorter payback period is usually preferred, although the measure ignores returns after payback.

Persona
A fictional but realistic profile of a typical user, with goals and frustrations, that helps the team design for real needs.

Phase gate
A review at the end of a phase where the results are checked and a decision is made to continue, change course or stop. Also called a stage gate or kill point.

Planned value (PV)
The authorized budget for the work scheduled to be completed by a given date. Comparing it with earned value shows whether work is ahead of or behind schedule.

Planning poker
A consensus estimating technique in which each team member privately picks a card showing an estimate, all reveal at once, and the highest and lowest explain their thinking before the team estimates again.
See also: Story points, Wideband Delphi

Portfolio
A collection of projects, programs and operations managed together to achieve strategic objectives. The parts need not be related to each other.
See also: Program

Power/interest grid

A stakeholder analysis tool that places people by their power over the project and their interest in it: manage closely, keep satisfied, keep informed, or monitor.

Predictive life cycle

An approach in which scope, schedule and cost are defined early and the work proceeds through planned, often sequential phases. Also known as waterfall.

See also: Adaptive life cycle, Waterfall

Probability and impact matrix

A grid that rates each risk by how likely it is and how much it would affect objectives, so risks can be ranked for further analysis and response.

Product backlog

The single, ordered list of everything that might be needed in the product, owned by the product owner. The most valuable, best-understood items sit at the top.

See also: Sprint backlog, Backlog refinement

Product owner

The person accountable for maximizing the value of the product, who owns and orders the product backlog and represents the customer's needs to the team.

Program

A group of related projects, subsidiary programs and activities managed together to gain benefits that would not come from managing them separately.

See also: Portfolio, Project

Progressive elaboration

Adding detail to a plan step by step as more information becomes available, rather than trying to specify everything at the start.

See also: Rolling wave planning

Project

A temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product, service or result. It has a defined beginning and end.

See also: Operations, Program

Project charter

The document, issued by the sponsor, that formally authorizes a project and gives the project manager authority to use organizational resources. It records the purpose, high-level objectives and key stakeholders.

Project management office (PMO)

A unit that standardizes project governance and shares resources, methods, tools and techniques. It may be supportive, controlling or directive, depending on how much control it holds.

Project management plan

The document that describes how the project will be executed, monitored, controlled and closed. It brings together the baselines and all subsidiary management plans.

Project-oriented organization

A structure in which most work is done as projects and project managers hold most of the authority over budget and people. Also called a projectized organization.

See also: Functional organization, Matrix organization

Psychological safety

A shared belief within a team that it is safe to speak up, ask questions, admit mistakes and take reasonable risks without fear of blame.

Q

Qualitative risk analysis
Prioritizing risks by assessing their probability and impact with ratings such as high, medium and low, to decide which need further analysis or action.
See also: Probability and impact matrix

Quality
The degree to which a set of characteristics fulfills requirements. Quality is planned and built in, not inspected in at the end.
See also: Grade

Quality assurance (QA)
Process-focused work that gives confidence the project will meet its quality requirements, such as audits and process improvement. It aims to prevent defects.
See also: Quality control (QC)

Quality control (QC)
Product-focused work that checks deliverables against requirements, through inspection and testing, to find defects before the customer does.
See also: Quality assurance (QA)

Quantitative risk analysis
Numerically analyzing the combined effect of risks on project objectives, using techniques such as Monte Carlo simulation, sensitivity analysis and decision trees.

R

RACI chart
A responsibility assignment matrix that shows, for each task, who is responsible, who is accountable, who is consulted and who is informed. Each task should have exactly one accountable person.

Refactoring
Improving the internal structure of code without changing what it does, to keep it clean, simple and easy to change.
See also: Technical debt

Relative estimating
Estimating items by comparing them with each other rather than in absolute hours, for example by saying one story is about twice the size of another.
See also: Story points

Release planning
Planning which features will be delivered in an upcoming release and roughly when, based on the prioritized backlog and the team's velocity.

Requirements traceability matrix
A table that links each requirement to its source and to the deliverables and tests that satisfy it, so nothing is lost and every requirement can be checked.

Residual risk
The risk that remains after a risk response has been carried out.
See also: Secondary risk

Resource leveling
Adjusting start and finish dates to balance resource demand with supply. It can lengthen the schedule and change the critical path.
See also: Resource smoothing

Resource smoothing

Adjusting activities within their available float so resource demand stays within limits. Unlike leveling, it does not change the critical path or end date.

See also: Resource leveling

Retrospective

A regular meeting in which the team reflects on how it worked, what went well and what to change, and commits to specific improvements for the next iteration.

Return on investment (ROI)

The gain from an investment relative to its cost, usually shown as a percentage: (benefit − cost) / cost.

Risk

An uncertain event or condition that, if it occurs, would have a positive or negative effect on one or more project objectives. Negative risks are threats; positive ones are opportunities.

See also: Issue

Risk appetite

The degree of uncertainty an organization or individual is willing to accept in pursuit of its goals. Risk thresholds turn it into measurable limits.

See also: Risk threshold

Risk register

The project document that lists identified risks with their causes, probability, impact, owners, agreed responses and current status.

Risk response strategies

The ways to deal with a risk. For threats: escalate, avoid, transfer, mitigate or accept. For opportunities: escalate, exploit, share, enhance or accept.

Risk threshold

The measurable level of risk exposure above which a risk needs a response, for example a cost overrun of more than 5 percent.

See also: Risk appetite

Risk-adjusted backlog

A backlog that includes risk responses as work items and is ordered by both value and risk, so high-risk items are tackled early.

Rolling wave planning

Planning near-term work in detail and later work at a higher level, then adding detail as each wave approaches.

See also: Progressive elaboration

Root cause analysis

A set of techniques used to find the underlying reason a problem or risk occurs, so the fix addresses the cause rather than the symptom.

See also: Five whys, Cause-and-effect diagram

S

Schedule baseline

The approved version of the schedule, with baseline start and finish dates, used to measure schedule performance. It changes only through change control.

Schedule performance index (SPI)

A measure of schedule efficiency, calculated as EV / PV. An SPI below 1 means less work has been done than planned; above 1 means more.

See also: Cost performance index (CPI)

Schedule variance (SV)

The difference between the value of work done and the value of work planned, calculated as EV − PV. A negative figure means the project is behind schedule.

Scope baseline

The approved scope statement, work breakdown structure and WBS dictionary, against which scope is measured and controlled.

Scope creep

Uncontrolled growth in scope without matching changes to time, cost and resources, usually because changes skip the change control process.

See also: Gold plating, Integrated change control

Scope statement

A description of the project's scope, major deliverables, acceptance criteria, exclusions, assumptions and constraints.

Scrum

A lightweight agile framework in which a small team delivers value in fixed-length sprints, with three accountabilities (product owner, Scrum master, developers), five events and three artifacts.

See also: Sprint, Scrum master, Product owner

Scrum master

The person accountable for the team's effectiveness with Scrum. They coach the team and organization, facilitate events and remove impediments; they serve rather than command.

See also: Servant leadership

Scrum of scrums

A coordination meeting in which representatives of several teams working on the same product share progress, dependencies and impediments.

Secondary risk

A new risk that arises as a direct result of carrying out a risk response.

See also: Residual risk

Self-organizing team

A team that decides for itself how to do its work and who does what, rather than being assigned tasks by a manager.

Servant leadership

A leadership style in which the leader puts the team's needs first: removing obstacles, shielding it from distractions and helping each member grow.

Spike

A short, timeboxed piece of research or experimentation to answer a question or reduce a technical risk before committing to a solution.

Sponsor

The person or group that provides resources and support for the project, champions it and is accountable for enabling its success.

Sprint

A timeboxed period of one month or less in which a Scrum team turns backlog items into a usable increment. A new sprint starts as soon as the previous one ends.

See also: Iteration

Sprint backlog

The sprint goal, the product backlog items chosen for the sprint and the team's plan for delivering them. It belongs to the developers.

Sprint planning

The event that starts a sprint, where the team agrees why the sprint is valuable, what can be done and how the work will get done.

Sprint review

An event at the end of a sprint where the team shows the increment to stakeholders, gathers feedback and adapts the product backlog. It is a working session, not just a demo.

See also: Retrospective

Stakeholder

Any individual, group or organization that may affect, be affected by or see itself as affected by a project's decisions, activities or outcomes.

Stakeholder engagement assessment matrix

A grid comparing each stakeholder's current level of engagement (unaware, resistant, neutral, supportive or leading) with the level the project needs.

Stakeholder register

A project document listing the stakeholders with their contact details, roles, interests, influence and expectations.

Statement of work (SOW)

A narrative description of the products, services or results to be delivered, used to define the work in a project or in a procurement.

Story map

A two-dimensional arrangement of user stories: the user's journey runs left to right, and detail and priority run top to bottom. Slicing it horizontally shows what each release will contain.

Story points

A unit-less measure of the relative effort, complexity and uncertainty of a user story. They are meaningful only within the team that assigns them.

See also: Velocity, Relative estimating

Sunk cost

Money already spent that cannot be recovered. It should not influence decisions about whether to continue a project.

Swarming

Several team members working together on the same item to finish it quickly, instead of each working on something separate.

T

T-shaped skills

Deep expertise in one area combined with broader, working skills in others. T-shaped people help cross-functional teams share work and avoid bottlenecks.

Tailoring

Selecting and adjusting processes, practices and artifacts to suit the specific project, team and environment, rather than applying one approach everywhere.

See also: Hybrid approach

Team charter

A document created by the team that records its values, working agreements, ground rules, decision-making and communication norms.

Technical debt

The future cost of rework caused by choosing a quick or easy solution now instead of a better one. Like financial debt, it grows if left unpaid.

See also: Refactoring

Test-driven development (TDD)

Writing an automated test before writing the code, then writing just enough code to pass it and refactoring. Short cycles keep design simple and defects low.

Three-point estimating

Estimating from optimistic (O), most likely (M) and pessimistic (P) values. The triangular mean is (O + M + P) / 3; the beta or PERT mean is (O + 4M + P) / 6.

Throughput

The number of work items a team completes in a given period. With cycle time, it is a key measure of flow.

Time and materials contract (T&M)

A hybrid contract in which the buyer pays agreed rates for labor and materials as the work is done. It suits small or quickly started work whose scope is not yet fixed.

Timebox

A fixed, maximum amount of time allotted to an activity or event. When the time is up, the activity ends, which forces focus and prioritization.

To-complete performance index (TCPI)

The cost efficiency needed on the remaining work to meet a target, calculated as (BAC − EV) / (BAC − AC). A value above 1 means the rest of the work must be done more efficiently than planned.

Trigger
A warning sign that a risk is about to occur or has occurred, prompting its owner to carry out the planned response.

Tuckman ladder
A model of team development in five stages: forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning.

U

User story
A short description of a need from the user's point of view, often written as "As a [role], I want [goal] so that [benefit]." It is a placeholder for a conversation, with acceptance criteria attached.
See also: INVEST, Epic

V

Validate scope
Formally accepting completed deliverables with the customer or sponsor. It follows quality control, which checks correctness first.
See also: Verification

Value stream mapping
A lean technique that maps every step needed to deliver a product or service, separating value-adding time from waiting and other waste.

Variance at completion (VAC)
The expected budget surplus or shortfall at the end of the project, calculated as BAC − EAC. A negative VAC means an expected overrun.

Velocity
The amount of work, usually in story points, a team completes in an iteration. It is used to forecast future capacity, not to compare teams.
See also: Story points

Verification
Checking that a deliverable complies with its specification or requirements. Validation, by contrast, confirms it meets the customer's actual needs.
See also: Validate scope

Virtual team
A team whose members work in different locations and rely mainly on digital tools to communicate and collaborate.

W

Waste
In lean thinking, anything that uses resources without adding customer value, such as partially done work, extra features, handoffs, waiting, task switching and defects.
See also: Lean

Waterfall
An informal name for a predictive life cycle in which phases such as requirements, design, build and test follow one another in sequence.
See also: Predictive life cycle

WBS dictionary

A document that gives the detail behind each element of the work breakdown structure, such as its description, owner, schedule, cost and acceptance criteria.

Wideband Delphi

A group estimating technique in which experts estimate independently, discuss the differences and estimate again until the numbers converge. Planning poker is a popular variation.

See also: Planning poker

Work breakdown structure (WBS)

A hierarchical decomposition of the total scope of work into deliverables and work packages. Work not in the WBS is outside the project's scope.

See also: Work package, WBS dictionary

Work in progress (WIP) limit

A cap on how many items may be in a workflow stage at once. Limits expose bottlenecks and push the team to finish work before starting more.

See also: Kanban, Little's Law

Work package

The lowest level of the work breakdown structure, for which cost and duration can be estimated and managed.

Workaround

An unplanned response to a threat that has occurred and for which no response had been prepared in advance.