

# Creating an Environment for Successful Projects

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Organizations that get better results from its projects make consistent and continuing efforts to nourish the environment for selecting and executing projects. The process can start with a survey to assess the project environment and continue by taking action on findings. The point is to apply a systematic approach that covers all areas, reinforces strengths, and gets results. Organizations increasingly find the need to get better outcomes from projects because that is where wealth-creation or survival comes from. A suggestion is to embrace the tenets of a project-based organization where:

- ☑ Projects create the means to generate profits and shareholder value
- ☑ People enter into relations determined by problems rather than by structure
- ☑ Cross-functional teams assemble to achieve a specific mission, with specific time and budget constraints
- ☑ Everyone is attuned and trained to support projects

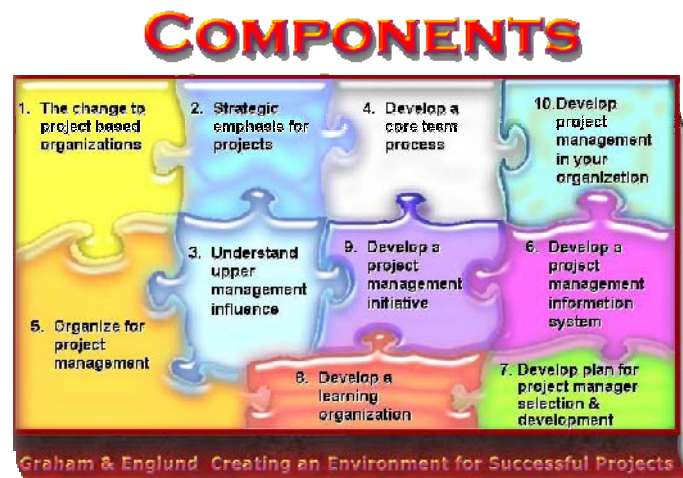
## **Summary**

[Creating an Environment for Successful Projects](#) (Graham and Englund, Jossey-Bass, 2004) guides readers to construct an environment in which projects are more successful. Its contribution fills the void for advanced project managers and managers of project managers on how to develop project management as an organizational practice. The book adds to the foundation provided by the project management body of knowledge by identifying, arguing for, and presenting examples of the conditions required for project managers and teams to apply their trade. Knowledge and procedures are not enough if the environment is toxic; practitioners need to systematically address the vital space where all conditions are present to create value through project-based work.

Any attempt at systematic change needs to include arguments about why these approaches are important and provide examples of how people implement the concepts. Put forward reasons in support of a systematic point of view. An assessment instrument, review tools, and templates ease and assist the task to begin. Profuse examples illustrate the possibilities, commitment, and thoroughness required to be successful. Ever present is the theme that all managers need to be authentic, act with integrity, and model desired behaviors.

## Synopsis

*Creating an Environment for Successful Projects* is for managers concerned about getting better results from projects within their organizations. Other books and writings create intense awareness about *what* to do; this book advances the knowledge and practice by passionately including *why* environmental conditions need to improve and describing *how* some organizations implement the concepts. Graham and Englund provide “second-level anecdotes” that describe how to get started, and they illustrate creative ways to adapt and apply potent practices. They share details of an organizational process of support for project management as practiced by leading companies, including proven practices implemented by Hewlett-Packard (HP) and other top companies. The final chapter summarizes steps applicable to any organization. The *Epilogue* adds a change management process for applying leadership to evolve a project-based organization.



The cohesive theme is to assemble the pieces of a puzzle that represent an environment for successful projects. The book devotes a chapter for each piece in order to enhance understanding of the components:

- 1) **Change to project-based organization.** Recognize the value that project outcomes provide to the organization. Realize that a project or program based organization is key to survival. Support cultural changes to revitalize the organization around projects. Organize upper managers in teams that model desired behaviors.
- 2) **Strategic emphasis for projects.** Clearly link each project to organizational goals. Use a prioritization process that everyone

understands and supports. Develop and run the organization according to a *plan of record*.

**Example:** Categorize projects into strategic “buckets” that fulfill organizational goals, determine what percent of the whole goes into each bucket (in dollars or other resources), prioritize projects according to criteria within each bucket, and resource projects in priority order until resources within that bucket are used up. The effect is a “do it all” balanced portfolio...but not doing all projects.

- 3) **Understand upper management influence.** Recognize that many upper managers did not have the benefit of the current body of knowledge about project management and may be guided by the “old story” about running an organization, such as commands and control. The “new story” is an organic organization based around projects. Support the planning process. Negotiate reasonable deadlines. Be careful to support, not interfere, in times of anxiety (when most management mistakes are made!). Reward desired behaviors on projects.
- 4) **Develop a core team process.** Define a core team that directs and stays together during the entire project—knowledge workers are not interchangeable parts. Support trust building, and clearly define roles and responsibilities.
- 5) **Organize for project management.** Set up systems that focus on results, not controls. Provide the necessary scoping and authority to project managers. Align projects with customers, and involve end-users throughout projects. Design effective decision-making processes. Recognize that there is no one perfect organizational structure. Ensure at least that the organization does not get in the way of doing projects.
- 6) **Develop a project management information system.** Use information to relieve anxiety. Ask stakeholders how they will use the information and provide the right information at the right time to answer those questions. Eliminate benefits of poor communications by placing greater value on good communications. Highlight interdependencies of projects across the organization.
- 7) **Develop a plan for project manager selection and development.** Put leaders at the helm who have an aptitude for producing results by working with people and who are trained in the profession of project management. *Be careful* not to support the accidental project

manager syndrome—promoting people into the profession because of achievement in other areas or because he or she suggested the project. The project manager skill set is different.

- 8) **Develop a learning organization.** View each project as an opportunity to produce a result plus improve the project management process. Perform project reviews and take action on key findings. Make learning a priority. Develop organizational project management competency. Set expectations that working on projects is a positive experience and can be fun. Implement a “gardener’s” approach to the environment.

*Example:* A gardener cannot command a tree to grow. He or she creates environmental conditions that support the tree to flourish...soil, nutrition, air, and sun.

- 9) **Develop a project management initiative or project office.** Organizations improve their ability to get results when they make a concerted effort to get better at doing projects. Form a group to lead the continuous improvement of project management across the organization by offering training, consulting, facilitation, and sharing of best practices. See [\*Creating the Project Office: a Manager's Guide to Leading Organizational Change\*](#), Englund, Graham, Dinsmore (Jossey-Bass, 2003).

- 10) **Develop project management in your organization.** Focus on the project environment and culture. Develop a project management initiative. Assess the current state, benchmark with others, define an improvement plan, implement changes and track progress. Recognize the contributions of program and project managers and the value of the project management process. Invest in training.

The recurring theme, and glue, that holds the pieces together within any organization is the authenticity and integrity displayed by its leaders. Authenticity means that managers believe what they say. Integrity means that they do what they say they will do, and for the reasons they originally stated. Demonstrating these values in action often makes the difference between success and failure. Avoid “integrity crimes” where people feel violated by actions inconsistent with words. Demonstrate through a project portfolio management process, driven by upper managers working together as a team, how each project contributes to organizational strategic goals. Managers who do not “walk the talk” seldom motivate people to follow them. By linking intentions, words, and actions, authenticity and integrity connect

the head and the heart. They help leaders establish credibility among followers. A legitimate leader achieves the ultimate reward: recognition by followers that the leader is credible and worthy of following.

Go to [www.englundpmc.com](http://www.englundpmc.com), click on "Offerings" and "Assessment" to see the *Environmental Assessment Survey Instrument (EASI)*. This survey steps each person through the ten pieces of the puzzle and produces a score for how well projects are supported. This data may be benchmarked against other organizations and provide the basis for action planning to create an environment for more successful projects. This data provides an effective means to get the attention of other managers about the current state, especially in data-driven organizations. Follow-on discussions open the door to decide upon and take action in key strategic areas that can provide the best return from project-based work.

Awareness and knowledge are first steps in leading change towards a project-based organization. Consulting and facilitated work sessions are the means to:

- conduct an assessment across the organization
- discover strengths that need to be reinforced
- design actions plans
- reap the benefits available in an environment that supports the right projects done right.