Your Guide to INTELLIGENT ASSURANCE
PLANNING TO ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS AT THE RIGHT TIME

Experienced change leaders know that from time to time, even the best-run programmes or projects may run into difficulties. That same experience also tells them that the best way of ensuring the smoothest journey is to proactively build in the assurance that the change remains:

• in control and
• on plan to achieve the intended outcome

And if it's not, then that same assurance activity needs to provide the clear set of actions to get things back on track.

PLANNED OR UNPLANNED?

Unplanned assurance is often called for by business leaders who just get a feeling that something isn't right; we've provided some thought on this in "What to do when things don't feel right" on the Project One website.

Planned assurance is integrated into the overall programme or project and proactively provides the assurance that is needed, focusing on the specific stage that the programme is at. Typically it is undertaken on critical business change where there are significant levels of investment and complexity in order to:

• Quickly identify priority areas for attention by the Executive and programme team
• Provide an independent assessment of the current state that would be available to a new Sponsor or Programme Manager
• To satisfy regulatory or compliance requirements

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT IT!

On the next page is the framework that we have used extensively and successfully as the basis for asking the right questions at the right point in time.

Not too early to be meaningless and not too late to be irrelevant. **That's *intelligent* assurance.**

A large manufacturing programme was reviewed very early on to answer the question "are we set up for success" – an example of the right review at the right time, giving timely recommendations to help make this a very successful (and award-winning) programme.

A review of a large programme for a utility company created all the right recommendations, but the programme manager was dismissed and the recommendations ignored – an example of a review being done for all the wrong reasons. The programme continued to struggle instead of being set right.

When done well

Properly planned and executed, good assurance will:

• **Increase the likelihood and confidence of delivering the desired outcomes**
• **Focus decision making on the key issues that will drive success (and reduce 'noise')**
• **Improve Sponsor engagement and create a "call to arms" where necessary**
• **Provide early warning of possible issues to better inform decision making and mitigating actions**
• **Provide clear and practical actions to reduce delivery risk and increase confidence**

When done badly

Sometimes, even planned assurance doesn't provide what is needed, most likely because it:

• **Overly focuses on compliance with processes and controls as opposed to achievement of outcomes**
• **Generates unclear and/or unrealistic actions that cannot be implemented**
• **Does not actually help the people charged with taking action**

We met with a Programme Director who had initiated a health-check on his programme, which suggested he needed another layer of governance but has completely missed the fact that there was a £7m hole in the finances - an example of the wrong questions being asked by an inexperienced review team.

Project1

projectone.com

Setup

- Define the project and the business case behind it
- Establish the outline business solution, the delivery approach and plan
- Establish necessary controls and stakeholder plans

Delivery

Design	Build	Test	Implement

- Prepare the business for the solution
- Management and control
  Delivery, Stakeholders, Business case

Implementation

- Implement the changes to the business
- Embed the changes and deliver the benefits
- Close the project and capture lessons learnt

Setting up for success

- Are there clear and well defined outcomes for the business change?
- Are all the stakeholders aligned and are the accountabilities clear?
- Is the business case realistic?
- Will the proposed approach and plan deliver the outcomes without undue risk?
- Are the key risks understood and is mitigation appropriate?
- Are the dependencies and constraints understood and are the planning assumptions realistic?

Creating a Firm Foundation

- Are the requirements clear and aligned to the outcomes?
- Is the detailed plan and approach achievable?
- Are the forecast costs realistic and value for money?
- Has the sourcing approach been assessed and risks appropriately mitigated?
- Are proposed contracts appropriate and do they adequately manage risk?
- Is resourcing sufficient and appropriate?
- Are the controls appropriate and effective?

Delivering with Certainty

- Will the solution deliver the requirements and outcomes?
- Is the detailed plan and approach still achievable?
- Are the forecast costs realistic and value for money?
- Are the business teams bought-in and engaged?
- Are all key stakeholders clear on and in agreement with the solution and delivery risks?
- Are benefit owners agreed and engaged?
- Are forecast benefits still in-line with the business case?

Ready for Operation

- Are realisation plans agreed?
- Are the business teams pulling for the change?
- Are the implications and risks associated with the test approach understood?
- Are the implementation plans robust, with risks and mitigation actions agreed?
- Are roll-back plans realistic, with trigger points and decision owners agreed?
- Are warranties and sufficient?
- Are service plans, resources and agreements in place?
- Are all impacted teams in agreement with the implementation approach?

Realising Benefits

- Is end-user satisfaction within acceptable limits?
- Are operations able to support the change without warranty?
- Are appropriate plans in place for managing outstanding activities and risks?
- Have lessons been captured and shared?
- Are contracted commercial arrangements operating satisfactorily?
- Are benefits being tracked and realised as forecast?
- Are service level agreements appropriate, achievable and being met?