Jeff Oltmann on Mastering Projects
A Program is Not a Project on Steroids

Failure to Satisfy

Large, complicated projects frequently fail to satisfy their customers. Because of their size and complexity, they must coordinate multiple related streams of project work, all of which must be successful at just the right time in order to deliver the complete solution that the customer needs. For example, consider a project to create a new product such as a next-generation tablet computer. This new product must tie together elements as diverse as hardware and software, new services, customer support, custom integration for corporate customers, and channel development. Failure to coordinate all of these elements into an integrated solution means failing to satisfy customers and generate sufficient revenue.

Failure to coordinate causes internal damage, too. Projects working at cross purposes cause chaos within the performing organization, wasting scarce resources and time. They can lead to a fragmented product line or enterprise architecture, thus driving up long-term inventory, development, and support costs.

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Separate, uncoordinated projects can't overcome these challenges, but a program can. A program is an integrated method to manage a group of related projects, thus obtaining business benefits that would be impossible if they were managed independently.

Creating a Symphony

A program is not merely a project on steroids. It is more like a conductor leading an orchestra. Just as the players in the orchestra play the necessary notes, the projects integrated by a program do most of the real work. But

> *A program is …*
> - *a group of related projects*
> - *managed in a coordinated [integrated] way*
> - *to obtain benefits and control not available from managing them individually*
>
> *The Standard for Program Management®, Project Management Institute (PMI), 2006*

without a conductor, the music created by a collection of independent players would not coalesce into a grand symphony. Similarly, without a program a collection of independent projects doesn't work together to create an integrated product or solution.

The picture on the next page illustrates how this works. Program Alpha manages *a group of related projects* (projects 1 through 5) in *a coordinated way* to create an integrated result (system or product) Zeta. Zeta, and therefore program Alpha, is not successful unless each project is individually successful *and* all of them work together. When this happens, the performing organization *obtains the benefits* of an integrated result, which is the only thing that the customer will buy. Program Alpha doesn't supersede the individual pro-

jects – it is an umbrella that coordinates the work of all component projects to create the complete solution.
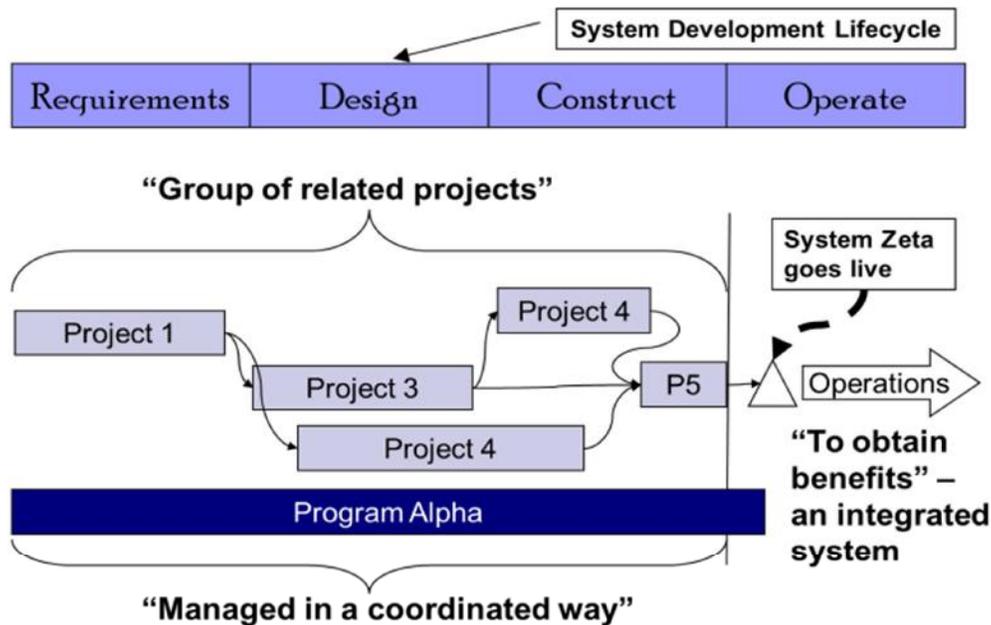
Key Differences

Although they share some techniques, there are other key differences between project and program management. The

types of new customers. The Project Management Institute calls this *benefits realization*.

Working Together

Program management is essential for project-based organizations that do complex project work. Used together

biggest, of course, is that a project manager is responsible for delivering a single successful project, while a program manager must successfully deliver the entire integrated set of projects to achieve a single objective.

Programs are also evaluated differently than projects. Typically, projects are deemed a success if they complete on time, on budget, and with the specified features and functionality.

However, programs are evaluated on the business results that they achieve – for example, increased market share, a targeted gross margin percentage, or acquisition of specified numbers and

with other management techniques, it helps them consistently take business ideas to business results. The picture on the final page shows this.

- Strategic planning aims an organization in the right direction. It establishes high level business objectives that are in line with business opportunities and customer needs.
- Project portfolio management focuses on doing the right projects. It selects the best from a pool of potential projects, aligning them to the high-level business objectives while considering the limited resources and capabilities of the organization.
- Project and program management execute the selected projects. Good

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project management does projects right, while program management does projects together.

Endpoint

Organizations as diverse as Intel, L-3 Communications, NASA, and Tektronix have found that programs are essential for creating complex, integrated solutions. If uncoordinated projects at your organization deliver only partial solutions to customers, add program management to your toolbox of techniques.
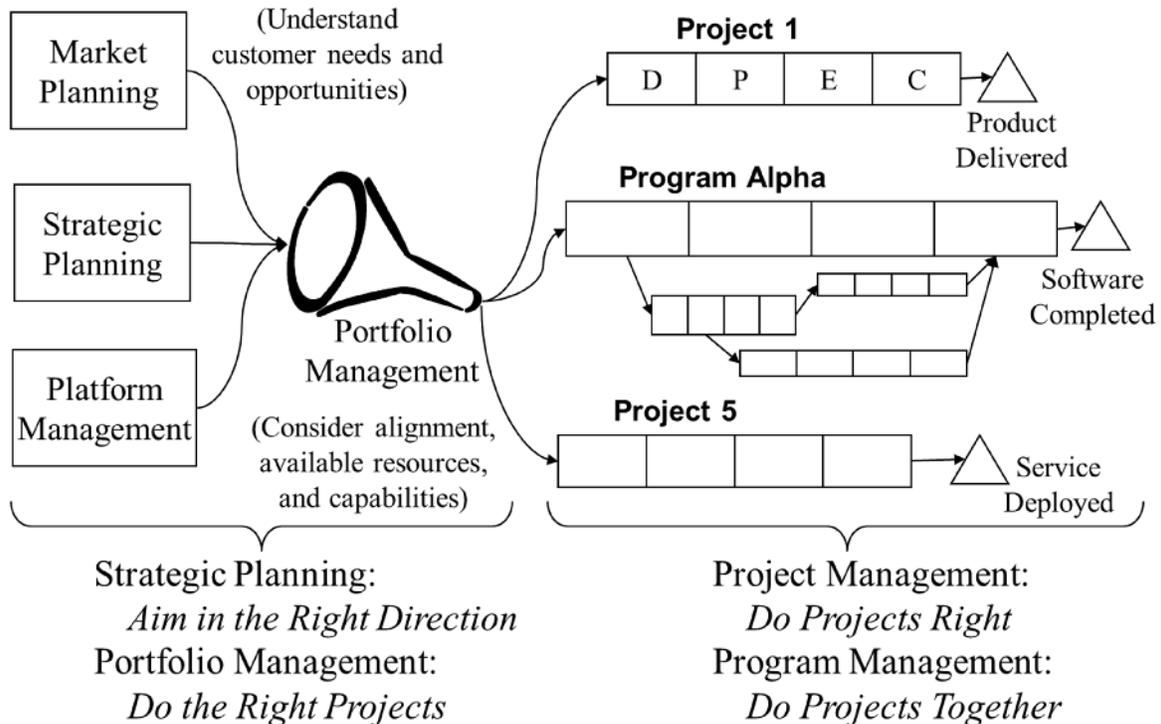
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