

## PM WORLD TODAY – PM ADVISORY – MARCH 2010

## Project Portfolio Management – The Art of Saying “No”

Part 5 of 5: Building Portfolio Monitoring and Governance

*By Jeff Oltmann*

## Not Done Yet

Effective project organizations say “no,” declining to do some worthy projects so they can focus their limited resources on only the very best. Narrowing their focus to a smaller portfolio of projects makes the remaining projects more successful.

Previous articles in this series described how to build a good portfolio of projects using the discipline of *project portfolio management* (PPM).

1. Identify strategic drivers of the portfolio.
2. Use agreed-on criteria to distinguish the best candidate projects from the rest. As quality pioneer Joseph Juran famously urged, “Separate the vital few from the trivial many.”
3. Construct a balanced portfolio that delivers high value, uses resources efficiently, and aligns with strategy.
4. Validate that the portfolio is feasible to execute using the resources and skills that are realistically available.
5. Initiate the projects, handing them off to program and project management.

See Figure 1 for a quick review of the portfolio management process that I covered in previous articles.

By the time they have reached this point, the portfolio management team has accomplished much. Starting with fuzzy concepts and project proposals, they have created an active, integrated portfolio of projects. However, their job is not done. They must monitor the portfolio, manage changes and tradeoffs across projects, and ensure that a governance framework clearly establishes responsibilities. This article addresses those issues.

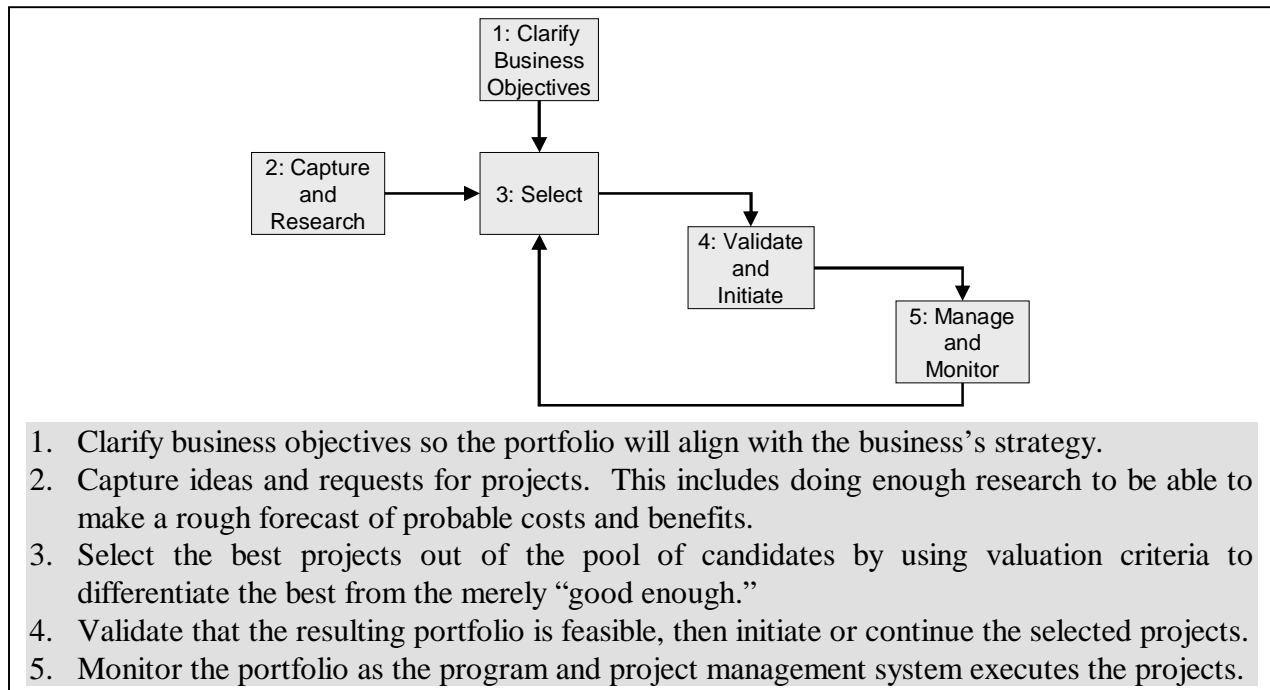
## Manage and Monitor

After validating the portfolio, put it into execution. Initiate the new projects and programs, inserting them into the project management system. Although program and project managers are responsible for day-to-day execution of each project, the portfolio

manager's job continues. He monitors the execution of the portfolio and its component projects, ensuring that they continue to meet the portfolio's original design objectives.

In the *Manage and Monitor* step, the portfolio manager works closely with the project managers or the PMO to:

- Gather information to monitor the performance of the portfolio.
- Identify and resolve issues within the portfolio, including reallocating resources.
- Steer the portfolio, making changes when necessary to rescue, re-scope, cancel, or introduce new projects.
- Manage escalations and mid-cycle requests for changes to portfolio composition, for example adding new projects.
- Initiate a full portfolio review and reconstruction on a scheduled basis, such as quarterly or annually, or when conditions change significantly.

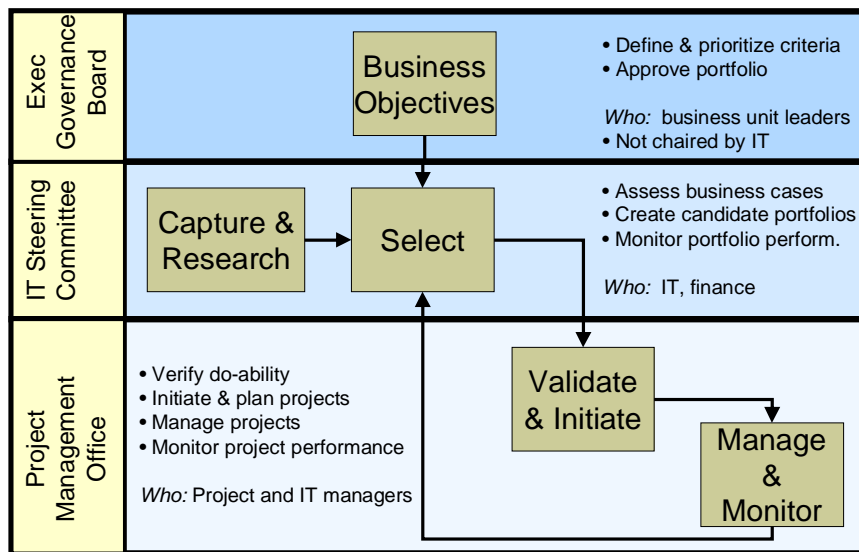


**Figure 1: Review of PPM Process Steps**

## Portfolio Governance

Portfolio management processes and tools are important, but not sufficient. Portfolio management is really about *people* – people at very senior management levels sharing power and decision-making responsibilities.

Therefore, a successful portfolio management system must have a clear governance structure. Portfolio governance specifies who has responsibilities in each process step and how they work together to make good decisions about projects and resources. As an example, Figure 2 shows the portfolio governance structure used by an IT organization (Oltmann, 2007, 140). In this example, three groups – the PMO, the IT Steering Committee, and the Executive Governance Board - have formal responsibility for various steps of the process. The diagram shows who is represented on each group, what each group does, and where handoffs occur.



## Lessons from Experience

From my experience managing portfolios and helping clients, I believe a good portfolio management system has these seven attributes.

1. Encourages structured investment decision-making based on clear criteria
2. Helps make hard tradeoffs, including saying no to some projects
3. Aligns project and program execution to strategic objectives of the organization
4. Backed by strong, long-term executive participation
5. Is an on-going process that frequently looks at strategic issues, not just at tactical details
6. Favors process simplicity and transparency
7. Strongly tied to governance

Organizations that combine effective project portfolio management with good project management get these results:

- Faster time to market or deployment
- Higher productivity

- Less chaos
- Strategy that really gets implemented

For example, the IBM Institute for Business Values scored the performance of over 20 electronics and high technology manufacturers from 1996 – 2001. Leaders in portfolio management delivered earnings performance that was 46% more predictable than the performance of poor performers. The authors say, “Leaders in portfolio management stand in stark contrast to many companies, where portfolio management only occurs when poor business performance and reduced budgets force crisis-mode cuts to projects.” (Cooper, 2002, p 12)

## Endpoint

The next time you hear the complaint “We’re spread too thin,” look below the surface. Are your projects unfocused and misaligned? Do too many “good” projects compete for too few resources? Combining project portfolio management with project management will help you “do the right projects and do them right.”

Cooper, J., Greenberg, D., Zuk, J. (2002) Reshaping the funnel: Making innovation more profitable for high-tech manufacturers. Retrieved on June 27, 2008 from <http://www-935.ibm.com/services/in/index.wss/ibvstudy/igs/x1022009?cntxt=x1021857>

Oltmann, J. (2007, May) *Portfolio Management of Projects*. Class, Center for Professional Development, Oregon Health & Science University, Portland, Oregon.

See previous articles in this series:

Oltmann, Jeff; “Project Portfolio Management – The Art of Saying ‘No’ – Part 1”, *PM World Today*, April 2009; <http://www.pmforum.org/library/tips/2009/PDFs/apr/Oltmann-%20Portfolio-Management.pdf>.

Oltmann, Jeff; “Project Portfolio Management – The Art of Saying ‘No’ – Part 2: First, Know Where You Want to Go”, *PM World Today*, July 2009; <http://www.pmforum.org/library/tips/2009/PDFs/july/Oltmann-Portfolio-Management-2-of-6.pdf>

Oltmann, Jeff; “Project Portfolio Management – The Art of Saying ‘No’ – Part 3: How to Select the Best Projects” , *PM World Today*, September 2009; <http://www.pmforum.org/library/tips/2009/PDFs/sept/Advisory-Oltmann-Portfolio3of6.pdf>

Oltmann, Jeff; “Project Portfolio Management – The Art of Saying ‘No’ – Part 4: Keeping Your Portfolio Balanced”, *PM World Today*, November 2009; <http://www.pmforum.org/library/tips/2009/PDFs/nov/Advisory-Oltmann-PortfolioPM4of6.pdf>.

**About the Author:*****Jeff Oltmann, PMP****Author*

**Jeff Oltmann** is principal consultant at Synergy Professional Services, LLC in Portland, Oregon, USA ([www.spspro.com](http://www.spspro.com)). He is also on the graduate faculty of the Division of Management at Oregon Health and Science University. His specialties include strategy deployment, operational excellence, and project portfolio management. Jeff is a seasoned leader with over 20 years of experience managing successful technology programs. He ran the Program Management Office (PMO) and a \$60M project portfolio for IBM's xSeries development facility in Oregon. Jeff's hands-on program management experience includes program budgets over \$100M and worldwide cross-functional teams of over 100 members. Jeff welcomes your questions and ideas. You can contact him at [jeff@spspro.com](mailto:jeff@spspro.com) or read previous articles at [www.spspro.com/resources.htm](http://www.spspro.com/resources.htm).