Process Discipline and Constant Change: Are They Diametrically Opposed?

Greetings Practitioners! This month's *Practitioner* explores the apparent conundrum between process discipline and the steady state of change the that surrounds our project management environment.

Planning is generally the key component in successful project outcomes. However, once execution begins even the best laid plans will require adaptive change as the project progresses from start to finish.

The very nature of project management forges seasoned project managers whose expertise is in adapting to the dynamics of any given project environment. The dynamics we are operating in today are reflected in other outlets like this recent title from the RadWaste Summit – "Find Clarity in Chaos."

Because change is the one constant in all aspects of our lives we need to be committed to managing it effectively. This is where process discipline plays a key role in our success. How we define process discipline is where we can make a difference. The process discipline we are most interested in is the outcome versus the approach. When we become enamored with the approach we struggle with change, but if we shift our focus to an outcome process discipline, we can stay tethered to project delivery that is innovative, efficient, and effective. By applying these attributes to our project management process discipline we minimize the trap of getting caught up in the we've always done it this way or that way trap. If the key drivers in our project delivery are innovation, efficiency, and effectiveness, changes in the approach will not derail our project.

So, with all that said, let's look at recent changes and ponder how we will adapt, while maintaining our process discipline attributes of innovation, efficiency, and effectiveness. Below is the contents of a recent DOE memorandum from the Secretary of Energy, Chris Wright:

"The Department of Energy's National Laboratory system serves as the backbone of the Nation's scientific enterprise. Founded as part of a strategic national investment in science during and following World War II, the National Laboratories form the most comprehensive research network of its kind. While most of the National Laboratories' work is driven by the Department's primary missions in energy innovation, science discovery, nuclear security, and environmental cleanup, they are a national resource and serve the national interest by addressing challenges extending beyond energy and catalyzing research that spans across sectors.

The Secretary of Energy
Washington, DC 20585

March 21, 2025

MEMORANDUM FOR HEADS OF DEPARTMENTAL ELEMENTS AND NATIONAL LABORATORY DIRECTORS

FROM: CHRIS WRIGHT *Chris Wright*
            SECRETARY OF ENERGY

SUBJECT: Strengthening National Laboratory Efficiency and Mission Execution

The Department of Energy's National Laboratory system serves as the backbone of the Nation's scientific enterprise. Founded as part of a strategic national investment in science during and following World War II, the National Laboratories form the most comprehensive research network of its kind. While most of the National Laboratories' work is driven by the Department's primary missions in energy innovation, science discovery, nuclear security, and environmental cleanup, they are a national resource and serve the national interest by addressing challenges extending beyond energy and catalyzing research that spans across sectors.

As Federally Funded Research and Development Centers (FFRDC) managed through Management and Operating (M&O) contracts, it is imperative that we continually evaluate existing requirements and processes to ensure that the National Laboratories have the necessary authority and flexibility to successfully execute critical missions on behalf of the Department of Energy and the Nation. To that end, I am directing the following actions to be implemented immediately:

- Revise delegated project authority within DOE Order 413.3B from $50 million to $300 million specific to the National Laboratories managed under M&O contracts. Tailor DOE Order 413.3B to only require DOE independent project reviews at specific critical decision points on projects between $300 million - $1 billion, subject to sustained successful project execution. Capital asset projects with a total project cost of more than $1 billion shall continue to follow the full scope of requirements established in DOE Order 413.3B.

- Expand the use of the National Nuclear Security Administration's successful "OSHA-Plus" framework for subcontracted construction projects at the National Laboratories. The framework uses a tailored, graded approach to meet Title 10 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 851, *Worker Safety and Health Program*, which increases competition and reduces costs while maintaining a safe work environment.

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- *"Assess the benefits and risks of removing construction labor agreement provisions from National Laboratory contracts. Risks to be evaluated include increased potential for labor strikes and local community concerns.*

- *"Revise National Laboratory contract clauses on Employee Compensation: Pay and Benefits to eliminate requirements that are not mandated by statute/regulation or are not necessary to monitor DOE's financial liabilities related to defined benefit plans. The National Laboratories must continue to comply with FAR 31.205-6, DEAR 970.5216-7, and DEAR 970.3102-05-6, and will be accountable for pay and benefits decisions subject to annual audits.*

"In addition to the above actions for immediate implementation, the Laboratory Operations Board Director shall establish a working group to identify opportunities to streamline and, as necessary, develop new procedures and timelines to ensure greater efficiency and accountability for Strategic Partnership Projects (SPP) and Cooperative Research and Development Agreements (CRADA). Proposed improvements or streamlining initiatives shall be provided to the Office of the Secretary within 30 days.

"These measures are representative of focused and purposeful actions to prudently streamline our processes, place decision-making authority at the appropriate level, and reduce unnecessary administrative burden on both the laboratories and federal stewards to more efficiently and effectively enable critical mission objectives. It is critical that we implement new delegations and flexibilities as intended, working collaboratively to ensure streamlining efforts have the intended outcome. The Laboratory Operations Board will be responsible for coordinating the necessary actions outlined in this memorandum and tracking implementation."

This Secretary's memo is reflective of the type and magnitude of change that symbolizes the current project management environment across most industries, challenging both our adaptive skill set and testing our commitment to maintaining our innovative, efficient, and effective outcome oriented process discipline attributes in managing projects. At the end of the day, process discipline and constant change are not diametrically opposed, but are partners in successful project management.

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It Is Not One World

Project Change - More Than Just Scope

By Nicole Tiefensee, Runn blog author

When we think of project change, the first thing that jumps to mind is scope change. While managing project scope plays a significant part in keeping your project on track, you might also encounter other changes along the way, such as:

- Changes to your **target delivery date** and project **milestones**.
- **Cost** changes, for people or other resources required to deliver the project.
- **Technical** changes, e.g. a shift to a new technology or software.
- Change in **assumptions**, e.g. about who your target audience is, which might lead to;
- Change in **priorities**.
- New **rules and regulations**, such as the EU's new General Data Protection Regulations that recently came into effect.
- **People** leaving the project and/or new people joining the team.
- Etc.

Essentially, a change is anything, that will have an impact on other aspects of your project—most notably the project schedule, the budget, the scope and resourcing.

In this guide, let's look at how you can effectively handle change. But first, a small recap:

What is a project change

A project change is a modification in your originally defined project plan that you agreed upon with your client. This change request can impact the project budget, tasks, structures, processes, other projects in your pipeline, and other aspects.

Interestingly, project changes go beyond small scope changes — extending to modification requests to deliverables, timeline schedule, payment terms, project specifics, and the resources working on a project.

The changes you encounter in your project plan can also be big or small. For example, a long-term client may request a more senior staff member (say someone they've worked with in the past) to complete their project. Or a client may request urgent delivery.

What are the types of change?

Some changes are planned or, rather, expected. For instance, your client could say they'd share more details that may impact the project scope when data from their market research comes in.

Knowing the types of change, however, helps you deal with unplanned changes. After all, smoothly managing change requests is first a mindset game, followed by the strategy part (how you handle the execution).

With that, here are the types of change:

- *Happened change.* A change that happens because of external factors and no one including the client has any control over it. For example, new mailing regulations.
- *Reactive change.* A change that happens in response to an event. For example, poor user feedback to a new feature you roll for a client.
- *Anticipatory change.* A change that you're expecting as a result of an event or a chain of events. For example, changes to team structures and leadership due to recession.
- *Operational change.* A change that's implemented to get an edge over the competition. For example, a competitor ramping up their marketing campaigns.

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- ***Strategic change.*** A change that happens due to changes in the management. For example, a new leader in the client's organization might want to do things differently.

Why is project change management important?

Managing change well is an excellent professional muscle to build — one that impresses, wins, and retains clients.

It's not to say that all requested changes are needed, or that project managers should be uber-flexible in allowing for changes any time the clients want. Instead, create a solid change process that tells clients when it's okay to request changes and how.

For example, having a change request form in place indicates to clients that you won't entertain every small, unneeded change request they ask for. Instead, they'll have to explain the need for the change for you to implement it.

This type of flexibility in project management improves client satisfaction while also helping you set boundaries and tight project scopes.

When you entertain and correctly execute important change requests, clients realize they're getting the most bang for their buck. The result? Happy clients that you are better able to retain.

Not to mention, rigid processes can impact the quality of the deliverables. Certain project changes can, however, improve deliverables, helping the client win.

Now for how to manage project changes.

Embrace change - it's inevitable

Whether a change is big or small, one thing is inevitable: There will always be changes in a project.

It's impossible to know everything upfront (if you did, your job would be obsolete!). Change is a product of learning and you, your team and your client will learn new things everyday as the project progresses. Rather than seeing it as something that should be avoided at all cost, see it as something that has the potential to make your project outcome better.

10 tips to manage project change

Managing changes is important, no matter what project methodology you use to deliver your project. If changes are not assessed, discussed and appropriately dealt with they can lead to unrecoverable schedule slips, resource conflicts and cost overruns

Here are 10 essential tips to manage change on client projects:

1. Know your baseline

The baseline is your initial plan that you have agreed upon with your client. It is documented in your statement of work and should include:

- scope and high level requirements
- goals and objectives
- budget
- project schedule
- key milestones
- target delivery dates

2. Know your client's priorities

Make sure you agree with your client on what's important. Firstly, understand how fixed the scope, budget and

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timings are. Secondly, take a look at the scope and determine with your client which requirements are absolute must-haves in order to achieve the objectives, and which ones are nice-to-haves. This will inform your change process (see below) and will help you assess and communicate the impact of changes further down the track.

3. Define the change process

At the start of the project, outline to your client how you will be dealing with changes in general, and scope changes in particular, and document it in your statement of work or initiation document. This doesn't need to be anything elaborate, but at a minimum you should outline:

- that changes are inevitable (you can never tell this to your client too many times!)
- how you define change.
- how you will be dealing with changes throughout the project.
- who can request changes; and
- who will sign-off on changes.

Ideally you want to put together the change process with your client, to ensure you have their buy in and everyone understands what's involved.

4. Know the decision makers

Make sure you are talking to the right people at the client side and understand who the decision makers are. This ties in with the point above - who will sign-off on change? It's not uncommon that the client side project lead can sign-off on changes to some level, but needs to bring in their manager if budget changes exceed a certain $ amount.

5. Document changes

Information about a change can come to you in lots of different ways. The client might request the change directly—in a meeting, via email or over the phone. Or you might come across it during a team meeting, e.g. when your tech lead mentions that changing the technical architecture would make the project more robust in the long-term.

A good practice is to document all changes in a change log so you don't lose track of them. There's lots of free templates out there you can use. I personally like a girl's guide to project management's change log template as it's nice and simple. I'd also recommend using a G-sheet or Smartsheet so you can easily share your change log with stakeholders and collaborate on it with your team.

6. Communicate about change - early and often

Make sure to tell your clients about possible changes as soon as you learn about them. Review the change log with your client during your weekly meeting and include an update in your status report.

7. Review the change and assess impact

Once you have come across and documented a request for change, you, or someone on your team, will need to take a look at the potential impact on scope, schedule, delivery dates, budget, quality and resources. Collect all the facts, then put together a recommendation so you and your client can make an informed decision on how to move forward. One thing to be aware of when dealing with lots of change requests is the "impact of the impact". It's most likely that the people on your team will be involved in assessing the impact of change, which will take them away from their current work.

8. Get approval

Make sure you have an audit trail / formal process for signing off on changes so there are no misunderstandings.

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9. Go ahead with the changed plan

Lastly, once the change is approved, go ahead and update your project plan, budget tracker, schedule and any other documentation you use to track and report on your project.

10. Beware of all the little things creeping in

I don't know about you, but "just" seems to be my client's favorite word. "Can't you just quickly do this?", "It's just changing the copy.", "Can't you just copy and paste this from another project?" Doing your client a little favor here and there is totally fine and can help you build a good working relationship. But remember, you're not running a charity, and lots of small changes will add up, so don't be afraid to say no and stick to your process.

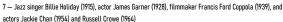# Just for Fun: April's Notable Events and Famous Birthdays

Notable Events

1 — The dollar sign was invented (1778), *General Hospital* first aired on TV (1963), cigarette ads on TV and radio were banned (1970), the first Major League Baseball strike began (1972), Apple Computers was founded (1976), singer Marvin Gaye was murdered by his father (1984), and Gmail was introduced (2004).

2 — The U.S. Mint was established (1792), Argentina invaded the Falkland Islands (1982), and Pope John Paul II died (2005).

3 — The Pony Express began mail service (1860), and outlaw Jesse James was killed (1882).

4 — President William Henry Harrison died after serving only 32 days in office (1841), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was signed (1949), Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated (1968), the World Trade Center opened (1973), and Microsoft was founded (1975).

5 — Kareem Abdul-Jabbar broke the all-time NBA scoring record (1984), and grunge rocker Kurt Cobain committed suicide (1994).

6 — The Mormon church was established (1830), the first modern Olympic games opened (1896), explorers Matthew A. Henson and Robert E. Perry reached the North Pole (1909), the U.S. officially entered World War I (1917), Twinkies were introduced (1930), and Teflon was invented (1938).

7 — The World Health Organization was created (1948), Hank Aaron broke Babe Ruth's career home run record (1974), **Frank Robinson became Major League Baseball's first Black manager** (1975), and astronaut Ellen Ochoa became the first Hispanic woman in space (1993).

9 — The Civil War ended with the Confederate surrender to the Union (1865), and U.S. forces captured Baghdad during the Iraq War (2003).

10 — The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was established (1866), the PGA was formed (1916), World War II's infamous Bataan Death March began (1942), *The House of Wax*, the first color 3-D movie, opened in theaters (1953), and the Beatles officially broke up (1970).

11 — A boxing match was the first live sporting event broadcast on radio (1921), the ill-fated *Apollo 13* launched (1970), and Ugandan dictator Idi Amin was overthrown (1979).

12 — The American Civil War began (1861), Puerto Rico became a U.S. territory (1900), President Franklin D. Roosevelt died (1945), and Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin became the first human in space (1961).

13 — The first nonstop flight from Europe to North America was completed (1928), Sidney Poitier became the first Black actor to win the Best Actor Oscar (1964), and Tiger Woods won his first of five Masters golf tournaments (1997).

14 — The first Webster's Dictionary was published (1828), and President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated (1865).

15 — The *Titanic* sank (1912), Jackie Robinson broke Major League Baseball's color barrier (1941), the first franchised McDonald's restaurant opened (1955), and **a fire destroyed much of the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris** (2019).

16 — The first U.S. postage stamp books were issued (1900), and a mass shooting at Virginia Tech University took place (2007).

17 — The Bay of Pigs invasion began (1961), the Ford Mustang debuted (1964), and *Apollo 13* returned to Earth (1970).

18 — The Great San Francisco earthquake struck (1906).

19 — The Revolutionary War began (1775), the Branch Dividian siege ended (1993); and the Federal Building in Oklahoma City was bombed (1995).

20 — Rome was founded (753 BC), WWI's Red Baron was shot down and killed (1918), Administrative Professionals Day was first celebrated (1952), and a mass shooting at Columbine High school in Littleton, Colo., took place (1999).

21 — The first movie projector was demonstrated in the U.S. (1895), the Spanish-American War began (1898), China's Tiananmen Square protest began (1989), and music superstar Prince died (2016).

22 — The first National League baseball game was played (1876), the first human eye transplant was performed (1969), and the first Earth Day was observed (1970).

23 — Hank Aaron hit his first major league home run (1954).

24 — The Library of Congress was established (1800), the Eastman Kodak Company was formed (1888), the first U.S. coast-to-coast car trip ended after 32 days (1908), Ireland's Easter Rising began (1916), and an attempt to rescue the American hostages in Iran ended in disaster (1980).

25 — The Mexican-American War began (1846), the Suez Canal broke ground (1859), New York became the first state to require license plates on cars (1901), the NFL adopted overtime for regular-season games (1974), and **the Hubble Space Telescope was placed into orbit** (1990).
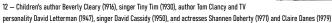
26 — Saturn was first observed (1514), and the world's worst nuclear disaster occurred at Chernobyl, Russia (1986).

27 — The first Social Security checks were distributed (1937).

28 — Boxer Muhammad Ali refused induction into the Army and was stripped of his world title (1967).

29 — The first Roget's Thesaurus was published (1852), and the zipper was officially patented (1917).

30 — The Louisiana Purchase was finalized (1803), the ice cream cone made its debut (1904), Bugs Bunny made his debut (1936), Mr. Potato Head hit toy store shelves (1952), and the Vietnam War ended with the fall of Saigon (1975).

Birthdays

1 — Actresses Debbie Reynolds (1932) and Ali MacGraw (1939)

2 — Fairy tale author Hans Christian Anderson (1805), singer Marvin Gaye (1939), and actor Dana Carvey (1955)

3 — Actor Marlon Brando and entertainer Doris Day (1924), astronaut Gus Grissom (1926), singers Wayne Newton (1942) and Tony Orlando (1944), actor Alec Baldwin (1958), comedian Eddie Murphy (1961), and Olympic champion skier Picabo Street (1971)

4 — Blues singer Muddy Waters (1915), author Maya Angelou (1928), and actors Cloris Leachman (1926), Craig T. Nelson (1946), and Robert Downey Jr. (1965)

5 — Actors Spencer Tracy (1900), Bette Davis (1908), and Gregory Peck (1916), and **diplomat Gen. Colin Powell** (1937)

6 — Country singer Merle Haggard and actor Billy Dee Williams (1937), actor John Ratzenberger (1947), and actresses Marilu Henner (1952) and Candace Cameron (1976)

7 — Jazz singer Billie Holiday (1915), actor James Garner (1928), filmmaker Francis Ford Coppola (1939), and actors Jackie Chan (1954) and Russell Crowe (1964)

8 — Siddhartha Gautama, founder of Buddhism (563 BC), former First Lady Betty Ford (1918), basketball Hall of Famer John Havlicek (1940), musician Julian Lennon (1963), and actress Patricia Arquette (1968)

9 — Actors W.C. Fields (1879) and Dennis Quaid (1954)

10 — Publisher Joseph Pulitzer (1847), actors Harry Morgan (1915), Chuck Connors (1921), and Omar Sharif (1932), **sportscaster John Madden** (1936) and Don Meredith (1938), and actor Steven Seagal (1951)

12 — Children's author Beverly Cleary (1916), singer Tiny Tim (1930), author Tom Clancy and TV personality David Letterman (1947), singer David Cassidy (1950), and actresses Shannen Doherty (1971) and Claire Danes (1979)

13 — 3rd U.S. President Thomas Jefferson (1743), Wild West outlaw Butch Cassidy (1866), actors Don Adams (1923) and Ron Perlman (1950), chess master Gary Kasparov (1963), and actor Rick Schroeder (1970)

14 — Country music legend Loretta Lynn (1932), baseball star Pete Rose (1941), and actors Brad Garrett (1960) and Sarah Michelle Gellar (1977)

15 — Artist/inventor Leonardo da Vinci (1452), musician Roy Clark (1933), Olympic champion sprinter Evelyn Ashford (1957), actor Seth Rogen (1982), and actress Emma Watson (1990)

16 — Aviator Wilbur Wright (1867), actor Charlie Chaplin (1889), composer Henry Mancini (1924), singers Bobby Vinton (1935) and Dusty Springfield (1939), basketball Hall of Famer Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (1947), football coach Bill Belichick (1952), and singer Selena (1971)

17 — Football player/commentator Boomer Esiason (1961), and actress Jennifer Garner (1972)

18 — Baseball Hall of Famer Catfish Hunter (1946), actor Rick Moranis (1953), and TV talk host Conan O'Brien (1963)

19 — Actors Dudley Moore (1935), Ashley Judd (1968) and Kate Hudson (1979)

20 — Nazi leader Adolf Hitler (1889), **bandleader Lionel Hampton** (1908), actor Ryan O'Neal (1941), singer Luther Vandross (1951), and actress Carmen Electra (1973)

21 — Queen Elizabeth II (1926), actors Charles Grodin (1935), Tony Danza (1951), and Andie MacDowell (1958), and baseball star Don Mattingly (1961)

22 — Actor Jack Nicholson and musician Glen Campbell (1936), and rock star Peter Frampton (1950)

23 — Playwright William Shakespeare (1564), 15th U.S. president James Buchanan (1791), actress Shirley Temple (1928), singer Roy Orbison (1936), actors Lee Majors (1940), Sandra Dee (1942), and Valerie Bertinelli (1960), and comedian/actor George Lopez (1961)

24 — Singers/actresses Shirley MacLaine (1934) and Barbara Streisand (1942), actor Michael O'Keefe (1955), and singer Kelly Clarkson (1982)

25 — Radio inventor Guglielmo Marconi (1874), jazz singer Ella Fitzgerald (1918), basketball wizard Meadowlark Lemon (1935), actor Al Pacino (1940), and actress Renee Zellweger (1969)

26 — Naturalist John James Audubon (1785), seismologist Charles Richter (1900), entertainer Carol Burnett (1933), actor Kevin James (1965), and First Lady Melania Trump (1970)

27 — Explorer Ferdinand Magellan (1521), telegraph inventor Samuel Morse (1791), Civil War general and 18th U.S. president Ulysses S. Grant (1822), baseball Hall of Famer Rogers Hornsby (1896), actor Jack Klugman (1922), **voice guy Casey Kasem** (1932), and singer Sheena Easton (1959)

28 — 5th U.S. president James Monroe (1758), former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein (1937), entertainer Ann-Margret (1941), TV personality Jay Leno (1950), and actresses Penelope Cruz (1974) and Jessica Alba (1981)

29 — Jazz bandleader Duke Ellington (1899), race car legend Dale Earnhardt (1951), comedian Jerry Seinfeld (1954), actresses Michelle Pfeiffer (1957), and **tennis Hall of Famer Andre Agassi** and actress Uma Thurman (1970)

30 — Country singer Willie Nelson (1933), basketball Hall of Famer Isiah Thomas (1961), and actors Johnny Galecki (1975) and Kirsten Dunst (1982)