REVIEW: ManagementStudio

Enterprise Software Solution for End-to-End Project Management and Delivery

Peter von Oven
End User Computing Subject Matter Expert

Introduction

In this first article of five, I am going to introduce you to the world of IT projects, what a project actually means, some of the different project phases, some of the challenges you will face along the way, and how ManagementStudio not only goes above and beyond in helping you deliver a project on time and on budget, but to provide the foundations for any subsequent projects you deliver.

I've known about ManagementStudio for some time now as I used to work with one of their team members, and more recently I've worked with one of their value-added channel partners on some transformative digital workspace frameworks that feature ManagementStudio as a core part of the ecosystem. All of which has now piqued my interest further having seen some of the features and capabilities of what the solution delivers and thought now it was high time I take a deeper dive into what the ManagementStudio solution offers in the world of delivering transformation projects, and to share some of that newfound knowledge.

Before getting into the ManagementStudio specifics, I'm going to start by talking about IT projects in general and some of the challenges you will likely face when embarking on a new project.

What is a Project?

As a starting point, I want to just explore what we mean when we talk about a project. Both in terms of its definition (what is a project) and then what it means as an IT professional facing the daunting task of then delivering that project.

In its simplest form, a project can be defined as a sequence or set of tasks that must be completed to achieve a certain outcome. For example, take a Windows 11 migration project, which would constitute the overall project definition or project name: migrating

_____

to Windows 11. The sequence of tasks or steps would be designed to get your employees successfully migrated from whatever they are running today onto Windows 11. This being the project outcome: everyone now running Windows 11.

This definition is true of any project, regardless of whether it is IT related or not, along with all the steps required to achieve project success.

If you want a more official definition then according to the Project Management Institute (PMI), the term project refers to "any temporary endeavour with a definite beginning and end".

Having defined what a project is at a high-level, I thought I would break down some of what that means within some of the core project stages. For a small word of just seven letters, projects themselves are substantially larger, multi-faceted and can be way more complex.

The Anatomy of a Project: The Key Phases

Like a good book, a project has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Yet we don't always successfully treat them as such - particularly the end piece.

In my experience, the success of a project can be tied back to the information gathered, or research conducted as part of the project definition and scoping exercise to help define the journey of a project. If you start with inaccurate data and misinformation, then you are doomed from the start. But moreover, that data should be continuously updated in order for the correct decisions to be made and the project outcomes achieved so there should be an element of reusability.

By this, I mean during your project research phase, a key part in defining your projects starting point, you will gather a huge amount of information about people, process, and assets (hardware and software) that form the basis and foundation of the project. You then move forward in delivering the project using that data. Then along comes another project and the whole information gathering process starts from scratch, and you duplicate effort by conducting the research all over again. More time; more effort; and more cost. But, if you had that continuously updated set of core data, you can quickly and easily get started with new projects using an evolution of the same data set. Hold that thought for a second.

So now you have a beginning. You have your data, the project has been scoped, budgets approved, and personnel are in place to provide the delivery. Now for the middle bit of the project story - the delivery.

It should all be plain sailing from here on in, right? Well, for anyone who has ever been involved in a project, they will know well that this is very much unlikely to be the case. Going head-on into a project with your eyes wide open, knowing full well that you will be hit with potentially project disrupting issues is a given, but how do you manage these to prevent a full derailment and more importantly, resolve them?

_____

The answer, in part, is down to the quality and accuracy of your data, but even that doesn't make things totally fool proof. There will be unknowns that come up. As the saying goes, you don't know what you don't know. Have you compared the physical data with actual feedback from real people? Have you even engaged them on the project?

I'll give you an anecdotal real-world example, and this again comes from personal experience. I worked on a project where the collected data pointed to an app that had not been used for almost a year. Therefore, a decision by the project team was made to delete the app and its data, as it wasn't being used anymore. Wrong! The app was an end of year reporting app, therefore used once a year, and the consequences of deleting it were felt far and wide. Now if the project team had communicated with the users of the app, or the app owner, then they would have told you it was still very much still in use. The moral of the story there was not to assume and to consult real people.

So where am I going with this? From personal experience of being involved in many projects over the years, the key disrupter in my opinion is the communication. I don't just mean communication between project team members, which goes without saying and is obviously important, but communicating with the people that the project directly affects - your customers. And, as we know, customer satisfaction is paramount. I have known projects be deemed to have failed, even though technically they delivered the desired outcome, purely because of negative feedback from those people affected. They felt they were not included and had no idea of what was going on with things like disruption to access and applications, all because nobody told them.

I'll use my Windows 11 migration example again to highlight what I mean. The project success would be that everyone now has a Windows 11 desktop, so in terms of definition it is job done. But have you checked that the workforce can actually use their new desktops? Do they have all their apps? Is the user experience as expected? If the answer to these questions is no, then you have to ask yourself if the project really was successful?

This is where my point about the end of a project is also key. Your story needs a happy ending. You need sign off to say everything has been completed successfully and not just from the project team saying they did what the project set out to deliver. Communication is key. You need to ensure that any anomalies have been addressed and resolved but, more importantly, are those directly affected by the project outcome happy with that outcome, as I highlighted in the previous example.

Communication is all encompassing. It involves not only the people on the receiving end of the project outcome but also the project team and any third-party suppliers and contractors delivering the project. They all need to be joined up, especially in this age of collaboration. This communication should be continuous throughout the duration of the project, logging not only completed tasks, but also anomalies so that they are recorded and resolved to enable the project to continue on track. End users also need this feedback so as not to keep them in the dark and to demonstrate project milestones. After all, you are going to need them to get project sign-off and closure.

_____

In all the points I've raised and discussed, the next question is how I capture the relevant information, where do I record it, and how do I enable collaboration and communication?

Project Tools

When it comes to tools for managing projects the list is long. Some are more obvious than others and some are not really designed for projects in mind, with spreadsheets at the heart of what they deliver. That doesn't mean that they aren't used for projects as typically they are, but are they the right thing to use?

Put your hand up if you have used Excel for managing projects and emails to collaborate. I know I have!

These tools do have a few things in common. They are all standalone and point products but more importantly they are all reactive. By that I mean you have to input all the data manually and, more than that, you have to go and find it in the first place. Not an easy task and introduces a level of human error and also do you even know where to look. All very time consuming.

To add further complication, you need to enable communication between all project team members, including your customers. So now you need a collaboration platform on top of everything else.

I hope I've not scared you too much because there is a solution and that's where ManagementStudio comes into play.

Welcome to ManagementStudio

So, what is ManagementStudio?

ManagementStudio is an enterprise class software-based solution that provides a unique platform for the end-to-end management of IT transformation projects. It is not just limited to projects with features that enable you to manage transformation, it enables on-going business as usual operations.

Focusing on the elements that constitute a project, it enables project teams within an organisation to manage every aspect of a project and its journey through the multiple tasks that make up the project. Having said that, it probably doesn't do the solution justice to call it just a project management solution. As I said previously, it goes way beyond that in terms of what it delivers and could better be described as a complete project orchestration solution.
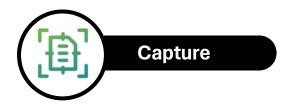
Complete in that, yes, it covers the salient points of a project already highlighted, but it goes way, way further than that, but not to the point of being overly complex.

_____

To that end, the ManagementStudio solution has four core themes or pillars that could really be described as a methodology on how you should approach a project. In ManagementStudio speak this methodology is referred to as the "4 C's"
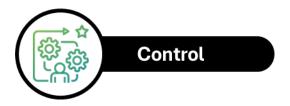
Introducing the 4C's

I'm not going to go into a deep dive of the 4C's in this introduction piece, I'll save that for later and the following articles, that will allow me give each "C" the focus and attention it deserves. So, for now, I'll give you a 2-minute whistle-stop overview:

Capture

I've highlighted this throughout this introduction and collecting or capturing data and information about your current state is critical for the success of your project. Bad data = bad project! ManagementStudio takes the guesswork out of understanding your environment. It integrates seamlessly into your directory infrastructure showing your users' accounts, devices, applications, operating systems, usage metrics and much more. This real-time information can then be used to deliver a complete project lifecycle.

If you remember earlier, I said, "hold that thought when it comes to data capture." Well, once installed ManagementStudio, will continue proactively to capture this information and data so when project number two comes along, and it will, you can pick up with the same up to date data source, meaning effectively you cut out the capture stage for future projects. Or maybe you're running concurrent projects from the get-go; no problem, it'll handle that too.

Control

Once you have your data capture, what's next? In the ManagementStudio world comes the next C, Control. Control is all about taking the data and putting it to use based on your project requirements. For example, ManagementStudio allows you to create workflows that provide a structure to completing project tasks, while providing comprehensive reporting and audit trails to very quickly see where you are at within the project timelines.

To speed things up even more, ManagementStudio has the ability to automate many of those manual tasks to help reduce manual mistakes and keep timelines down, if not bring them forward.

Communicate

Something else I have repeatedly talked about, and that is communication. However, that communication needs to be engaging and make the customer feel that you care by inviting feedback. Don't just send out a boring email!

With ManagementStudio you can invite users to provide real-time feedback, whether that is a survey or asking them about their requirements. You can even provide them with testing plans to run through, so achieving project success is even easier to gain, as there won't be any nasty surprises from people saying something doesn't work. You can even allow them to schedule their own timeslots when it comes to delivery - putting the customer in control and making them feel engaged in the project.

Collaborate

Finally, there is collaboration, where anyone involved in the project (admins, third-party suppliers, end-users etc) will interact with the solution. That could be via the main client, the portal, surveys, dashboards or web reports.

Successful collaboration points back to the accuracy of data and how up to date that data is. All those involved in the project will be using a single source of data from the capture phase to make informed decisions relating to project tasks, all with the aim of not only keeping the project on track but ensuring who is doing what when it comes to delivering those tasks.

These tasks are why collaboration exists, from progress tracking, to setting up emails, simple task management, to migrating users, managing issues through to resolution, and enabling role-based access to multiple projects where different collaborators play different roles in each project.

In Summary

In this introduction article I have covered quite a bit of ground in talking about projects in general, and some of the challenges that we all face when trying to successfully deliver a project. In that discussion, I highlighted some of the more pressing challenges and those that often can stop a project dead in its tracks or just temporarily derail it.

However, there is a solution in the form of ManagementStudio, which I've also introduced you to as your new best friend when it comes to IT project management and delivery.

_____

Whats Next?

In the next article I am going to take you further into the 4 C's and explore the features and capabilities of ManagementStudio.

In the meantime, if you want to see ManagementStudio in action, then head over the web site for a demo- https://managementstudio.com/demo/

About the Author

Peter von Oven is an experienced technical consultant working closely with customers, partners, and vendors in designing technology solutions, to meet business needs and deliver outcomes. During his career, Peter has presented at key IT events such as VMworld, IP EXPO, and various VMUGs and CCUG events across the UK. He has also worked in senior presales roles and presales management roles for Fujitsu, HP, Citrix, and VMware, and has been awarded VMware vExpert for the last ten years in a row including vExpert EUC, vExpert Pro, and now the new and as yet unnamed Omnissa EUC Expert community.

Today he works with partners and vendors helping drive and deliver innovative technology solutions. He is also an avid author, having now written 18 books and created numerous videos on the subject of VMware end-user computing solutions.

In his spare time, Peter volunteers as a STEM Ambassador, working with schools and colleges, helping the next generation develop the skills and confidence in building careers in technology. He is also a serving Royal Air Force Reservist currently working as an instructor with the Air Cadet organisation.