



Governing Change

intelligent financial software



Governing change... Generating quality

Simplicity is everything

Any business delivering change projects as an ongoing part of its operation will rely on the close and effective engagement of its Project Managers and other accountable executives to produce successful results. In order to support these people in their essential work, a business will necessarily need to introduce a governance envelope, within which its project portfolio will reside. The challenge has been, and always will be, to introduce governance that supports rather than impedes. Many people over the years have seen this as the excuse for generating complex and costly processes and systems.

The undeniable truth however, is that a complex system, designed from scratch, very rarely, if ever, works. Nor, as an equally undeniable corollary, can such systems be patched up to make them truly work. The only reliable option is to start again, beginning with a working simple system. I think it's fair to say that, wherever you might find the rarity which is a complex system that actually works; you will also very often find it has evolved from a simple system that worked.

The simple fact of the matter is that when project governance requirements are looked at in detail, they almost always resolve themselves into very simple systems. So a business, a software house is a good example, will normally target its projects to: start and finish on time; deliver to the required quality; and expend no more than their allowed effort in doing so.

Any governance system will need to wrap around its contained project/s to ensure these targets are met.

This is not a complicated proposition. However, more complexity enters the system when its architect works on the provision of the checks and hurdles to define the points at which mandatory governance is applied. Additionally the concurrent running of a number (even, many) projects in a change portfolio further complicates the task of governance.

The governance system architect will need to manage these factors by setting the project checks and hurdles at a level low enough to ensure quality standards are met, but not so low that unnecessary complexity is introduced. It is a well documented experience, reported regularly by those working directly in Programme Management Offices (PMO), that, as a system grows in complexity, it tends to oppose its stated function. I suspect there are few among who cannot quote examples of projects where the very act of reporting to a governance system begins to eat significantly into the timetable available for the project.

Additionally, it is clear that complex governance systems as they begin to enter the stage of tending to oppose their own proper function, also tend to produce complex responses (not solutions) to problems.

So, while there are occasional examples of complex systems that actually work, 'simplicity' should always be our watchword.

The virtuous governance triangle

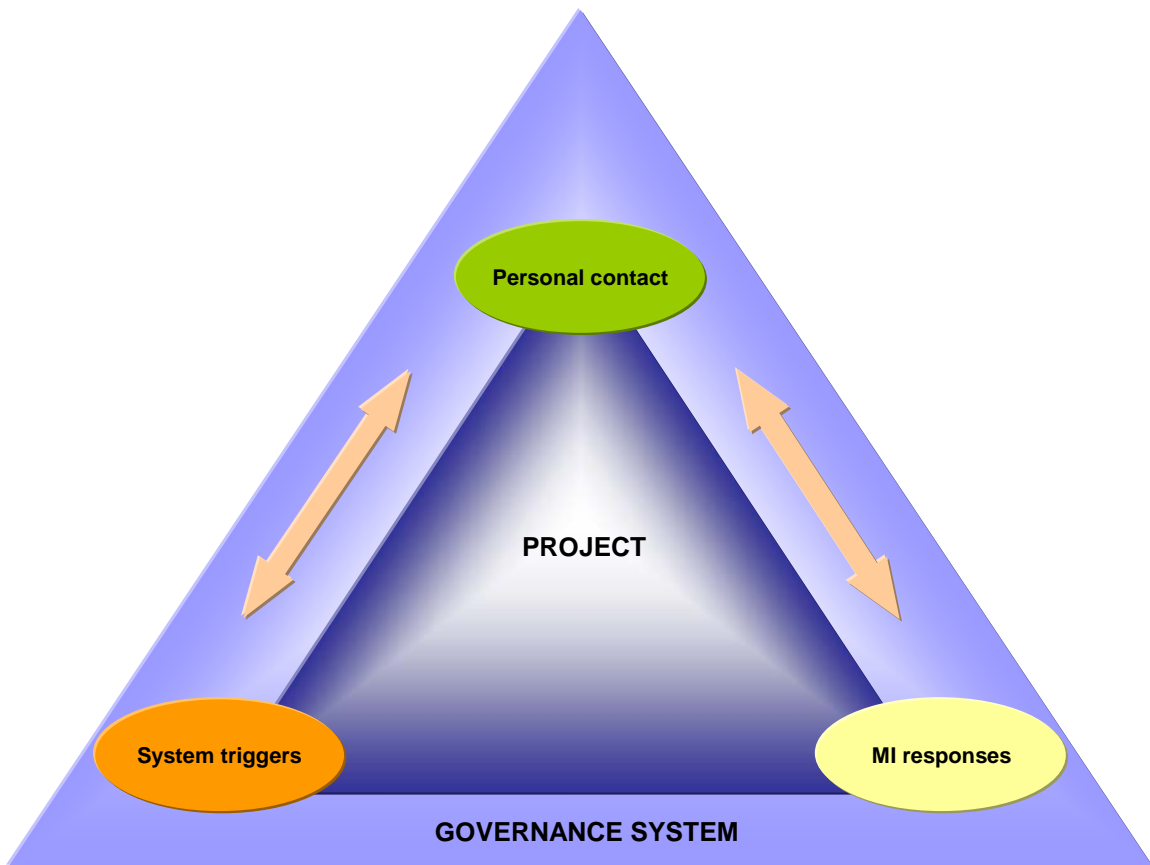
Ultimately, the successful governance regime will largely require three processes to operate, in order to ensure a project delivers the quality product its sponsors require. These are:

Personal contact: regular 1-on-1 control meetings between the Project Manager and the PMO: nothing works better than this regular interaction. It always has been the best form of governance,

but, with large change portfolios, this contact is too often squeezed as available time to cover all the projects becomes constrained.

System triggers: these are delivered from whatever automated, project control, software systems the business employs. These will control the movement of a project across its Stage Boundaries (to use a PRINCE2 term – Inception, Design, Build, Test etc.). These will confirm the information from the 1-on-1 exchanges, but are also essential to ensure the formality of the quality assurance process as a project progresses.

MI responses: these are very much a reactive measure, being generated from management information which is, by its very nature, only available after the event of interest to the PMO. However, they operate both as a direct quality assurance on the project and as indirect checks on the quality assurance process itself.



These three processes operate in harness but, as ever the system triggers and the MI response processes work in a supporting role to the primary control, which, as it always has been, is good, old-fashioned, commonsense, person-to-person contact.

Simple... but almost always effective.