



## White Paper 2019-11

### Best Practices of Gate-Based Project Assurance Approaches for Project Execution

*Gate-based governance approaches are now mainstream for the project definition phase (or bidding phase for contractors). Many organisations also implement similar approaches during project execution, however, their application is slightly different because gates cannot in reality be go/no go gates. Based on our experience designing and implementing gate-based governance tools for project execution, we develop in this White Paper the best practices we have identified for those approaches.*

#### What is a gate-based project assurance (or governance) tool for project execution?

Several key gates are defined during the project execution process, which are typically:

- Project hand-over from project definition/tendering organisation
- Project setup complete (a few weeks after project hand-over)
- Ready to place orders for main equipment and subcontracts
- Detailed engineering complete
- Ready for (off-site) pre-fabrication/ manufacturing
- Ready to mobilise on site (or to mobilise main construction equipment)
- Ready to start commissioning and testing
- Hand-over

The list of gates will vary depending on the industry and type of project, and their number may also vary with the size and complexity of the project.

For each gate, a checklist of points that would normally be expected to be completed is created, that cover all relevant project processes, from safety and quality to project control and delivery processes. As a good practice, the checkpoints should preferably refer to deliverables which status can be audited rather than to activities since project progress is a result of completed deliverables or work whereas activities can go on for a long time without anything useful being produced.

This combination of gates and check points covering all relevant processes provides a tool that is useful for the Project Manager as a checklist, and for the project governance for project assurance. It is also useful to implement management by exception, i.e. concentrate management attention on those aspects that appear difficult to complete.

Some refer to such as tool as a project governance tool, however, we will hereafter call it a gate-based project assurance tool. We prefer the latter denomination because we believe it should primarily be a tool for the project manager.

#### Checkpoints for each stage of the project

The benefit of the project assurance tool is to specify early requirements on all applicable project processes.

Therefore, there should be substantial early requirements from the start-up gate included for construction, logistics, commissioning and start-up. This allows to ensure that minimum requirements are met to avoid too late discovery of essential issues.

In general, a gate-based project assurance tool for project execution will show many checkpoints at project setup stage to reflect all the activities that need to be performed at that stage to set up the project on the right path. While each gate will include checkpoints for all project processes, engineering and procurement checkpoints will be heavily represented at the preparation phases whereas site mobilisation and construction phases will predominantly include checkpoints on construction and commissioning.

**A gate-based project assurance tool is a substantial asset for an organization during project execution.**

#### The benefits of gate-based project assurance tools for project execution

Implementing gate-based project assurance tool provides benefits for several parties:

- For the Project Manager
  - A structured list of checkpoints as a reminder that certain essential activities need to be performed early enough
  - A way to remind relevant team members of their duties
- For Project Management team members
  - Checklists to remind the team which activities have to be performed at which stage of the project
- For the Project Sponsor
  - An assurance that the minimum requirements for project execution are met
- For the Quality department and Project Sponsor
  - An auditable process of the minimum requirements for project management even if the maturity of the organisation's project management system is limited

## Best practices for project execution assurance tools

### Go/no-go gates are exceptional in execution

Contrary to gate-based project definition phase assurance checklists, it is generally impossible to stop a project in its tracks except in some specific instances. Therefore, gates must be set in the schedule, their status reported but a full compliance should not be expected. When the completion state is not satisfactory, recovery plans must be put in place to put the project back on track.

The only exception to this more flexible approach is for the 'ready to mobilise gate' which should really be a decision gate for project governance to allow or not site mobilisation, which always represents a much higher daily expenditure than the preparation phase.

**A gate-based tool is simple, flexible and powerful and helps the Project Manager ensure all major issues are covered**

### General best practices

- Timing of gate reviews
    - Gate dates should be set in the project schedule and should not move unless there is a full project re-baseline as for convergence point gates (refer to White Paper 2012-04 [‘Convergence Management: the Key to Large, Complex Projects Success’](#) and 2015-17 [‘How to Produce and Update a Convergence Plan’](#)).
    - Unavailability of management should not lead to postponing gate reviews
  - Detail of checkpoints for each gate
    - While checkpoints for each gate are expected to cover all aspects and processes related to project management, they should be somewhat limited in number and focused on issues that are important for the Project Manager at his/her level. In particular, very detailed discipline specific questions (e.g. detailed engineering process questions) should be transferred to discipline-specific check lists and should not burden the overall project checklist.
  - Status of the project assurance tool for external parties
    - For a contractor, the project assurance tool process can be presented to the client/ Owner as part of the qualification process, but compliance
- to the gate checklists should not be a contract requirement, and it should be considered an internal process.
  - Responsibilities and ongoing reporting
    - The Project Manager should be responsible to assess the completion of the checkpoints and should have a way to respond to an audit, however, he/she should not be burdened with referencing all the relevant records when filling-in the checklist so that this tool can be light to use
    - The Project Manager should personally follow-up the status of the checklists, it should not be delegated.
    - The status can be reported as part of the internal monthly report (showing the amount and percentage of closed checkpoints for each gate) or could be presented a dynamic project dashboard
  - Adaptation for large projects
    - On large projects the list of gates in the project assurance tool should be adapted to the key streams and convergence points of the project. Additional project specific checkpoints should be added to the checklists. This adaptation should be performed at project start-up. For smaller and straightforward projects, a standard model should be used, with the possibility of classifying certain checkpoints as not relevant for this project

## Conclusion

A gate-based project assurance tool is a substantial asset for an organisation during project execution. It has to be designed and used slightly differently from similar tools used during project tendering (contractor) or project definition (owner) phases. It is particularly useful in organisations with low to moderate project execution maturity levels, as it acts as a safety net to make sure no major aspects of project execution get forgotten. It is also useful in highly mature organisations specifically for complex projects for which the basic model can be adapted at the start of the project and act as a reference shared by the team.



We Empower Organizations to be Reliably Successful in  
Executing Large, Complex projects.

Discover more on  
[www.ProjectValueDelivery.com](http://www.ProjectValueDelivery.com)