Glossary of Essential Project Management Terms and Phrases

Here is a list of common important PM terms and phrases and their definitions[1]. Over time, you should become familiar with most of these.

Term or Phrase	Definition
change request	A change request is a formal proposal for an alteration to some product or system. In project management, a change request often arises when the client wants an addition or alteration to the agreed-upon deliverables for a project. Such a change may involve an additional feature or customization or an extension of service, among other things. Because formal change requests are beyond the scope of the agreement, they generally mean that the client will have to pay for the extra resources required to satisfy them.
client or customer	The person or group that is the direct beneficiary of a project or service. These are the people for whom the project is being undertaken (indirect beneficiaries are often called stakeholders). This person or group, the originator of the project, sets the specifications and gives approval for the final product.
condition	Sometimes referred to as a "must have," a *condition* is a term adopted from the US military used to describe some "thing"—e.g., a circumstance or environmental situation—that *must be* present for something else to occur. In project management, a condition is some thing or attribute that must be present or in place in order for a project to be considered successful. Without it, the project will fail. An example: If an eLearning client says, "the course you produce must be SCORM compliant; without that it won't function on our LMS," *SCORM compliance* become a condition of the project output.
constraint	A constraint is a limitation that is outside the control of the project team and must be managed.

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[1] Several sources were used to develop this list of definitions. They include Lou Russell (lourussell.com), Mitre (mitre.org), Peregrine Performance Group (peregrinepg.com), PM Study Circle (pmstudycirle.com), Project Management Tips (pmtips.org), Tech Republic (techrepublic.com), Tech Target (whatis.techtarget.com), WhizLabs (whizlabs.com), Wikipedia, Workamajig (workamajig.com), and Wrike (wrike.com).

	Constraints are not necessarily problems. However, the project manager should be aware of constraints because they represent limitations within or around which the project must be executed.
	Date or time constraints, for instance, imply that certain events (perhaps the end of the project) must occur within a given timeframe.
	Resources are almost always a constraint, since they are never available in unlimited supply.
critical path	The critical path is the sequence of tasks that must be completed on schedule for the entire project to be completed on schedule. It is the longest duration path through the workplan. If a task on the critical path is delayed by one day, the entire project will be delayed by one day (unless another task on the critical path can be accelerated/shortened by one day).
deliverable	A deliverable is any tangible outcome that is produced by the project. All projects create deliverables. These can be documents, plans, computer systems, relationships, communications, buildings, aircraft, etc.
	Internal deliverables are produced as a consequence of executing the project and are usually needed only by the project team.
	External deliverables are those that are created for clients and stakeholders.
functional manager	The functional manager is the person a project team member reports to within his or her functional organization. Typically, this is the person who does the project team member's performance review.
	The project manager may also be a functional manager, but s/he does not have to be.
Gantt chart	A Gantt chart is a bar chart that depicts project tasks as blocks over time. The beginning and end of the block correspond to the beginning- and end-dates of the task. Gantt charts are useful in the planning and scheduling of projects. They are also helpful in understanding and managing the relationships between tasks.
hammer, the (slang)	This is a slang term we use at Peregrine to describe the person on the client-side project team that helps us get access to people within the client organization when that access is not gained easily. The "hammer" is usually designated during the contracting phase of a project and typically has significant authority and influence within the client organization.

milestone	A milestone is a scheduling event that signifies the completion of a major deliverable or a set of related deliverables. A milestone, by definition, has a duration of zero and no effort. There is no work associated with a milestone. A milestone is a component of a Gantt chart and is represented as a diamond.
network diagram	A network diagram is a graphical representation of all the tasks, responsibilities and work-flow for a project. It often looks like a chart with a series of boxes and arrows. It is used to map out the schedule and work sequence for the project, as well as track its progress through each stage, up to and including completion. Since it encompasses every action and outcome associated with the project, a network diagram also illustrates the scope of the project.
objective	An objective is a statement that describes what the project is trying to achieve. The objective should be written such that it's degree of achievement can be evaluated at the conclusion of a project. Project success is determined based on whether project objectives were achieved. "SMART" is a useful model when crafting an objective. Make objectives specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timebound.
phase	A phase is a major, logical grouping of work on a project. It may also represent the completion of a major deliverable or set of related deliverables. On an IT development project, logical phases might be planning, analysis, design, construction (including testing), and implementation.
project	A project is a temporary endeavor undertaken to achieve a particular aim and to which project management practices can be applied, regardless of the project's size, budget, or timeline.
project charter or definition	Before you start a project, it is important to know the overall objectives of the project, as well as the scope, deliverables, risks, constraints, assumptions, stakeholders and governance strategy. The project charter (or definition) is the document that holds all or most of this relevant information. The project manager is responsible for creating the project charter. The document should be approved by the sponsor to signify that the project manager and the sponsor are in agreement on these important aspects of the project.
project manager	A project manager is the person responsible for planning, organizing, and controlling a project from start to its successful completion.

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	The project manager's role includes managing the team. This requires leadership skills, including setting the team vision, assigning the best people to the tasks, coaching, and resolving conflict.
project team	The project team consists of the full- and part-time resources assigned to work on the deliverables of the project.
requirements	Requirements are descriptions of how a product or service should act, appear, or perform. Requirements generally refer to the features and functions of the deliverables you are building on your project. Requirements are part of project scope. High-level scope is defined in your project charter. The requirements form the detailed scope. After your requirements are approved, they may be changed through a scope change management process.
risk	There may be potential external events that will have negative impacts on your project should they occur. Risk refers to the combination of the probability the event will occur and the impact on the project if the event occurs. If the combination of the probability of the occurrence and the impact to the project is too high, you should identify the potential event as a risk and proactively develop a plan to manage the risk.
scope	Scope can refer to either product scope or project scope. It's important to know the difference: • *Product* scope is defined as the functions and features that characterize a product or a service. • *Project* scope, on the other hand, is the work that must be done in order to deliver a product according to the product's scope (required functions and features).
scope creep	Scope creep (a.k.a. *requirement creep* and *kitchen sink syndrome*) refers to changes, continuous or uncontrolled growth in a project's scope, at any point after the project begins. This can occur when the scope of a project is not properly defined, documented, or controlled. It is generally considered harmful. It is related to but distinct from feature creep, because feature creep refers to features and project creep refers to the whole project.
sponsor	The project sponsor is typically a senior leader within the organization who represents the business and writes the checks. His or her primary responsibilities are to establish the business case, approve

	project adjustments, and work with the project manager to resolve conflicts between parts of the business.
stakeholder	Specific people or groups who have a stake in the outcome of the project are stakeholders. Normally stakeholders are from within the company and may include internal clients, management, employees, administrators, etc. A project can also have external stakeholders, including suppliers, investors, community groups, and other organizations.
standard	Adopted from the US military, and sometimes referred to as a "success metric," a standard is simply a way of measuring success. An example: If a client says, "we want customer satisfaction ratings to be at 4.5 or above," the C-SAT rating of 4.5 is a standard.
subject matter expert (SME)	The subject matter expert (SME) provides the knowledge and expertise in a specific subject, business area, or technical area for a project/program. Their availability is critical to project speed and quality of outputs.
task (activity)	An assigned piece of work often to be finished within a certain timeframe.
triple constraint	Triple constraint is the combination of the three most significant restrictions on any project—scope, schedule and cost. The triple constraint is sometimes referred to as the project management triangle or the iron triangle. In the typical triangular model, scope, schedule and cost are constraints that form the sides of the triangle, with quality as the central theme. The three constraints are interdependent: None of them can be altered without affecting one or both of the others.
work breakdown structure (WBS)	A work breakdown structure, or WBS, is a hierarchical structure of things that the project will make or outcomes that it will deliver. It defines all the things a project needs to accomplish, organized into multiple levels, and displayed graphically. Essentially, the WBS defines the "what" of the project. Everything you need to accomplish in the project is displayed in a single, easy to understand chart.
workplan (schedule)	The project workplan tells you how you will complete the project. It describes the tasks required, the sequence of the work, who is assigned to the work, an estimate of how much effort is required,

	when the work is due, and other information of interest to the project manager.