

## January 2024 MITE Hot Topic: Managing Project Scope Through Chartering

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Imagine that you are managing a project to build a house for a family. You are given a timeline of two years and a list of professionals who will help you complete the task. Where would you start? The first step should be to gather your project team to set goals and clarify key elements before the work begins – including (but not limited to) the purpose, individual roles/responsibilities, the budget, and what the ultimate vision of success will look like.

One of the most crucial aspects of any project is the charter. The project charter is arguably the most fundamental tool in an Improvement Specialist's toolkit. It is a formal document that authorizes the initiation of a project as approved by the Executive Sponsor. Project charters can take on different forms given the scale of the work, however, they all seek to accomplish a common goal: to create a shared understanding of a project's purpose, goals, deliverables, milestones, resources, and areas of operation. The document also serves as a formal agreement between stakeholders, which engages team members and creates a system of accountability. Once drafted through consensus building among the project team, the charter acts as a living, reportable document to guide team members in their efforts, and provide regular updates to stakeholders. If adjustments need to be made, a new agreement must be struck between all parties involved for work to continue.

A critical aspect of the chartering process is that the project team understands the scope of work. The scope defines the set of boundaries that a team must operate within to achieve the desired outcomes. However, it is also critically important to define what is outside of the scope to minimize team confusion and ensure focus remains on the stated priorities. Through this practice, an Improvement Specialist can combat scope creep, which occurs when team members deviate from the originally agreed upon areas of operation. Scope creep is described as "when a project adds features and functionality (project scope) without addressing the effects on time, costs, and resources, or without customer approval" (PMI, 2008). By establishing a clear scope at the beginning of an initiative, an Improvement Specialist can foster a unified vision and minimize the risk of not accomplishing the stated objectives within the agreed upon timeframe.

How to create a project charter:

- Assemble the project team, including customers, executive sponsors, and subject matter experts.
- Discuss and document the purpose of the project (importance to the organization), the problem that the project will address, and the goal you are trying to accomplish using a standard template, such as the [Engagement Charter](#), [Mini Charter](#), or [Problem Assessment Form](#).
- Discuss and document the scope of the project, noting what will be in scope and what will be out of scope. You can use the project [scoping document](#) for reference.

- Define and document team roles and responsibilities. In addition, identify and document the key stakeholders and note their expectations for the project.
- Create a project timeline, outlining the specific deliverables and milestones of the project that you will need to accomplish to reach your goal.
- Document the potential risks that could arise in the project to avoid surprises, as well as how you plan to address them.
- Define the project requirements by noting any outcome, process, and/or balancing metrics that need to be attained to qualify the project as a success.

The project charter sets the stage for successful project outcomes by acting as a roadmap for team members to follow at each stage of the project's lifecycle. When leveraged appropriately, it provides direction and purpose to team members, which facilitates communication and reduces the likelihood of scope creep.

### **References:**

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