

THE PROJECT PLAN IS NOT THE PROJECT

And a green plan does not mean a healthy one

Project plans are essential. They create structure, sequence activity, show dependencies and give teams a shared view of what should happen when. But a plan is still only a representation of delivery. It is not delivery itself.

01. THE PROBLEM

Order, not certainty

A programme can contain thousands of activities, milestones and dependencies. Every line can be logically sequenced and carefully maintained, while the real risks sit somewhere else entirely.

Plans show what we expect to happen. They are much less effective at showing uncertainty, unresolved decisions, weak assumptions or conversations that have not yet happened.

A detailed plan can still give a very convincing picture of something that is not under control.

02. THE SIGNAL

Green does not always mean good

Status can mislead.

A workstream can be green while a critical decision remains unresolved. Another can be amber because dates have moved, but the issue is understood and controlled.

Good governance looks beyond the RAG status.

What is unresolved? What are we assuming? What could move the plan next?

03. THE CONTROL

Manage what moves the plan

The best programme teams do not spend all their time making the plan look accurate. They use it to expose where attention is needed.

Track the decisions. Challenge the assumptions. Understand the dependencies. Make ownership clear. Surface uncertainty early.

One unresolved decision can matter more than fifty completed activities.

The plan should help focus the conversation on what will genuinely move delivery forward. That is very different from simply reporting whether activities happened on time.

04. THE ROLE

Drive the project, not the plan

A good PM does more than maintain the plan and chase dates.

They identify what is blocking progress, surface decisions, challenge assumptions, connect dependencies and drive action.

It's easy to manage activity. The real value of project management is in truly driving delivery.

The plan is only a tool.

The PM's real job is to keep the project moving, not simply report on plan progress.

The plan tells you where you expect to be.

Good project management keeps sight of what is actually happening, what could change next, and where attention is needed now.



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