Projects and programs for implementation

MODULE 6 | 6.4 | STUDENT COMPANION

A **project** is a temporary organisation created to produce specified business products, as set out in an approved business case. By contrast, a **program** is a more flexible, temporary structure that steers related projects and activities so that together they deliver outcomes and benefits tied to strategic objectives (definitions associated with the PRINCE2 method).

Projects and programs compared

	Project	Program
Objective	One discrete objective	Several related objectives
Management	One project manager	A program manager over several project managers
Content	Several streams of work	Several related projects
Change strategy	One strategy with one delivery plan	One strategy delivered through several plans, each a project
Duration	Shorter	Longer, often several years
Link to strategy	Supports the business plan; not always tied directly to strategy	Usually tied directly to strategic goals

Where a strategy has several themes, each theme often becomes a program

Larger organisations group related projects into programs, often one per strategic theme, rather than running many unconnected projects. Initiatives run as **formal projects** succeed more often: they get dedicated resources and are bounded, trackable pieces of work. Detailed scheduling and budgeting tools (network diagrams, earned value) belong to the Strategic Management Accounting subject.

Corella Partners' advisory growth program (imagined)

A program manager oversees three project managers and manages the dependencies. Staff who work on the projects tend to become advocates for the strategy.

Project	Purpose	Depends on
Advisory package	Fixed-price advice for small businesses	Trained advisers from the academy
Client dashboard	Monthly financial performance for clients	Data feeds from compliance systems
Training academy	Turn compliance staff into advisers	Trainers hired; budget released

A program report card (imagined)

Program goal: advice reaches 40% of fees within three years; 200 advisory clients in year one

Project	Owner	Next milestone	Status	Comment
Advisory package for small businesses	National advisory leader	All six offices by July	On track	Brisbane pilot complete
Client dashboard product	Head of data services	Trial with 20 clients by May	At risk	Software build three weeks late
Advisory training academy	Head of people	First intake trained by April	Off track	Trainers not yet hired

On track: progressing as approved | At risk: could turn red | Off track: act now

With a **report card**, the program manager sees at a glance which projects are on course; it gives each a clear owner, shows the outlook for key dates, puts the goals at the top, and can be tailored to the organisation.

Governance and risk

Issue	What good practice looks like
Benefits, not just outputs	A project can be on time and on budget yet miss its benefit; the project owner (a senior user, sometimes the CFO) is accountable for realising benefits
Governance throughout	From the front end of the project to its close-out
Risk management varies	Stronger in mature organisations used to complex, risky work; weaker in small or less mature ones, in cultures that strongly avoid uncertainty, and where it isn't a technical requirement

Leading virtual teams

- Keep trust alive through technology; make every member visible
- Make sure differences between people are understood and valued
- Run productive meetings and track progress with shared tools
- Prefer video for sensitive issues; keep messages meaningful but not overwhelming
- Agree response norms (for example, a code meaning 'reply the same day') and match the tool to the task

Cloud collaboration tools

Agile teams deliver in short sprints, each producing a usable part of the result; the traditional waterfall approach moves step by step to one final outcome. Corella builds its dashboard in two-week sprints, with developers in Perth, accountants in Sydney and testers in Manila.

Benefits	Problems to plan for
Lower communication and collaboration costs	Training and new skills
Better integration of knowledge and systems	Time to implement
More flexibility and reliability	Ongoing service costs
Stronger competitiveness; a smaller carbon footprint	Security and data-control risks

Six considerations

1. Governance and priority
Separate strategic initiatives from wish lists; prioritise and resource them

2. Time-phased actions
Each task with its own resources and deadline

3. Realistic scope
Manage weaknesses, threats and risks; re-check as markets move

4. Clear definition
Each initiative stands alone, so its purpose isn't diluted

5. A central program
Regular reports, approved measures, formal control of changes

6. Staff input
Grounded in operational reality; builds engagement

In a small organisation, the 'central program' may be one senior manager

Case note: Heathrow Terminal 5

Heathrow's Terminal 5 was a huge construction project, widely praised for finishing on time and on budget. But when it opened on 27 March 2008, the baggage system failed and staff struggled with car parking and security checks. British Airways cancelled 34 flights on the first day and about 300 by 4 April, more than 23,000 bags had to be sorted by hand, and BA put the cost at GBP16 million or more. Two BA directors left in April, and a parliamentary committee report (3 November 2008) criticised the lack of testing and staff training before opening. The building was delivered; the benefit, a smooth new terminal, arrived months late.

Sources: Building and The Register, 3 November 2008, on the House of Commons Transport Committee report; TravelMole, 4 April 2008.

Practice questions

MODULE 6 | 6.4 | TRY THESE BEFORE THE WORKED ANSWERS

Question 1 - Project or program?

Initiative at Seabreeze Hospital (imagined)	Separate project, part of a program, or neither? Why?
(a) A new electronic patient record	
(b) Training nurses to use the new record	
(c) Redesigning ward workflows around the record	
(d) Repainting the cafeteria	

Question 2 - Read the report card

Harbourside Port Authority (imagined) runs a digital port program. Recommend action for the two projects that need attention.

Project	Status	Comment
Online booking portal	On track	Testing complete
Truck appointment app	At risk	Vendor four weeks behind
Gate automation	Off track	30% over budget; no project owner since the manager resigned

Question 3 - Norms for a virtual team

An imagined engineering firm's design team works across Perth, Singapore and London. Propose five norms covering meeting times, response expectations, tools and documentation.

Worked answers

MODULE 6 | 6.4 | WORKED ANSWERS - ATTEMPT THE QUESTIONS FIRST

Question 1 - Seabreeze Hospital

Initiative	Answer
(a) Electronic record	Project within a 'digital wards' program: it depends on (b) and (c)
(b) Training nurses	Project in the same program; timing must match go-live
(c) Ward workflows	Project in the same program; benefits come only when all three align
(d) Cafeteria	Neither: routine maintenance, handled through normal operations

Question 2 - Harbourside Port Authority

- **Truck appointment app (at risk):** meet the vendor to agree a recovery plan; check whether penalties apply; adjust the launch date of dependent projects; report weekly until green.
- **Gate automation (off track):** appoint a new project owner immediately; review scope and budget with the program board; decide whether to re-plan, cut scope or pause; apply formal change control to any variation.

Question 3 - Virtual team norms (sample)

- A weekly video meeting at 4 pm Perth and Singapore time (morning in London), rotated monthly so no one always meets out of hours
- Message codes: 'today' for same-day replies, 'week' for less urgent items
- One shared online workspace for drawings and decisions; no design files sent by email
- Decisions recorded in a shared log within 24 hours of each meeting
- Video, not email, for disagreements or sensitive feedback