

The Project Management Life Cycle and the Project Management Cycle

While project management often serves to make things simpler and therefore more achievable, we must admit that there are times when the opposite occurs. That is, instead of clarity, we end up with confusion. And perhaps there's no greater example of this than the misunderstanding between the project management life cycle, and the project life cycle.

The project management life cycle is, not a cycle at all. It's really more of a series of activities. These activities go by different names depending on the methodology. The PMI calls them "process groups," and categorizes them as follows:

- + **Initiating: nature and scope of the project.**
- + **Planning: time, cost, resources and scheduling**
- + **Executing: processes used to complete the project**
- + **Controlling: observe and adjust project as required**
- + **Closing: formal end of project**

As any project manager will tell you – and so will the PMI, for that matter – things aren't as simple as this in real life. Often, except for "closing", these activities need to be re-visited throughout the project.

So that takes care of the **project management life cycle**. Now what about the **project life cycle**?

The project life cycle refers to the stages of a project that take it from point A to point Z. The particular project life cycle methodology will depend on the nature of the project.

For example, software development projects can have a project life cycle that looks like this:

1. **Evaluate**
2. **Design**
3. **Build**
4. **Test**
5. **Launch**

Again, things in real life are more complicated than this. But the general idea is clear enough: the project life cycle is designed to usher a project through a process. It's a linear, logical path.

So that begs the question: can the project management life cycle, and the project management cycle, live and play well together?

Without a doubt, yes!

But it doesn't happen without a sophisticated project approach – which is an approach embraces both concepts, and knows where one stops and the other begins (or when they're both running concurrently!). Functional, easy-to-use and empowering project management software is a project manager's best friend here; even more than free coffee.

So to go back to the beginning: **project management, at its best, makes things simpler**. Sometimes, however, the field as-a-whole is guilty of going in the opposite direction by making things more complicated. The similarity between the terms “project management life cycle” and “project life cycle” are a good example of this.

That, along with the right project management software, a good team, and some good luck, can help you get your projects to the finish line in scope, on time, and on budget.