



DAY 2

The Project Life Cycle

From first idea to final handover: the five phases every project moves through

1. Why Every Project Follows a Life Cycle

No matter the industry, whether you are building software, planning an event, or constructing a building, every project moves through the same broad arc: someone has an idea, the idea gets planned in detail, the work gets done, progress gets checked along the way, and the project gets formally closed. Project managers call this arc the project life cycle, and it has five recognized phases.

2. The Five Phases

Phase 1: Initiating

This is where a project is formally authorized to exist. The key output of this phase is the project charter, a short document that states the project's purpose, high-level goals, and the sponsor's formal approval to spend time and money on it. If a project skips this phase, teams often start work without real agreement on what they are actually trying to achieve, which is one of the most common causes of failure later on.

Phase 2: Planning

The most detailed phase. Here the PM and team work out scope (exactly what will and will not be delivered), a schedule (when each piece of work will happen), a budget, a risk plan, and a communication plan. Planning is where the project's roadmap gets built, and the quality of this phase strongly predicts whether the project stays on track later.

Phase 3: Executing

This is where the actual work happens, the code gets written, the venue gets booked, the building gets constructed. The PM's job during execution is largely about coordination: keeping the team focused on the plan, resolving blockers quickly, and managing the people and resources involved.

Phase 4: Monitoring & Controlling

Running in parallel with execution rather than after it, this phase is about comparing actual progress against the plan. Is the project on schedule? On budget? Has anything changed that requires the plan itself to be updated? This is where a PM catches small problems before they become large ones.

Phase 5: Closing

The project is formally completed: final deliverables are handed over, contracts are closed out, and the team documents lessons learned, what went well and what would be done differently next time. Closing is frequently skipped under time pressure, but it is one of the highest-value phases, since it is how an organization actually gets better at running its next project.

WORTH KNOWING

These phases are not always strictly sequential in practice. Planning and executing often loop back on each other as new information emerges, and monitoring happens continuously throughout execution rather than as a separate block of time. Think of the life cycle as a map of activities, not a rigid checklist.

3. Key Deliverables by Phase

Initiating	Project charter; formal sponsor approval to proceed.
Planning	Project management plan, schedule, budget, risk register.
Executing	The actual product, service, or result being built.
Monitoring	Status reports; change requests when the plan needs adjusting.
Closing	Final handover documents; lessons-learned report.

4. A Worked Example

Imagine a small NGO is organizing a community health fair. Initiating: the director approves the idea and names a lead organizer. Planning: the organizer books a venue, lines up volunteer doctors, sets a budget for supplies, and builds a week-by-week task list. Executing: volunteers are briefed, supplies are purchased, the fair is set up and run on the day. Monitoring: the organizer checks daily that RSVP numbers and spending are tracking against plan, and adjusts the volunteer schedule when two doctors drop out. Closing: the organizer tallies attendance, pays remaining invoices, and writes a short report on what to do differently at next year's fair.

5. Reflection Questions

- Think of a project you have been part of. Can you identify where each of the five phases happened, even informally?

- Which phase do you think is most often rushed or skipped in real organizations, and what problems does that cause later?
- Why might 'closing' be considered one of the most valuable phases, even though it produces no new deliverable?

6. Key Terms Introduced Today

- Project charter — the document that formally authorizes a project and names its sponsor.
- Scope — the boundaries of what a project will and will not deliver.
- Risk register — a log of identified risks, their likelihood, impact, and planned response.
- Lessons learned — a documented reflection on what worked and what did not, captured at project close.

7. Looking Ahead

Tomorrow's session introduces the triple constraint, the relationship between scope, time, and cost that every project manager has to balance. You will see it show up directly inside the planning phase you learned about today.