

# Project Steering Committees

Accountable for project results or accidental  
tourists?

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- “accidental” Project Managers
- Project Managers have access to training, tertiary study, methodologies, templates, etc
- “accidental” members of Project Steering Committees
- Steering Committee members do not typically have access to professional development programs and/or supporting resources

# Purpose of this Session

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- To give you an overview of an initiative undertaken by an Australian public sector organisation to “*enhance the performance*” of its Project Steering Committees

- Please turn to your neighbour
- Introduce yourselves
- Each pick one word that describes your personal experiences with Project Steering Committees





# Steering Committee Challenges

- Meetings morphing into stakeholder information sessions
- “too much trust”
- Not enough “ownership” by executives
- “not enough rigour”
- Members “protecting their own patch”
- Steering Committees acting as working parties
- Poor awareness of Steering Committee roles and responsibilities

# Target Outcomes

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- Increased **awareness** of Steering Committee roles and responsibilities
- Increased **executive ownership** of projects and programs
- Increased **effectiveness** of Steering Committees

# Desirable Characteristics (of effective Steering Committees)

- ☑ Provides the Project/Program with strategic direction and advice in line with the wider business context
- ☑ Has access to a regular report that accords with the principles of project execution management at each meeting
- ☑ Works effectively to leverage the collective intelligence and insight of each participant
- ☑ ...
- ☑ ...

# Desirable Characteristics (of effective Steering Committees)

- Foundation document
- Set of principles or guidelines
- Characteristics relating to the Committee as a whole eg *“resolves conflict between the project and core business or competing projects”*
- Characteristics relating to individual Committee members eg *“are able to question ideas / assumptions and critically review information and approaches”*

# The “before” Scenario

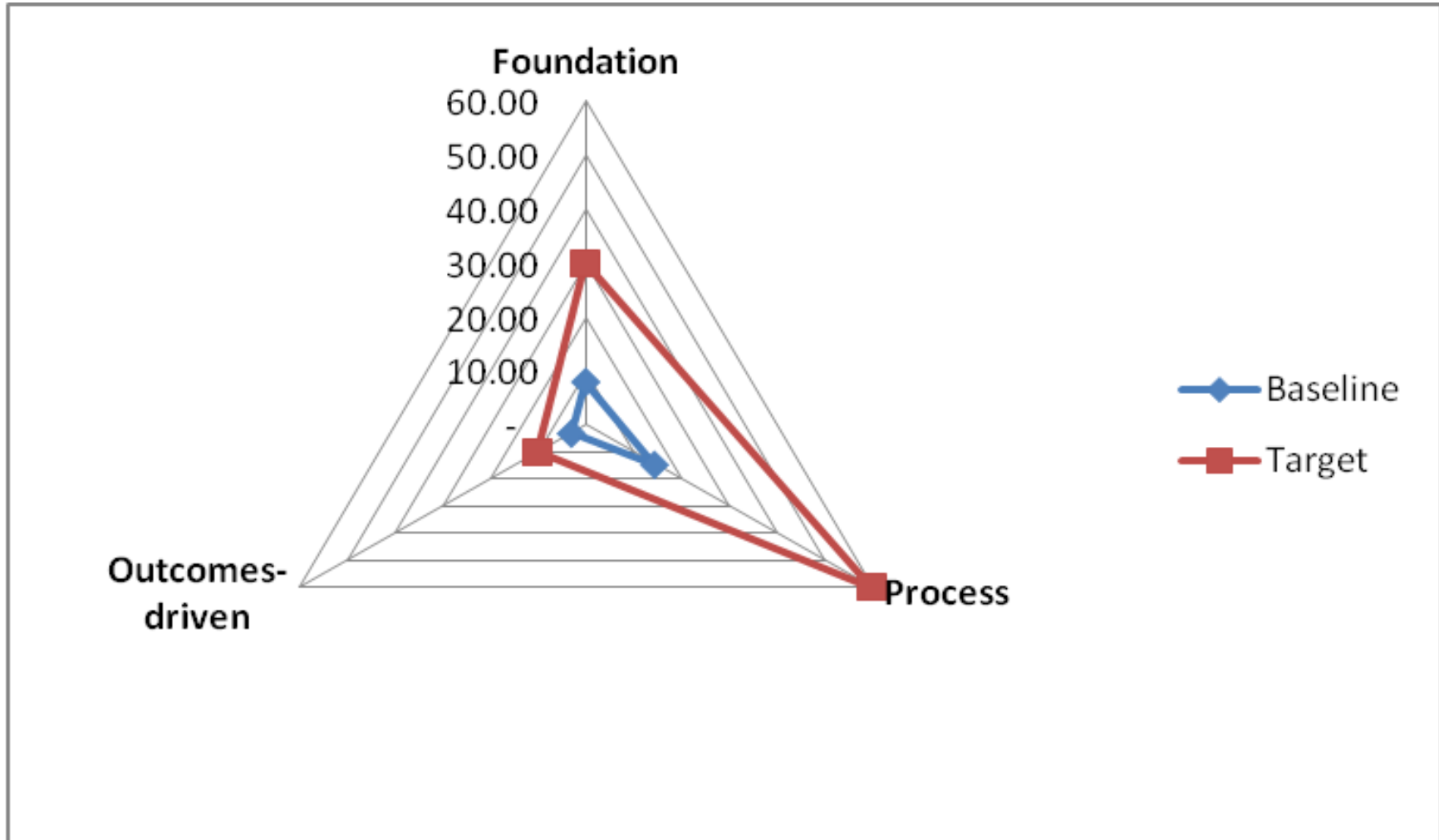
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## Establishing a baseline

- Survey
- Document inspection
- Interviews

Also serving as an informal needs analysis

# Performance Metrics



## Key themes

- Knowledge gaps around core concepts
- Inconsistent approaches across the organisation
- Specific skill development required in some areas  
eg questioning skills

## Design constraint

- Full or half day workshop format would not be suitable for executive / senior management audience

- **Target Group**  
(7 critical projects/programs => 60 participants)
- **Launch by Senior Sponsor**
- **Executive Project Leadership Guide**
- **Education**  
(three 90-120 minute “knowledge bite” sessions)
- **Application of Learning**  
(Steering Committee simulation)
- **Learning Support**  
(project specific assistance and/or executive coaching)

- Direct application of key concepts
- Simulation of current practice and protocols around Steering committees
- Real time, spaced learning approach
- Scenario content designed to expose participants to poor practice



# Steering Committee Simulation

In the form of

- Emails
- Documentation review
- Meeting preparation and participation
- Facilitator-led debriefing discussions

- The importance of executive support and participation
- Spaced, flexible learning approach
- Immediacy of application
- Common language and consistent understanding
- Emergence of a shared culture for project Steering Committees

## Quotes from Participants

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“Great value in having senior leaders in the simulations ... we got access to their implicit knowledge; how they respond to things, the types of questions they ask, their different perspectives”

“The mixture of theory and practice worked well – to practice skills and then link them to the theory of the Knowledge Bites”

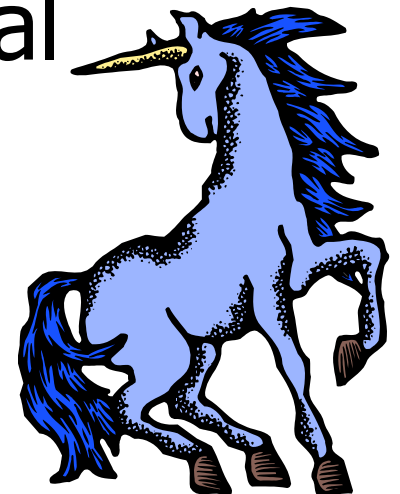
“This type of learning is a good way to hear what other people think and build a shared culture for Steering Committees”

## Favourite Quote!

“That was actually really fun – and I think I might’ve learned something”

# Steering Committee Myths

- All projects need a Steering Committee
- The Steering Committee must be established at the outset of the project
- The more members the better!
- Committee members bring technical expertise to the project
- The Project Manager is a member of the Committee





So ...

Accidental  
Tourist

Accountable for  
Project Results





# Establishing an Effective Steering Committee

- Document clear terms of reference or a charter for the Committee
- Agree decision-making and other key processes
- Review membership at key points of the project
- Induct new members into the Committee
- Review the health of the Committee on a regular basis
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the Committee at the end of the project

The project management framework underpinning this initiative is drawn from –

Zwikael, OY & Smyrk, JR

“Project Management for the Creation of Organisational Value”

Springer, London 2011



# Questions



For further information

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