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Maintaining Momentum
The engine for success
in major programmes

January 2026

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Building and maintaining programme momentum

1. Creating the right environment

2. Minimum viable bureaucracy and decision making

3. Pace vs control

4. Clear outcomes

5. Driving continuous improvement

6. Handover to business teams

Get in touch

End notes

Major programmes offer immense potential for transformative change, but their inherent complexity demands a balance of vision, adaptability, and flawless execution. Achieving on-time and within-budget delivery remains a challenge for public and private sector organisations.

This report explores a critical success factor in these large-scale endeavours: momentum. Drawing on the experience of Deloitte's Major Programmes team and our next-generation approach – Programme Aerodynamics® – we unpack six principles for building and sustaining momentum throughout the programme lifecycle: right environment; minimum viable bureaucracy; pace vs control; clear outcomes; continuous improvement; and handover to business teams. Working with our team of Major Programmes practitioners, we impart knowledge garnered from extensive, first-hand experience of leading and managing large-scale transformation programmes across industries.

Deloitte's Major Programmes team tackles complex transformations by moving beyond traditional project management methodologies, which can often hard-code failure into programmes from the start. We leverage Programme Aerodynamics,® built on the principles of our NextGen delivery approach—Anticipate, Unify, Innovate, Evolve—to navigate volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environments and deliver successful outcomes.

Building and maintaining programme momentum

Major programmes, whether in the realm of technology, infrastructure, business transformation or military and defence, are complex endeavours. They require a careful balance of strategic vision, the ability to adapt to evolving circumstances, and sound execution. The failure to deliver these on time and to budget represents a significant issue for private and public sector organisations, with UK taxpayers facing substantial costs from delays and cancellations of major government programmes.[1]

In today's volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) world, the need to initiate, harness, and sustain momentum during large-scale delivery is the linchpin that separates success from stagnation. It is the driving force that propels a programme from inception through to completion.

Creating this momentum however is not a matter of chance – We delve into **six key themes** to **building and maintaining momentum in major programme delivery**:

Six key themes

1
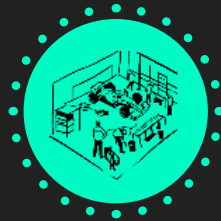
Creating the right environment

Explores the process of creating the conditions for success to establish and maintain momentum for impactful delivery – creating the right environment for multidisciplinary teams to build and sustain programme momentum.

2

Minimum viable bureaucracy

Examines the importance of enabling decision-making at the appropriate level, empowering the people who are best placed, with the best available information, to make decisions. This helps generate a culture that fosters collaboration and accountability.

3

Pace vs control

Explores achieving proportionate control in major programmes, including establishing the right degree of governance, clearly defining roles and responsibilities, and developing effective communication channels to accelerate the pace of the programme and maintain sufficient levels of control.

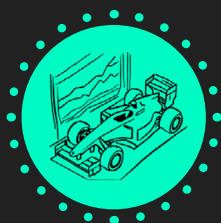# Building and maintaining programme momentum (cont.)

Six key themes

Learning from our rich tapestry of experiences, strategies, and insights, we explore adjustments organisations can make to increase momentum and achieve success.

4

Clear outcomes

Focuses on the importance of defining clear outcomes that all stakeholders can buy into – Measuring and tracking success, engaging the public and the need to continuously evaluate programme inflection points throughout the lifecycle to maintain momentum and deliver the intended impact.

5

Continuous improvement

Looks at driving continuous improvement to maintain programme momentum, considering data-driven decision-making, and learning from experience to continuously improve programme delivery.
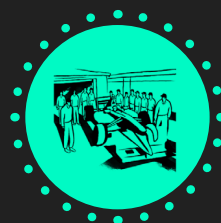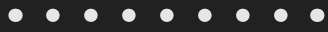
6

Handover to BAU

Explores how early planning for transition to business teams can maintain stability and operational continuity, and ensure outcomes and benefits are realised. With knowledge transfer, process improvement, and thinking 'pan-organisation' to support a seamless transition.

1. Creating the right environment

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In the world of major programmes, creating the right delivery environment is crucial in establishing and maintaining momentum. The environment encompasses the social dynamics, physical workspace, and broader ecosystem where teams operate. The National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority (NISTA) and its predecessor, the Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA), recognises that setting up projects for success requires the prioritisation of people and behaviours.[1] Yet major programmes can spend an insufficient amount of time setting up the delivery environment, with the right capabilities, to achieve the standards required for successful delivery throughout the programme.

Establishing the appropriate environment is crucial for teams to build and sustain programme momentum. A key aspect of this is ensuring we have the people with the required skills and experience, deployed at the right time in the programme lifecycle. Deloitte's work with Thames Tideway exemplifies this approach, where we helped establish a new special purpose delivery organisation, carved out of Thames Water, to deliver the scheme. This proactive approach is essential for both creating initial momentum and maintaining it throughout a programme's duration.

How leaders drive momentum
A key foundation in creating the conditions for teams to build and sustain momentum is effective leadership. Effective leaders do not just manage tasks; they inspire and guide their teams. A leader who is inspirational and strategic can energise the team, keep a focus sharp and help anticipate future challenges that could derail progress. This means setting a clear direction, providing the necessary support throughout the programme, and fostering a sense of purpose. Crucially, leaders must create an environment that encourages collaboration, empowers decision-making at all levels, and promotes continuous improvement to maintain momentum.

The environment encompasses the social dynamics, physical workspace, and broader ecosystem where teams operate.

1. Creating the right environment (cont.)

Compelling direction

Enabling programme momentum requires establishing crystal-clear goals that provide a shared understanding of what success looks like. Leaders must articulate a compelling vision that resonates across all levels of their programmes ensuring all team members understand the 'why' behind their work. This vision should be aligned with the organisation's strategic objectives. But it does not stop there – incentives must be carefully designed to be truly effective and motivating for the workforce. When incentives are directly aligned with the programme's objectives and desired outcomes, organisations create a powerful force for success. This encourages individuals and teams to not just meet, but consistently exceed expectations, driving exceptional results and propelling the programme forward. Later in our report we will delve deeper into the importance of defining outcomes and embedding a forward-looking approach.

Creating a supportive culture that fuels momentum

Maintaining delivery momentum requires a supportive culture. When leaders genuinely invest in their teams' well-being, providing consistent support and guidance, it creates a positive work environment. This increases employee morale and engagement. Motivated teams are more likely to maintain focus, resilience, and dedication, driving sustained programme momentum. Cultivating this environment empowers teams to align their efforts, confidently share ideas, take calculated risks, and continuously improve, maximising their potential for successful project outcomes.

Deloitte's Programme Aerodynamics® equips leaders and delivery practitioners with methods and tools to set direction without imposing excessive structure and develop a culture that drives programme momentum. The next theme in our report will explore the significance of empowering decision-making at the appropriate level to maintain momentum.

2. Minimum viable bureaucracy and decision making
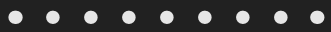
MVB is a guiding principle to ensure there is the appropriate degree of governance and structure in place to drive success for clients.

"A minimum viable bureaucracy (MVB) is defined as having the least number of governing bodies and processes needed to carry out the function(s) of an organisation or programme without impeding the delivery of customer value. It helps to achieve business agility by reducing decision latency (time to make a decision), which has been noted as a primary driver of success."

The Scrum@Scale Guide Online | Scrum@Scale Framework (scrumatscale.com)

Deloitte's Programme Aerodynamics® approach is described as:

"A delivery process, a cadence of meetings, which creates a forward looking, problem solving and aligned mindset. By focusing on building a delivery rhythm and transparency, the process accelerates programme delivery and momentum."

At the core of this framework, MVB must aid decision-making, ensuring it happens at the right level within programmes and projects.

Case study
COVID 19 Testing programme

The Test team, faced with the urgent requirement to deliver and report progress and issues in a fast-moving environment, had to minimise meeting time while still ensuring key messaging reached hundreds of staff. One measure taken was to run daily stand-up calls for every single team member, with team leads keeping updates short and focused on "what's next" rather than what has already happened. This allowed staff to understand leadership intent and direction without the need for lengthy calls and additional direction from leadership.

2. Minimum viable bureaucracy and decision making (cont.)

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What does this mean for us?

MVB requires the right team structures and environment. In an environment that fosters collaboration and freedom to act independently, empowered staff can make strategic choices without unnecessary escalation and are able to anticipate challenges and take controlled risks within established tolerances. This is enabled by clearly defined roles and responsibilities, including scope, team boundaries of ownership and escalation guidelines.

Decision-making is enabled through data, which needs to be sufficient to make informed choices without undue detail. There must be a clear reason for every data collection activity and must clearly be beneficial to programme outcomes. Every programme and organisation is different, so we must ask if the level of bureaucracy is right for the organisation at this time, given their client, industry, staff ethos and size.

	Too little bureaucracy	Minimum viable bureaucracy	Too much bureaucracy
Governance	Insufficient/too vague to drive efficient behaviours	Enough to enable analysis and decisions without undue administrative burden	Rigid processes and overly complex guidance
Tools	Insufficient to enable efficiency Variety of individually created tools and processes, leading to inconsistency and confusion	Standardised tools Appropriate tools for each role Reduced time to collate information	Numerous and unchangeable tools that do not evolve to match needs Time wasted on 'workarounds' and time spent converting/adapting information
Data collection	Insufficient/inaccurate/inconsistent data collection, leaving leadership unable to make effective decisions based on the information they are given	Appropriate detail and complexity of information to aid specific business outcomes, collated with minimal disruption to teams and usable by those in decision-making positions	Excessive data gathering and cumbersome reporting taking time away from teams. Data collated and not used to check progress or inform decisions.
Direction and management	No overall direction Effective change only at tactical level	Understanding of aims Direction enables change without being overly prescriptive	Firm direction but slow to change with circumstances
Roles and delivery	Duplication of effort, confusion, and inconsistent communication	Proper understanding of: Roles; Aims; and Cross-team tasks	Lack of empowerment to coordinate across teams Limited staff development

3. Pace vs control

Establishing clear, efficient governance and effective communication channels to accelerate the pace of the programme, while maintaining sufficient levels of control, requires a careful balance.

## What are the challenges we face to get the balance right?

In many cases, process-driven bureaucracy can unintentionally become the rule, largely due to a narrow focus on standards and good practices. In that regard, the following challenges must be overcome to establish proportionate control to the value of the prize and the risk of failure, and avoiding this misdirection:

• Being able to flex governance structures and reporting requirements around distinct and constantly changing levels of scrutiny and complexity across projects and their lifecycles.

• Keeping the focus on delivering the desired outcome and its benefits, rather than getting too caught up in sticking strictly to the plan.

• Keeping stakeholders on the same page, even if they have different priorities and levels of accountability.

How do we achieve that right proportionate control?

The fundamental principle of every control function should not be on creating reports and controls, but on allocating the right amount of control to support decision-making and getting the work done. Deloitte's approach based on establishing a Minimum Viable Bureaucracy (MVB), explained previously, nurtures this principle by getting these four basics right:

1 Building transparency to delivery with proportionate governance and controls.

2 Being outcome-focused and not only fixating on the plan, generating quick wins is a plus.

3 Data-led decision-making using effective/suitable project management tooling.

4 Establishing accountability for delivery and decisions.
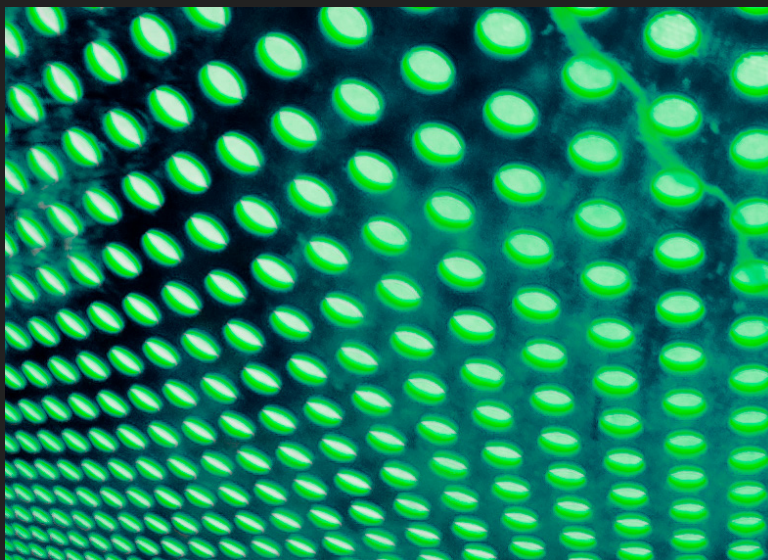
3. Pace vs control (cont.)
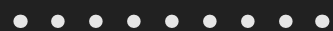
Case study
## Major mining project in Africa

This major project was under a complex and ever-evolving reporting environment, with a significant number of stakeholders, including the government and three joint-venture groups, requiring information to make decisions and assess progress daily.

Over approximately one year, the team helped develop the information flows and data capture process to enable these reports to be produced more quickly and easily, providing more up to date and robust information. An evolving 'performance hub' encompassing the key datasets was deployed for this purpose, enabling this information to be made available across the programme, used for multiple purposes and during the lifecycle within a flexible framework.

Creating and maintaining that minimum viable bureaucracy (MVB)

To achieve and maintain an end-to-end MVB, every control function needs to be equipped and capable to sense and flex around different control requirements to fit the context, timing, scale, and complexity of any programme (e.g. new regulations, auditability, safety conditions and readiness), allowing them to progress without unnecessary interruptions while keeping the focus on protecting delivery of the expected outcome.

This requires strong stakeholder engagement to drive and maintain the speed of delivery. This could be addressed by building an efficient governance structure, able to establish clear accountabilities; deploying effective communication channels, capable of maintaining transparency across the organisation; and designing outcome-focused and data-driven reports also capable of adapting to the continuously changing needs of the programme.
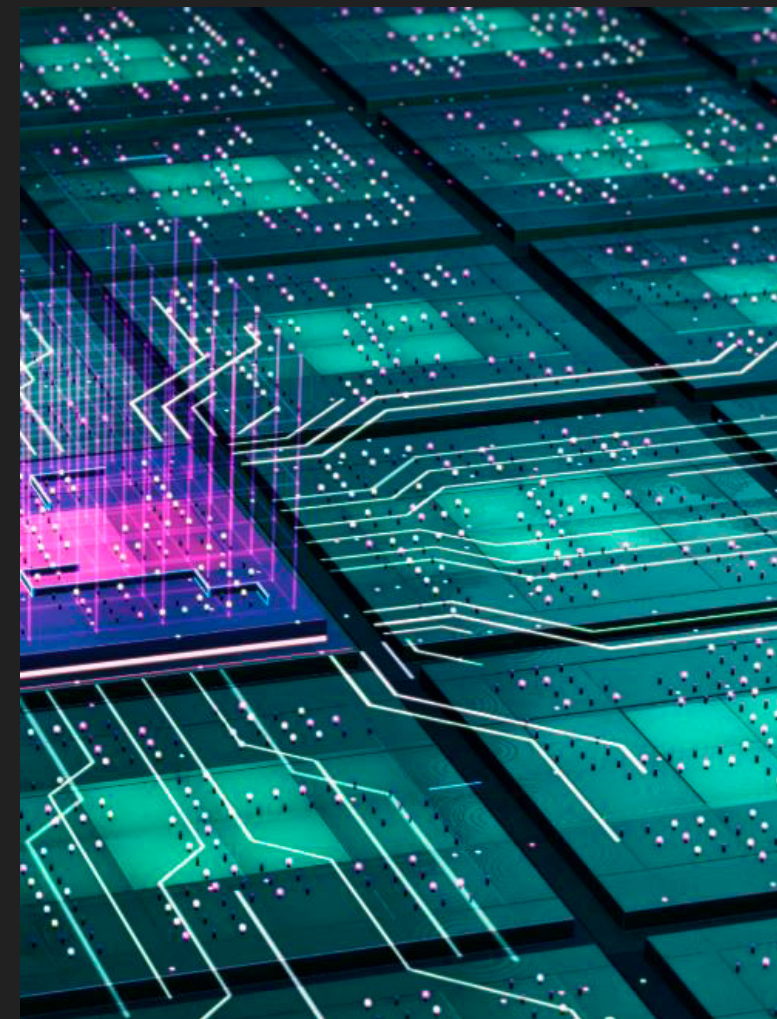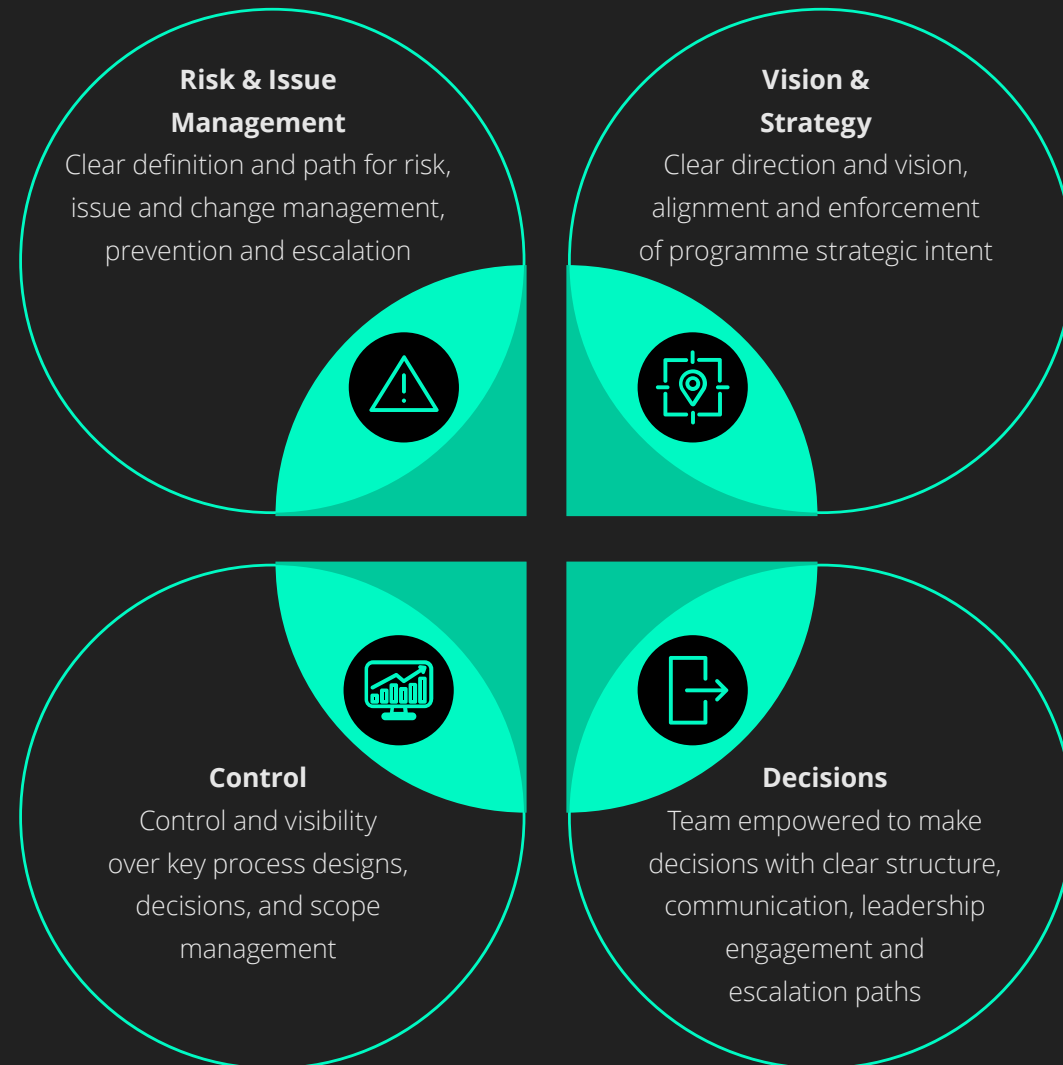
3. Pace vs control (cont.)
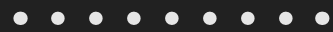
What does proportionate control look like in a MVB?

Efficient governance is in place and acts as a linkage mechanism facilitating alignment between business strategy and direction. It establishes clear responsibilities and ensures that the right people are empowered to make decisions and drive work forward.

Effective communication is taking care of cascading and delivering decisions throughout the programme, streamlining actions and increasing pace of delivery.

An adaptable reporting mechanism with a predefined set of flexible and fixed connections has been agreed and is working towards an expected outcome, focusing only on what really matters.

Having all of them together working for the programme provides several benefits including:

Risk & Issue Management
Clear definition and path for risk, issue and change management, prevention and escalation

Vision & Strategy
Clear direction and vision, alignment and enforcement of programme strategic intent

Control
Control and visibility over key process designs, decisions, and scope management

Decisions
Team empowered to make decisions with clear structure, communication, leadership engagement and escalation paths

4. Clear outcomes

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The value of any programme, whether in technology, infrastructure, or business transformation, cannot be measured without defining success. Embedding a forward-looking approach to focus on clear outcomes, rather than process, allows teams to clarify the intended results required for the success of the programme. Being outcome-focussed in nature and leveraging best-practice programme controls, methods, and tools will enable the accuracy, quality, and momentum required for the success of any programme.

What are outcomes and how do we identify, track, and monitor them?

Outcomes are the primary goal. They are the high-level overarching changes an organisation wants or needs and which are, at least in part, a direct consequence of a programme. Outcomes certainly go beyond outputs, focussing on the real impact delivered for the organisation and wider society.
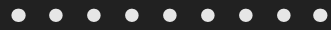
Creating an efficient and harmonious delivery ecosystem is critical to success but is often overlooked in favour of getting going. Ensuring outcomes are agreed up front and documented along with their associated activities and their accountable owners enables teams to be forward looking and data driven. Constantly reviewing this data and identifying trends helps teams make more informed decisions, allowing them to pivot and adapt and go on to deliver ambitious goals – not because they adhere to a static plan, but because they proactively evolve programme structures to overcome new challenges.

4. Clear outcomes (cont.)

Case study
where a project struggled to identify their end goal due to not identifying clear outcomes

Deloitte recently worked with a client running a multiyear programme of business and technical change. The client was struggling to clarify their end goals due to the programme's teams being pulled together from multiple, disparate projects of varying quality. The client asked Deloitte to support with leading the programme office, to drive all projects to define a clear set of outcomes, along with a 'definition of done' and an accountable business owner. This was then presented to the Board who wanted a straightforward way to know what they would achieve for their investment, when it would happen, and which executive was accountable for it. By establishing the outcomes at the most senior level, the programme's focus was significantly sharper and simpler to understand.

Case study
SMART outcomes to transform a global retail company's supply chain

Defining clear outcomes is also exemplified on the work Deloitte carried out in transforming a global retail company's supply chain, who struggled with high logistics costs and meeting customer delivery expectations. By collaboratively establishing SMART outcomes from the beginning, such as reducing storage costs and improving delivery rates, we developed and implemented a tailored strategy. This helped to deliver process improvements, new technology, and a better way of working across the organisation. Through optimising delivery efficiency, regular progress tracking and transparent communication of results, we proved that focus on clear goals leads to real and positive changes for our clients.

What can help increase the success of a programme?

A programme management office builds tailor-made programme controls and processes to ensure that all stakeholders are engaged, have visibility and accountability for delivery, with a clear understanding of performance expectations. Data is evaluated to identify trends and where interventions may be required to ensure that momentum is maintained, and the intended impact is delivered. This all helps to provide increased transparency and confidence that robust delivery management will be executed, and benefits will be realised, all with outcomes at its heart.

5. Driving continuous improvement

Transformation success depends heavily on the ability to maintain programme momentum. However, despite initial progress and enthusiasm, initiatives can slow down or even grind to a halt over time. To drive impactful change and help keep the transformation programme on track, it is important to embrace continuous improvement (CI) practices such as agile project methodologies, process improvement and ensuring continuous feedback from stakeholders.

We explore how these key principles can maintain programme momentum, and how you can leverage them to support effective delivery of your most critical projects.

What is Continuous improvement?
Continuous improvement (CI) is the ongoing effort to reduce risk of delivery and increase the value being delivered by the programme. A systematic approach to CI involves collecting and analysing data, identifying root causes of problems, and implementing solutions to increase efficiency, reduce costs, and improve overall team performance and satisfaction e.g. optimal utilisation of time and skills of programme team members.

We explore how these key principles can maintain programme momentum, and how you can leverage them to support effective delivery of your most critical projects.

5. Driving continuous improvement (cont.)

How do we apply CI to maintain programme momentum?

There are several approaches to how you can apply CI throughout the lifecycle of a programme depending on what you are delivering, the scope, size, and tools available.

One CI approach is to adopt agile project methodology where collaboration, flexibility and continuous improvement are central to daily activities. By breaking down project delivery into smaller tasks you can deliver value in short iterations, and by adapting processes in response to changing requirements and feedback received from key stakeholders you can achieve positive outcomes.

Continuous feedback from stakeholders enables teams to identify areas for improvement and amend their processes in real-time. This improves communication and collaboration among team members and stakeholders.

Lean Six Sigma[3] principles can be deployed for CI. For example, combining the Lean principle of waste reduction and Six Sigma use of data analysis in reducing defects and increasing quality provides an enhanced approach for continuously reviewing processes for improvement. Programme teams can use Lean Six Sigma to identify the root cause of a problem and implement improvements. Real-time data enhances decision-making and ensures the programme is responsive to change.

Automation is another way to improve project management processes. By automating repetitive tasks such as data entry or report generation, we can improve efficiencies and reduce errors caused by manual tasks – and it allows the programme manager and team members to focus on more strategic tasks. The arrival of GenAI is a key accelerator.

Post-project review and lessons learnt are useful tools to discuss and learn from challenges experienced during the programme and agree future solutions for the next programme phase. Feedback reviews can be held at agreed regular intervals to support this, such as the use of retrospective meetings to assess progress and agree actions for improvement in the next stage of work.

Applying these reviews enables a programme to adapt and evolve to maintain momentum throughout the lifecycle. This includes through the transition of a programme into operations, which is fundamental to the success of the programme and the focus of our final theme.

5. Driving continuous improvement (cont.)

Case study
Embedding sustainable CI capability planning into a service delivery for a leading UK retailer

Deloitte's work with a leading UK retailer to embed excellent service delivery into a shared service centre, recognised that a sustainable Continuous Improvement (CI) capability was required to build momentum. Deloitte led the client through a structured improvement event and capability building planning process for their shared service operation. This work encompassed designing a CI sustainability roadmap, coaching senior leaders, ensuring that training and core improvement tools and techniques were adapted to the client environment and culture, and the development of a standardised approach to CI which included a prioritisation hopper for future projects. Key achievements included core processing activity reduced from five-day to two-day cycle, key supplier data gathering cycle reduced by three weeks, and product reporting time reduced from 30 hours to 18 minutes.
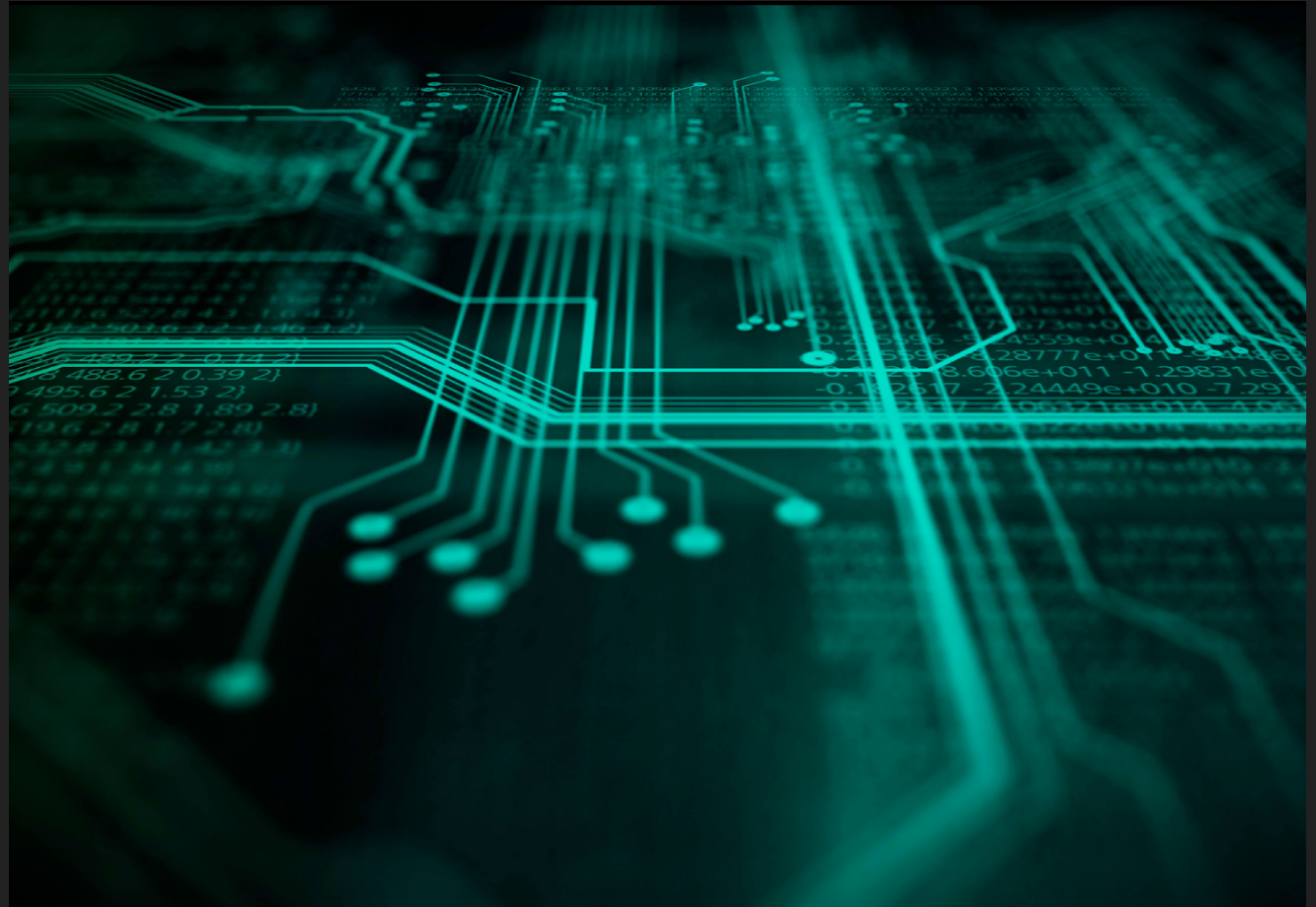
6. Handover to business teams

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Attempting to successfully migrate a major programme into, or back to, an operational business can often be key its success. Migrations can have a significant impact on the realisation of benefits by the operational business after the programme has been disbanded. Programme handovers should not be considered only within a specific time window but as a process that should be appropriately considered and planned from the offset.

Case study
Handover on a major infrastructure programme

For example, during 2019-2021, Deloitte supported the major infrastructure programme to build and open the Elizabeth Line railway service in London, incrementally handing over the services over a 9-month period. As this was a new railway network to be operated by a new operating organisation, a dedicated programme transition team was formed to manage the handover activities. This team was specifically responsible for ensuring handover activities were adequality planned and created an environment for programme and business teams to collaborate to protect the quality of products/services being handed over, thus helping mitigate the risk of any delays.

6. Handover to business teams (cont.)

What should be considered when planning handover to business teams?

While there are many distinct aspects to consider when planning the handover of a programme or project, the table outlines some considerations that should be factored into programme/project planning, grouped into eight themes:

| Commercial	Process	Data & knowledge transfer	People	Timings/schedule	Warranty/hyper-care	Comms	Operational continuity
• Programme handover requirements should be documented in relevant tender documentation (client & supplier agreements) in as much detail as possible. • Supplier and client should be aligned on the scope of the delivery, product, measures of success and warranty/hyper-care periods.	• Planning of the handover process should start at the very beginning of a project or programme. • The definition of 'complete' should be documented within the handover contract. This contract should stipulate what products are to be delivered, by when and to what standard. • While the physical handover is often at the 'end' of a project, agreeing the requirements for 'handing over' up-front helps manage expectations between all the parties involved, agree priorities, and ensure the optimal product that can be adopted into BAU is developed and delivered.	• In most cases, it's likely the project team will leave at the end of the programme taking their skills and experiences with them – it is therefore crucial that project teams plan for their knowledge to be transferred to BAU teams considering 'what', 'when' and 'how' this should be done. • This should encompass required process documentation, end user guides and key lessons learned. • Project teams should pay special attention to considering who should be trained to use and maintain the end-product.	• The people element of transitioning into BAU is often overlooked or understated in its importance. • For any programme to be successful, those involved must understand their role, expected contribution and what output they are accountable for delivering. • Consideration should be made to understanding key operational stakeholders and bringing them along on the programme journey, engaging them throughout, and not just at the end of the project.	• While some projects are handed over at full-term completion, many are handed over iteratively to teams as sprints are concluded. • Any handover points should be planned well in advance, with all involved stakeholders in agreement of the transition timeline and what activities will happen in this window and who should be involved.	• Project teams should plan for the unforeseeable, and ensure appropriate resources, time and cost are provisioned to conduct a warranty or hyper-care period. • This approach increases the likelihood that delivered products are fit for purpose and any 'live' issues are identified and resolved as efficiently as possible before operational teams continue to support through BAU processes.	• As handover points are reached, it is crucial that all stakeholders, inclusive of end users, are informed of what is being received, versus what is not, and if relevant, how this differs from the original plan. • Furthermore, end-users should understand how the delivered product adds value to the organisation with handover points a perfect way to communicate this success. • Communication is also important in ensuring that goals, key dates, priorities, and responsibilities are understood and accepted between all parties involved.	• As projects and programmes often deliver products that must be maintained and supported by operational teams, it is vital to ensure that appropriate levels of BAU operational support is available to end users once handover has been completed. • Failure to manage appropriate operational support can often impact the optics of a projects or programmes success.

6. Handover to business teams (cont.)

Summary

Leading practice suggests we start with the end in mind when initiating a project and spend time practically considering how the projects/programmes output will be handed to operational business teams throughout the life of a project. By considering transition from project to business early, project teams are best equipped to plan appropriate time, cost, and resource to ensure effort is transitioned safely and efficiently. It is good practice for the receiving business to appoint a 'sponsor' of a project/ programme, who usually contributes towards project/ programme governance (e.g. in a Steering Committee) to ensure ownership of any receiving change, inclusive of benefit management, is carefully considered, planned and implemented.

As most programmes are initiated for the sole purpose of delivering benefits, it is vital that benefits continue to be measured after the programme conclusion. This is especially needed in cases where planned benefits are not delivered immediately on programme conclusion. The programme team, working closely with the business, should have designed a benefits management plan at the start of the programme. While this plan can contain intangible benefits, it is the tangible benefits that are most important at the handover stage. Typically, a benefits management plan will contain:

• definition of each identified benefit.

• release schedule for when each benefit will be delivered.

• benefit owner i.e., who from the business will own this benefit realisation.

• what metrics will be used to benchmark benefit realisation.

• any associated risks and/or assumptions related to the benefits and, where required, appropriate mitigation strategies.
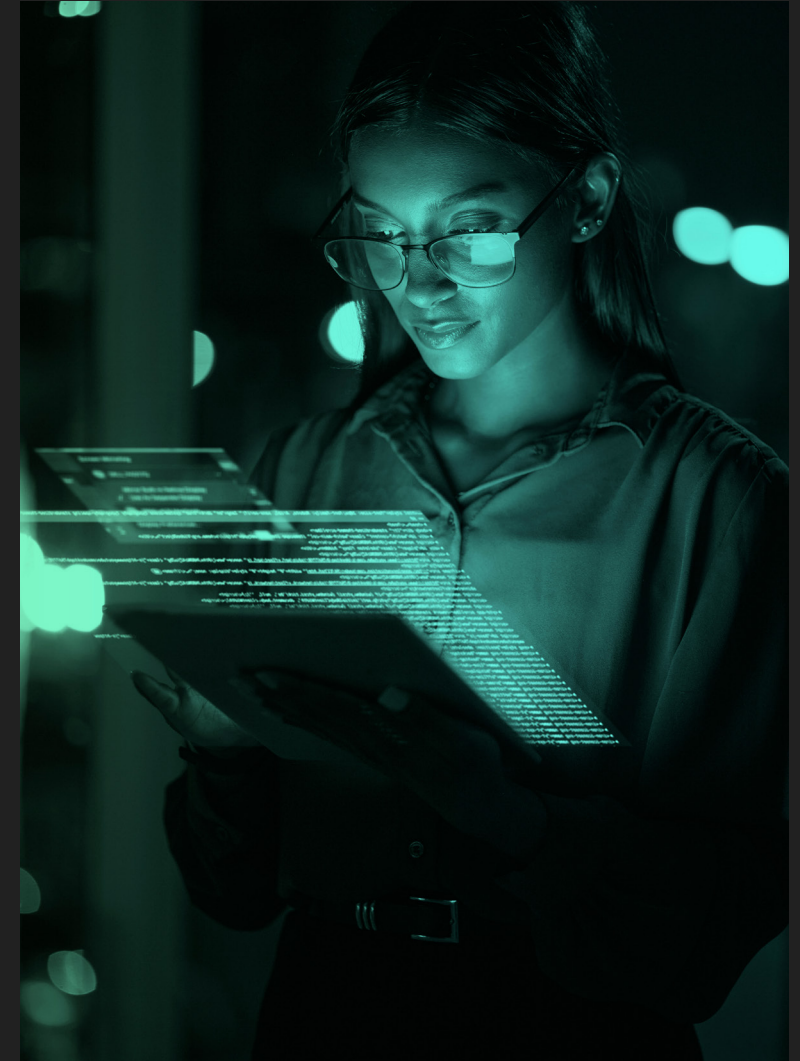
Get in touch

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In a highly complex and uncertain environment, sustaining momentum is key to achieving success.

We hope you have enjoyed this report – If you are interested in finding out how you can build and maintain programme momentum, please reach out to our contacts to find out more.

What is Deloitte Major Programmes?
Deloitte Major Programmes focuses on solving the most challenging issues facing the world today – economic, environmental, and societal. Our Programme Aerodynamics® framework, built our NextGen approach of Anticipate, Unify, Innovate, and Evolve, helps clients overcome complex challenges and achieve lasting transformation.

For more information visit our website.

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End notes

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1. Reducing the frequency and scale of failure across the UK Government's largest and most ambitious projects and programmes across the Government Major Projects Portfolio could generate a 'major programme dividend' for the public purse, potentially worth up to £60bn – *Deloitte's 'Delivering the Major Programme Dividend'* centred on the criticality of early decisive intervention in major programmes at risk of failure.

2. Principle 3. Prioritise people and behaviour, Principles for project success, Government project delivery profession, Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA).

3. Guide: Fundamentals of Lean Six Sigma – Learn Lean Sigma

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