



The trouble with using the word Efficiency

You are in a project kick-off meeting and the business sponsor has been talking about the importance of the project. They stress the tendencies for past projects to run late and over budget and the importance of 'efficiency' on this project. Everyone agrees...

Efficiency is one of those words I like to call problematic.

Why would I say that?

The word efficiency needs to be considered on three levels:

Context, Delivery and Personal Level.

Starting on a Personal Level, efficiency means different things to different people.

It could mean:

- Doing it right the first time
- Having the right-fit people delivering the project
- Getting started quickly and finalising the details as we go
- Having a detailed plan with well thought out contingencies
- Being assertive and having a strong leader to drive the project
- Collaborating to have everybody's buy-in to make it a smooth project.

What you believe is efficient will depend on what you value the most. Having said that, what is efficient needs to be defined upfront by the project team - which takes us to the Delivery Level.

On the Delivery Level what does 'efficiency' mean to the project? This is where the traditional project management terms of on-time and on-budget get used without truly understanding what it really means. Being efficient from a client's perspective goes beyond this. It could mean being proactive in handling issues and providing the client with confidence you are across future issues - showing that you know where you are now, not just what you are reporting - which is already in the past.

On the Context Level what does efficiency mean to the client?

One of my clients is a Mining and Infrastructure company. They were delivering a billion dollar project for a client. The client had been promising the shareholders that they would

be in production within 24 months. The delivery of product to market on time was worth more than how much it would cost to get there. Therefore the client had a slightly higher tolerance of Cost to Market and was willing to spend on resources to ensure the delivery date was met - and shareholder's expectations were maintained.

Take a moment to consider what your Context, Delivery and Personal expectations of efficiency are.

Can you satisfy your business sponsor, your team and yourself?

If you cannot, what is the impact? Will it lead to damaging your reputation?

Tess Brook is a communication and conflict coach and work place mediator. She specialises in deconstructing language and conflict alike. She creates awareness around how language leads to conflict, simply from your word choice, (refer to problematic words) and communication patterns. She works one-on-one ([communication coaching](#)), with parties in conflict ([conflict coaching and/or mediation](#)), teams focused on creating effective conversations (The trouble with talking program) as well as large team conflict resolution.

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