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# Capital Project Stage-Gate Decision Leadership Training Course

11 – 15 October 2027  
Rome





## Capital Project Stage-Gate Decision Leadership Training Course

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### Programme Summary

Capital project stage-gate decision leadership is a one-week training course for sponsors and investment decision-makers working at strategic level, culminating in a gate governance charter for their organisation's capital portfolio. Many capital projects pass their gates on momentum rather than evidence, so weak definition and optimistic estimates reach execution. The approach equips leaders to design the gated lifecycle, set gate criteria and decision rights, and take defensible go, hold, recycle or stop decisions. Mars Training Centre UK delivers this programme in capital project stage-gate decision leadership.

### The Business Case

Much of a capital project's value is fixed before construction starts, during the front-end phases that gates are meant to control. When gate reviews become formalities, organisations commit funds to projects that are poorly defined or no longer fit strategy. Leaders who run gates on clear criteria and independent evidence redirect capital early and protect the projects that deserve to proceed.

- Cost and Schedule Predictability: Improves when projects enter execution only after definition meets agreed gate criteria.
- Capital Allocation Quality: Strengthens as weak or misaligned projects are held, recycled or stopped before major commitments.
- Decision Accountability: Becomes visible when every gate decision has a named owner, recorded evidence and stated conditions.

### Principles and Evidence Base

- ISO 21502:2020 Guidance on Project Management: Defines governance, sponsor roles and decision points, applied in Sessions 1 and 2.
- Front-End Loading FEL Stage-Gated Process: Frames the FEL phases and the gates before execution, used in Sessions 1 and 3.
- APM Directing Change: Provides principles on authorisation and independent assurance, applied in Session 4.

### Intended Participants

- Executives who sponsor capital projects and answer for their business case.
- Members of investment or capital committees who approve funding at decision points.
- Leaders of portfolio or project management offices who run the gate process.
- Senior officials who authorise public infrastructure spending.



The programme serves energy and utilities, infrastructure and construction, mining and manufacturing, and government capital programmes.

## Learning Outcomes

1. Participants will be able to diagnose weaknesses in a current gate process.
2. Participants will be able to design a gated lifecycle with deliverables and criteria matched to each phase.
3. Participants will be able to assign decision rights to sponsors, steering committees and investment committees.
4. Participants will be able to evaluate a business case update and an independent review report at a gate.
5. Participants will be able to justify a go, hold, recycle or stop decision with recorded conditions.
6. Participants will be able to construct a gate governance charter ready for executive approval.

## Programme Structure

### Day 1: Stage-Gate Governance Principles

Why do capital projects need gates, and what does each gate protect?

- Value Creation in the Front-End Phases
- ISO 21502:2020 Governance and Decision Points
- FEL 1, FEL 2 and FEL 3 Phase Purposes
- Common Failure Patterns at Gates
- Gate Maturity Self-Assessment

### Day 2: Decision Rights and Governance Roles

Who decides at each gate, and on what authority?

- Sponsor, Steering Committee and Investment Committee Roles
- Delegated Authority Thresholds by Project Size
- Separation of Delivery and Approval Responsibilities
- Gatekeeper Conduct and Conflicts of Interest
- Decision Rights Matrix Drafting

### Day 3: Designing Capital Project Stage-Gate Criteria

What must be true before a project passes each gate?

- Gate Deliverables and Definition Levels
- Business Case Update at Each Gate
- Cost Estimate Classes and Contingency Ranges
- Readiness Checks for Scope, Schedule and Contracting Strategy
- Gate Criteria Scorecard Design



## Day 4: Gate Reviews and Independent Assurance

How is evidence tested so that a gate decision can be trusted?

- APM Directing Change Assurance Principles
- Independent Project Review Planning
- Peer Review and Cold-Eyes Review Methods
- Optimism Bias Checks on Estimates and Benefits
- Go, Hold, Recycle and Stop Decision Records

## Day 5: Applying Stage-Gate Decision Leadership

How are the elements combined into a governance charter the organisation can adopt?

- Applying the Maturity Results to a Participant Portfolio
- Simulated Investment Committee Gate Decision
- Testing the Decision Rights Matrix Against a Troubled Project
- Peer Review of the Gate Criteria Scorecard
- Gate Governance Charter Presentation

## Methodology

The programme relies on simulation and case analysis drawn from energy, infrastructure and public sector projects at different stages of definition and approval. Participants examine gate packs, question project teams in role-play and take decisions as a mock investment committee, then compare their reasoning with the outcome of the real case.

- Suggested activity: Reviewing a refinery expansion gate pack and deciding whether it should pass to execution.
- Suggested activity: Recycling a hospital project business case after a cold-eyes review.
- Suggested activity: Drafting decision rights for a utility's capital programme with three approval tiers.

## Capstone Output

Each participant completes a gate governance charter for their organisation. It sets out the gated lifecycle, gate criteria and deliverables, a decision rights matrix, the independent review arrangements and a template for recording gate decisions and conditions, ready to submit to an executive or investment committee.



## Frequently Asked Questions

### **Is capital project stage-gate decision leadership suitable for sponsors without a project management background?**

Yes. It is designed for executives and officials who approve or sponsor capital projects, and assumes investment experience but no project management qualification.

### **Which standards does capital project stage-gate decision leadership rest on?**

It rests on ISO 21502:2020 guidance on project management, the front-end loading FEL stage-gated process and the APM Directing Change governance principles.

### **How is the capital project stage-gate governance charter used at work?**

Submit it to your executive or investment committee to revise how capital projects are approved, and use its decision template at the next gate.

### **How does capital project stage-gate decision leadership differ from a general project management programme?**

A project management programme focuses on delivering the work. Stage-gate decision leadership focuses on those who authorise funding: what they require at each gate and how decisions are recorded.