

Delivering Projects On Time, To Budget and To The Right Quality Standards

After many hours in planning and thousands of pounds spent, the hotel was built and the staff appointed. The problem was that no one had spotted the covenant stopping people from crossing a path leading into the only entrance, which was about to ensure that this particular project was delivered very late and very over budget. Most people think of projects as large, expensive ventures but the reality is that most of us manage small significant projects all the time. Ron Rosenhead of Project Agency focuses on giving you some ideas for managing your projects better.

Identify the business case

This is the **WHY** of project management. Some key questions need to be asked in order to develop a business case (a written document) which explains why you are doing the project. This document needs formal agreement by senior managers before you commit too much time and resources to it. You need to consider:

How this piece of work fits with your organisations (or department's strategy? If it doesn't, should you still be considering working on it?

What is the upside of delivering this project? Project managers and team members often find it difficult to articulate the benefits, but without clear benefits how are you going to motivate others to work on the project?

What are the costs and are they worth it? For small projects some very simple cost benefit analysis needs to be done at an early stage. For more complex pieces of work the accountants need to be involved.

Develop the project definition

This is the **WHAT** of project management. This stage involves a number of key themes:

Clarifying roles. This means identifying who will be the project manager, who will be the sponsor and who will be on the project team (if one is needed). The sponsor is the person who asks others to do the project. They champion the project and actively review it.

Develop clear and measurable objectives for the project, including identifying success criteria, the project's scope (what is included and excluded)

Identify and manage stakeholders. This particular activity needs to start early in the project and continue throughout its life. Our own researches show that poor stakeholder management often leads to serious delays.

If you need a project team, analyse who has what skills and select accordingly. Produce a development plan for those who do not quite hit the mark.

Develop your plan

This is the **HOW** of project management. Your plan needs to be robust and deliverable.

Break the project down into its component parts – this involves detail, detail, detail. Use any process you think is appropriate; 'Post It' notes, mind mapping, brain-storming sessions, anything that helps you identify activities to deliver the project.

Research points to something called "optimistic planning bias." In plain English that means we are over optimistic as to what we can achieve in an hour, a day or a week. How can you be more accurate with your estimates? Ask yourself how confident you are in your ability to deliver an activity in the time stated. Anything less than 80% and it's time to re-calculate.

Develop project charts. Produce simple bar charts like the one below showing the relationships between activities and durations. Use the charts to track progress and to communicate with stakeholders.

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Week 9
1									
2									
3									
4									
5									
6									
7									
8									
9									

In the above example, activity 3 cannot start before activity 1 is finished; activity 5 needs to start once both activities 2 and 3 have been completed.

NOTE: you can use this type of chart to identify the number of people you need at any one time. If you choose a column say week 3, you will see 3 boxes filled out. This means there are 3 activities going on at any one time that week – you need 3 people. If you look at column 5 there are 2 activities going on at the same time – you need 2 people. You can use this data to help plan who you need and when.

Risk management. Many projects fail to identify potential 'issues' that may impact on the project. Use a risk log to identify the likelihood of each particular risk and the impact that any risk may have on the project. Grade the risks on a scoring system and articulate the actions you intend take to manage them should they occur.

Developing a monitoring and control process

Identify the type of control needed in the project. Do you need tight controls or are loose controls OK? Or do you need a mix of controls as you go through the project? The answer to this links in with the level of risk associated with the project.

Identify a simple but powerful project reporting structure. Who reports to whom, on what and at what level of frequency? Any project reports should be one page maximum and they should deal with agreed items like the budget, items off schedule etc.

A clear process is needed for agreeing changes in the project. It could be something like this: the project manager agrees all minor changes provided they do not change the budget the delivery time or the objectives. If the change impacts on any of these three, then the sponsor would need to agree them.

Actual v planned. You need to know where you are in the project. Are you hitting deadlines and budgets? Use a simple actual v planned chart to help you identify just how you are doing.

Closing the project

Plan a date for a formal project closure meeting. Ensure you are clear who will attend – stakeholders, project team, project manager and sponsor.

Use a facilitator. You may need someone to facilitate a workshop to ensure that all the key points are covered.

Remember the objective. It's to learn what went well and what could have been done better. How accurate were your estimates? Did you hit the budget? We suggest you write a formal report on the lessons learned. The report should be placed in one central area such as your Intranet or a central place for people to refer to. Before anyone starts a new project they should look at the reports that people have written on similar projects before them.

Good luck with delivering your projects!

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