



Project Planning

As you progress in your college career and within any organization, you will face more and more complex and difficult challenges. Some of these challenges may be huge and they may involve the coordination of many different individuals/groups, the completion of many tasks in a clear-cut sequence, and the expenditure of a great deal of time and possibly money. As such below there is invaluable information below to assist you in project planning.

What is project planning?

You should understand how to plan and schedule small and middle-sized projects, how to complete them on time and on budget. While running a project you need to know which jobs are most important, and which deadlines are most important to meet.

Who should be involved in the project?

When designing the project the essential component is that a plan must be devised that will integrate as many organization members as possible into the project. Involving organization members through an active role in the decision making process for the project will promote members feeling ownership of the project.

What are you trying to achieve?

The first stage is estimating a plan is too accurately fully understand what you need to achieve. This involves reviewing the task in detail so that there are no unknowns. Without doubt this is the most difficult-to-understand, and takes the greatest amount of time to solve.

When deciding who will do what, you should consider that it may be good for group members to do what they are best at, or it may be a better experience to try something new and challenging. You should keep in mind that many tasks will require more than one person and that "being responsible for getting it done" doesn't mean "doing it all alone".

Time estimation:

Accurate time estimation is a skill essential to good project management. Design a timeline for project components. Realize that changes to the schedule will happen. It is important to get time estimates right for two main reasons:

1. Time estimates drive the setting of deadlines for delivery of projects, and hence peoples' assessments of your reliability and the organization reliability.
2. They often determine the pricing of contracts (i.e. location of event) and hence their profitability.

You can lose a great deal of credibility by underestimating the length of time needed to implement a project. If you underestimate time, not only do you miss deadlines, you also put other project workers under unnecessary stress.

In addition, usually people vastly underestimate the amount of time needed to implement projects. This is true particularly when they are not familiar with the task to be carried out. They forget to take into account unexpected events or unscheduled high priority work. Individuals also often simply fail to allow for the full complexity involved with a job. As such decide? What time allotment will be given to the project?

How to Project Plan?

The best way to review the project is to list all tasks in full detail by developing action plan. An *Action Plan* is a list of tasks that you have to carry out to achieve an objective. It differs from a To Do List in that it focuses on the achievement of a single goal.

Wherever you want to achieve something, draw up an action plan. This allows you to concentrate on the stages of that achievement, and monitor your progress towards it.

To draw up an Action Plan, simply list the tasks that you need to carry out to achieve your goal.

Also, along with an Action Plan develop an effective way to identify the projects strengths and weakness. As such, below a method to implement the analysis is included.

SWOT Analysis

SWOT Analysis is an effective way of identifying your Strengths and Weaknesses, and of examining the Opportunities and Threats you face

To carry out a SWOT Analysis write down the answers to the following questions.

Strengths:

- What advantages does the organization have?
- What do individuals in the organization and the organization do well?
- What relevant resources does the organization have access to?
- What do other individuals see as the organization and individuals in the organization as strengths?

Consider this from your own point of view and from the point of view of the people you interact with. Don't be modest. Be realistic. If you are having any difficulty with this, try writing down a list of your characteristics and your organization's characteristics. Some of these will hopefully be strengths!

Weaknesses:

- What could you improve?
- What could the organization improve?

- What do you do badly?
- What do you believe the organization does badly?
- What should be avoided?

Again, consider this from an internal and external basis: Do other people seem to perceive weaknesses that you do not see? It is best to be realistic now, and face any unpleasant truths as soon as possible.

Opportunities:

- Where are the good opportunities facing the organization?
- What are the interesting trends you are aware of on campus?

Useful opportunities can come from such things as: changes in social patterns; population profiles; campus lifestyle changes; etc.

Threats:

- What obstacles does the organization face?
- Does the organization have bad debt or cash-flow problems?
- Could any of your personal weaknesses seriously threaten your organization?

Carrying out this analysis will often be illuminating — both in terms of pointing out what needs to be done, and in putting problems into perspective.

- In addition, to creating an action plan create a timeline. That is computer-generated, drawn, or made into a poster for the, timelines can remind organization members and yourself of project progress.
- Also, if you want to take it another step develop a visual *people map*. That is either computer-generated, or drawn that indicates who the group members are, what jobs they are doing, or how they fit into the overall project.

Upon completion of the action plan organization members should review their completed plans carefully and make sure they are feasible. They should ask and decide:

- a. Can we complete our project using this plan and do a high quality job?*
- b. Do we need to scale down or expand our project?*

Completion of Project

Finally, after the project has been carried out the organization should always implement a reflection and self assessment of their project as a method to assess their work. In the busy schedule of the life today, there is often little time for reflection. Yet, reflection is a very important part of the learning process. As such, carry out individual reflection and group reflection on the success of the project. By:

- Describing the unexpected snags and how they were overcome (or not overcome)
- If in groups, how the group functioned to plan, make decisions, and troubleshoot
- How their original concept compares to the final product
- Whether and how the planning they did was important and helpful to the school's community and their organization
- How did group members as individuals fulfill their designated responsibilities and made unique contributions to the project.
- Did the project reach the designated audience and adhered to their needs