
Research Tips

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Project Management

Whether your task is large or small, project management is useful for keeping your timelines on target, anticipating roadblocks and maximizing other opportunities not originally designed into the project (new contacts and publicity, for example). Even if you are in the proposal stage, completing most of a project outline will allow you to develop a detailed budget that is more in line with the actual costs than if you had just “thought” of the numbers. The following is a brief account of the project management structure as developed by Kepner-Tregoe Associates.

There are three phases to projects: definition, planning and implementation. The purpose, scope and objectives of the project are clarified in the definition phase. The Development of a Work Breakdown Structure (WBS) is critical. A WBS is an outline indicating how all the major outputs (deliverables) relate the minor outputs (sub-deliverables). WBSs are used in the delegation of work and allocation of resources. Since you know all the work which needs to be done, you can now identify resource requirements.

The actual assigning of responsibility and the scheduling of work occurs in the planning phase. Assigning responsibility for tasks is important so there is a clear ownership for all tasks. You can even assign primary responsibility to one person, While others are assigned also to work on that task. It is important to list who will be responsible for each element and what they will do. If you like charts, you’ll love doing a Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RAM) to clearly lay out the responsibility and show primary responsibilities.

When you are about to assign people responsibility for tasks, you need to:

- ◆ to obtain initial commitment of responsibility;
- ◆ review responsibility assignment with each person;
- ◆ establish window time period; and,
- ◆ confirm that:
 - i) work assignment are appropriate,
 - ii) people are available,
 - iii) and cost estimates are correct.

Other steps in the planning phase include:

- ◆ sequence deliverables to help schedule work efficiently;
- ◆ consider WBS terminal elements;
- ◆ estimate calendar duration for each task;
- ◆ list precedence for each task;
- ◆ for complex projects, draw a network diagram (which task happens when);
- ◆ develop a project task list.

Network diagrams are drawings which show sequence and precedence among your terminal elements (end of a task). If you develop this network diagram showing the time required to complete each task, then you can map your “critical path” which is the minimum time needed to finishing the project.

Protect the plan at all cost. A potential problem Analysis will help you to:

- ◆ identify potential problems, their probability of occurring and their seriousness (e.g., low, medium and high impact);
- ◆ identify likely causes;
- ◆ take preventive action;
- ◆ plan contingency action and triggers.

Potential Opportunity Analysis allows you to:

- ◆ identify potential opportunities (e.g., marketing);
- ◆ identify likely causes;
- ◆ plan capitalizing action and triggers.

The Implementation Phase is the final phase of the project when deliverables are produced to meet the project objectives. You should be monitoring your project to assess:

- ◆ status (progress against objectives);
- ◆ schedule (i.e., events which mark the completion of major part of a project);
- ◆ resources use and cost;
- ◆ human performance (i.e., expectations, well being and morale).

You should also consider the possibility, or some might say the reality, that you may be modifying your project to respond to problems, opportunities or even change in objectives (hopefully not!).

The project will benefit from a closeout and evaluate process to assure all objectives are met and the lessons learned are shared. The following may be included in this process:

- ◆ include closeout activities in your WBS, resource requirements and RAM;
- ◆ review success against objectives;
- ◆ inform others that the project is finished;
- ◆ review lessons learned;
- ◆ bring closure to the project team;
- ◆ develop ideas for future projects/themes.

How would you develop project success factors? How about examining the following:

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| ◆ project team commitment; | ◆ task vs. social orientation of team; |
| ◆ accurate initial cost estimates; | ◆ absence of bureaucracy (is anyone reading this article?); |
| ◆ project team capabilities; | ◆ project manager on site; |
| ◆ funding throughout project; | ◆ clear criteria for success. |
| ◆ effectiveness of planning and control; | |
| ◆ minimum start-up difficulties; | |

Above article has been reprinted from Silverman, B. (May 3, 1999). Project management. Centinel, Centennial College, Scarborough, Ontario, Canada.