

Project Management



Whether we realise it or not, we are all faced with managing projects in our everyday lives – whether at work, at home or in Scouting. A project can be that deadline you need to meet at work, decorating your home or raising awareness of Scouting in your District.

For any of these to be successful they need to be managed, or organised; they need some kind of plan (I'll buy two cans of paint on Saturday), usually a team (I'll ask my family), they need checking (did I buy the paint on Saturday?) and reviewing (was there enough paint for two coats?).

The majority of information on the subject of project management will focus on commercial business projects. However, many of the principles apply to a wide variety of projects.

WHAT IS A PROJECT?

A "project" is a number of connected activities that are planned to happen during a set period of time, with a definite target. There are a few fundamental points that identify a project and differentiate it from "normal", everyday work.

- (1) Projects are about change – not accidental and random, but deliberate and planned, and as such are a major contributor to survival and growth.
- (2) Projects are "one-time efforts" – the project that you manage will only exist for a short time span.
- (3) Projects have defined and limited times spans, and are also bounded by the other key features of cost and performance.
- (4) Projects have a defined target – if the project reaches this point, it is deemed successful.
- (5) Projects are unique. There may have been projects of a similar nature that have been carried out before, but it is unlikely to have exactly the same objectives, time span, budget, team or resources available to it.

Although these are said to be the "five fundamentals" with respect to projects, it is essential to remember that projects are also largely about people. Many will have something to gain or lose as a result of the changes taking place and the way the project is managed, and many people are required to ensure a project's success.

Other important things to remember about projects are that they can vary in size and can have either

tangible or intangible goals (i.e. "decorating a scout hut" is a tangible goal, whilst "keeping leaders happy" is intangible.)

Good project management allow you to make better use of the resources you have, (such as people, money, equipment etc.) because you can plan where you want to use them in advance. You must think ahead and manage the project with care if it is to be successful. However there will be some risk involved and also things that crop up that you hadn't thought of (because you can never think of everything!)

PROJECTS AND CHANGE

It is likely that while you are managing your project some people will be reluctant to change, and others will actively oppose the change you are aiming to achieve.

It is a fact that we must face when managing a project (remember that projects revolve around change), that many people don't like change.

This may be because they see the change as a threat to their interests, or as harmful to the Association. Change requires the effort to learn new ways or methods; it also requires exposure to uncertainty and insecurity – which understandably leads to greater resistance. Very often, the reason for all this is poor management and inadequate communication with those involved.

Those who resist the change may not understand WHAT has been proposed, or even WHY it has been proposed. It is important to take the time to understand the underlying cause of the resistance and to try to address their concerns.

1. PUBLICISE the benefits and calm fears.
2. BELIEVE in the need for the change, and draw attention to it.
3. Ensure people FULLY UNDERSTAND the changes.
4. INVOLVE PEOPLE – they are more likely to respond positively if they are involved in the changes.

PROJECT ORGANISATION

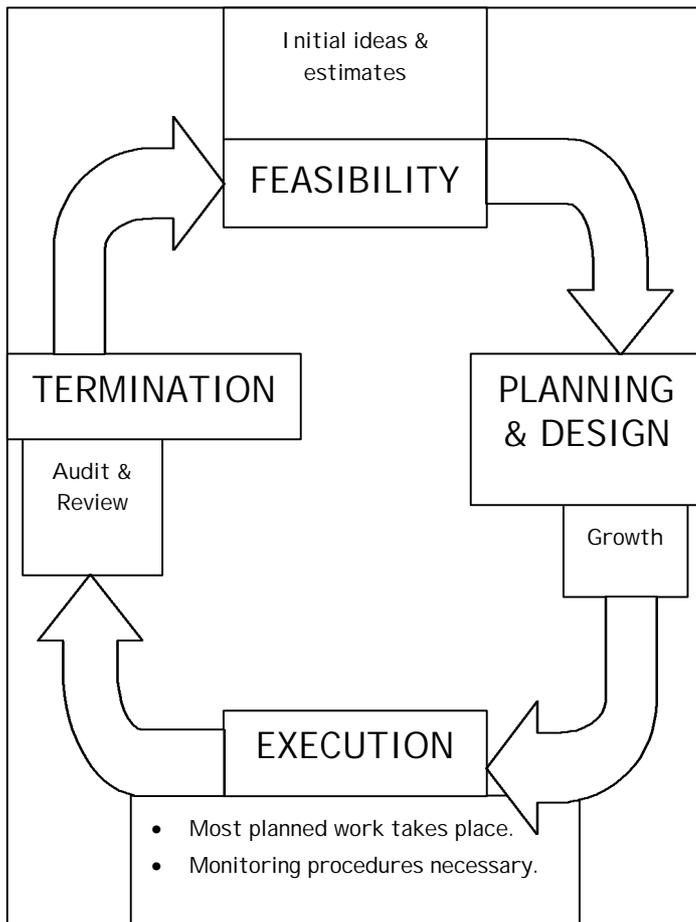
Project organisation, as a whole, brings together the necessary information, people and resources. As an essential part of this, the project manager must have a project specification detailing what is to be achieved and in what period of time. There must be a clear understanding of the project in a documented form to help the project manager and their team to fully understand the big picture.

In relation to the Scout Association the project must be a balance between the needs of the young people, and those of the leaders and other affected parties; this requires an acceptable trade-off between the two where there is a conflict.

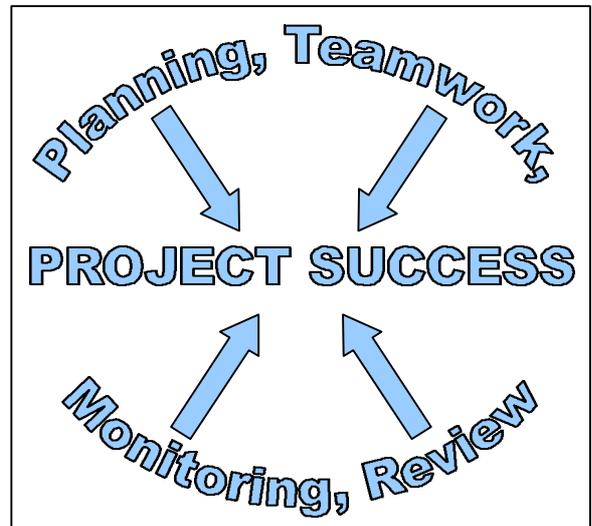
Anyone managing a project must be adaptable and learn to operate in a frame of mind where change is normal. Even well managed projects change, so although flexibility is essential they must also be controlled.

There is a good chance that you will be involved in a number of different projects, within Scouting, at work or at home, so it is important to think about them all in a clear and structured way so that none are neglected.

Projects have a life cycle:



Throughout this lifecycle, there are four elements that should occur simultaneously and go towards achieving the required goal: Planning, Teamwork, Monitoring and Review.



PLANNING

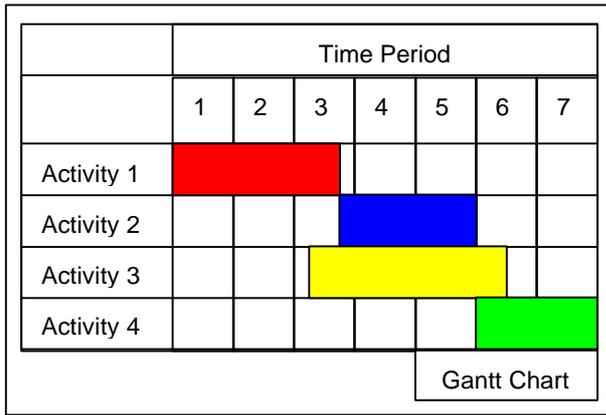
Planning is vital to the creation and completion of a project. It confirms that the project is achievable (or shows that it may not be within the expected time-scale / budget etc.), and maximises our chances for success.

First you need to agree on the required outcome with all involved. This includes the person who commissioned the project and those who will be working with you on it. This is so the project can be broken down into what needs to be done when, by whom and what resources are needed. You also need to include, and stick to, regular review dates.

Remember that some actions are dependent on others and so cannot be done until the others are complete; but also that some actions may be carried out simultaneously. It is important to identify these at this point.

The plan should contain enough detail to make it useful, but not so much as to make it complicated. You need to make sure reasonable periods of time are regularly set aside to complete tasks, so that your time is not taken up with short-term queries.

The whole planning process could be made easier with the use of a chart (such as the Gantt Chart overpage).



This chart shows which activities need to be done at what time, and whether any rely on the completion of other tasks. (Further information on how to construct a Gantt Chart can be found in the "Diagrams" Factsheet.)

TEAMWORK

Project teams in the business world are generally unique, but in Scouting your team will often consist of the same people time and again. Likewise, you might not have a great deal of choice over who is in your team, so a great deal of flexibility will be necessary. You could consider using external people as members of your project team.

In any environment teams CAN be difficult to work in, requiring an amount of compromise. However, it is likely to lead to a better outcome than if several people all worked separately, especially if all concerned feel able to contribute their ideas.

It is important for you to ask who feels best able to complete the various tasks, and to delegate a number of tangible jobs so people can SEE the results of their hard work.

You also need to give a clear definition of what is required (and when it is required) to team members even though you may be operating in an informal atmosphere.

A large part of team development occurs informally as the team works together, and it is the responsibility of the project manager to promote a positive atmosphere and encourage development. Honesty is always critical to the success of the team. Acknowledging conflict and helping team members come to satisfactory compromise will allow the team to work effectively.

(Further information on teamwork can be found in the "Group Methods" and "An Effective Group" Factsheets.)

MONITORING & CONTROLLING

Monitoring and controlling the project is essential, it tells us the current status of the project and what is likely to happen in the future.

Only relevant details need to be monitored, and the results must be understandable, otherwise the process is a waste of time. One way to measure progress is to use milestones, (i.e. A is to be done by 12th, B is to be done by 15th, C is to be done by...)

It is impossible for ALL the problems that may occur in a project to be anticipated, so it is very important to be flexible and willing to modify your plans accordingly. Coping with unexpected difficulties is the key to success; our response to a problem is far more important than the fact that it occurred.

When monitoring reveals that the project is off-track, it is important to actually DECIDE what to do about it. The problem may need correcting, limiting or regulating. Rather than analysing errors to assign blame, the project manager must concentrate on correcting it and improving teamwork. The actions taken must be appropriate, timely and cost-effective and must tackle the underlying cause of the variation.

Above all, the project manager must be decisive, as ignoring a problem only allows it to get worse.

REVIEW

It is likely that you will manage another project, so reviewing this one will help you to learn from your mistakes and approach the next one with the advantage of experience.

Reviews need to happen throughout the project, and not just at the end. You need to:

1. know exactly what has happened (both good and bad),
2. determine why these things happened,
3. make sure these experiences are learned from.

Once you have all this information, you will be able to identify what went well and why, prevent errors from being repeated, motivate team members (if reviews are carried out constructively), and stimulate ideas for further projects.

It is important that throughout the whole process you create a culture of learning from mistakes, rather than seeking to blame people (which can be destructive and de-motivating).

Lastly, it is extremely important that the final review takes place as soon as the project ends, and all details are fresh in your mind.

Further information on reviewing can be found in the "The Review Technique" Factsheet.)

This has hopefully given you an idea of the key factors that go towards managing a successful project, and some of the difficulties you may face as you manage change. The most important things to remember are that you need to:

- Plan
- Promote a positive atmosphere in your team
- Monitor the project's status
- Review
- BE FLEXIBLE

REFERENCES

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This factsheet was originally written as part of a series on Managing Change for the PRI Autumn 2000 Briefing events, but can also be used independently.