

Automated Commentaries for Simulated Soccer

Project Plan

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Project Plan

Introduction

The project plan covers the key issues, tools and activities that we will be using to manage our project. Hopefully by outlining how we are going to go about with the project will help us to plan, organize and priorities tasks enabling the project to be successful.

Project definition and attributes

A project is an activity, which achieves specific objectives through a set of defining tasks and effective use of resources.

Projects have a number of distinctive attributes:

The specific project objectives can be grouped under three general headings: **quality** (which we can define as fitness for purpose or specification level), **costs** i.e. the budget, and **time** (to completion). The project will have some key objectives, which tend to be more important than the others.

In any project, **people** are a fundamental key to success and provide the links, which facilitate the achievement of the project objectives. This is shown below in Figure 1 as the Triangle of Objectives.

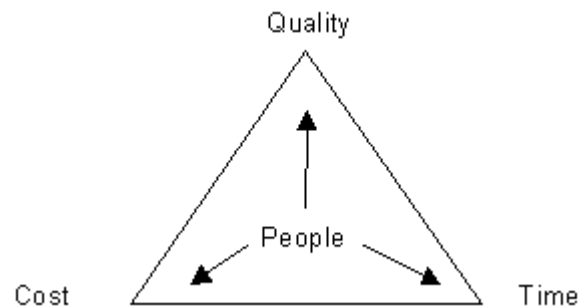


Figure 1: Triangle of Objectives

All objectives must be SMART:

Specific: expressed singularly

Measurable: ideally in quantitative terms

Acceptable: to stakeholders

Realistic: in terms of achievement

Time-bound: a timeframe is stated

The project has a defined time frame with a beginning and an end date which is from the 25th September 2006 till 22nd March 2007.

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This project is challenging and unique because it has never been attempted by students studying at University of Kent at Canterbury.

Project life cycle

This project can be described by using a life cycle approach and the four phases of the life cycle are shown below in Figure 2.

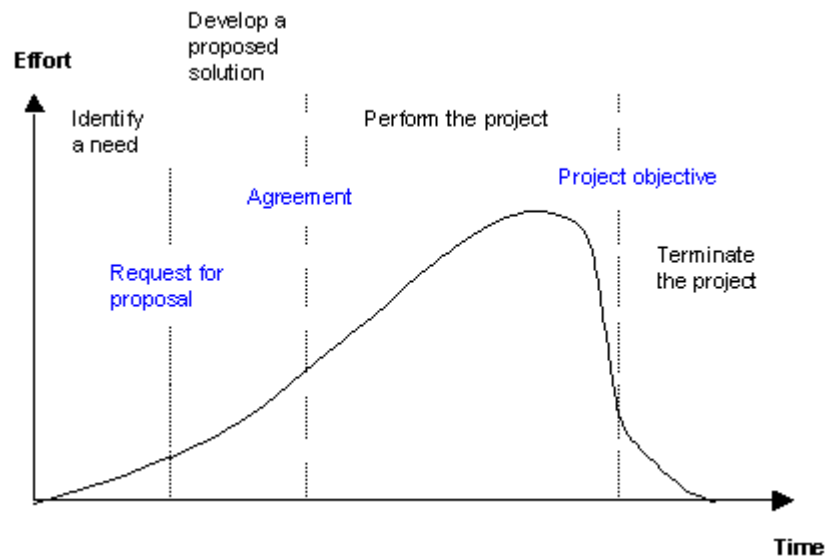


Figure 2: Project Life Cycle

In the first phase, a need is identified by the client, customer and this results in a Request for Proposals (RfP) which describes and defines the needs and requirements. We can call this phase **Initiation**.

The second phase is characterised by the development of proposed solutions and the **Bidding** process. This was characterised by a structured bid form which requested specific items of information related to project costs, staffing and other resources, timescales, description of the activities, compliance to technical standards and key deliverables.

The third phase in which the project is executed covers detailed planning and **Implementation** and we will return to this in some detail shortly.

The final phase is terminating the project or **Closure**. In some cases this is marked with formal acceptance by the customer or client with signed documentation.

There are two important additional activities associated with projects that are worthy of special mention here: evaluation and dissemination. It should be noted that both evaluation and dissemination are not confined to the later phases of the

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project. The process of liaising with users and stakeholders, gaining feedback and facilitating interaction should begin as early as possible. Similarly, the mechanisms for disseminating information about project activities must begin at project start-up and continue throughout the duration of the work.

The remainder of this section concentrates on the key activities of the third phase Implementation, and covers planning, monitoring, and controlling.

Why planning is important

In order to achieve the objectives of any project it is essential to look at the details of the work required, which includes identifying specific tasks and estimating time to complete them, estimating associated costs, identifying who will perform the tasks and highlighting areas of risk together with devising appropriate contingency plans. In some cases, an outline of this information is required in the bid for funding.

It is usually part of the responsibility of the project manager to create the **project plan** and to update it on a regular and frequent basis. This is an important point - project plans are not made in tablets of stone! They are **dynamic** and must reflect the current situation. In most projects there are a number of "unexpected" challenges or events which may affect the timescales, costs and outcomes of the project. With good planning these unexpected events can be dealt with effectively and will not cause insoluble difficulties to the project team.

There are a number of tools available to assist with the planning process and these are described in more detail below. Which tools are used will depend on the size and nature of the project.

Formal methods of project planning and software tools

There are a number of formal methods for managing projects. One such example is Prince 2.

PRINCE is an acronym for PProjects IN Controlled Environments and is a complete methodology frequently used for managing large-scale projects in UK government departments and agencies. More information is available at <http://www.ogc.gov.uk/prince/>

There is also a number of software packages which facilitate the planning process by providing simple ways of employing the techniques described below. Which package you use (if any) will depend on a number of factors such as size of the project, organisation preferences, licences available and previous project experiences.

Planning tools and techniques

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We have already noted that the project objective(s) must be clearly identified in order to inform the planning process.

A detailed project plan should be prepared and will usually be a requirement of the funders. A number of tools or methodologies can assist the creation process.

It is useful to begin the process by identifying all the tasks and elements of the project. The creation of a **Work Breakdown Structure (WBS)** is a systematic approach to scoping the project work in which a logical, hierarchical pattern is devised which may resemble a family tree. An example for moving a set of offices and staff to a new building, is given in Figure 3. Each branch contains work items which are further broken down into work packages. Note that tasks may have already been grouped into Work Packages as part of preparation for the bidding process.

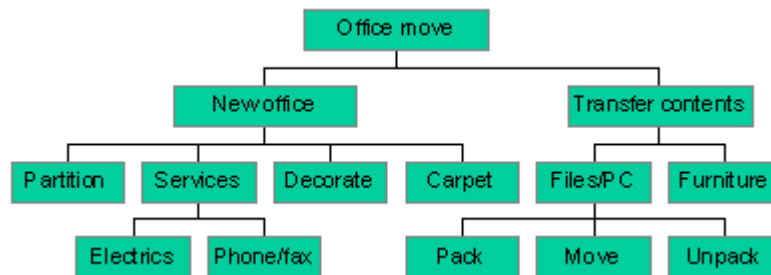


Figure 3: Office Move Work Breakdown Structure

The level to which tasks are identified will depend on the size and nature of the project, the level at which a single individual or team can be assigned responsibility and the level at which costs are allocated. Not all branches of the WBS have to be broken down to the same level.

Once tasks have been identified, they need to be scheduled within the project time-frame. A visual representation of this process is helpful and a **Gantt Chart** or bar chart is a valuable aid to planning and achieves this aim. Named after the American industrial engineer Henry Gantt (1861-1919), they can easily be created with the project management software tools described above. It is also possible to indicate the inter-dependencies of tasks using cascading arrows (i.e. instances where one activity cannot begin until another is completed). Project milestones (time points that indicate completion of key phases) and deliverables (defined and tangible outcomes of the project) can also be marked.

An example Gantt Chart is shown below in Figure 4.

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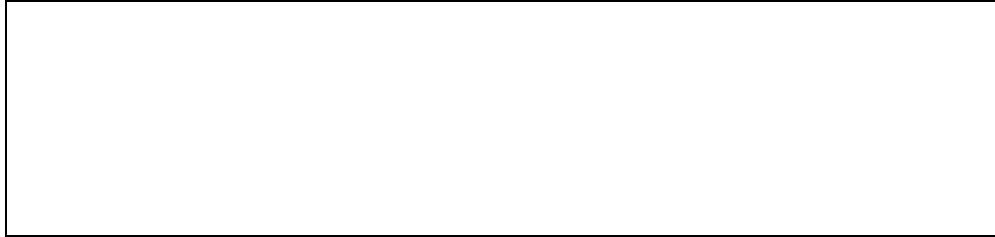


Figure 4: Gantt Chart

A more recent development is **network analysis** which covers a number of different methods which had their origins in the late 1950s, and were used successfully in the management of various US defence projects. Their particular strength is in their ability to show the various inter-dependencies of related tasks, however they require some initial learning and practice to become adept at their interpretation. There are two main systems:

1. Activity-on-arrow systems such as **PERT** (Programme Evaluation and Review Technique)
2. Activity-on-node or activity-in-the-box networks such as **precedence notation or precedence diagrams**. These are more popular and more detail is therefore given on this method.

The notation convention for an activity in precedence notation is given in Figure 5. The flow of work is from left to right.

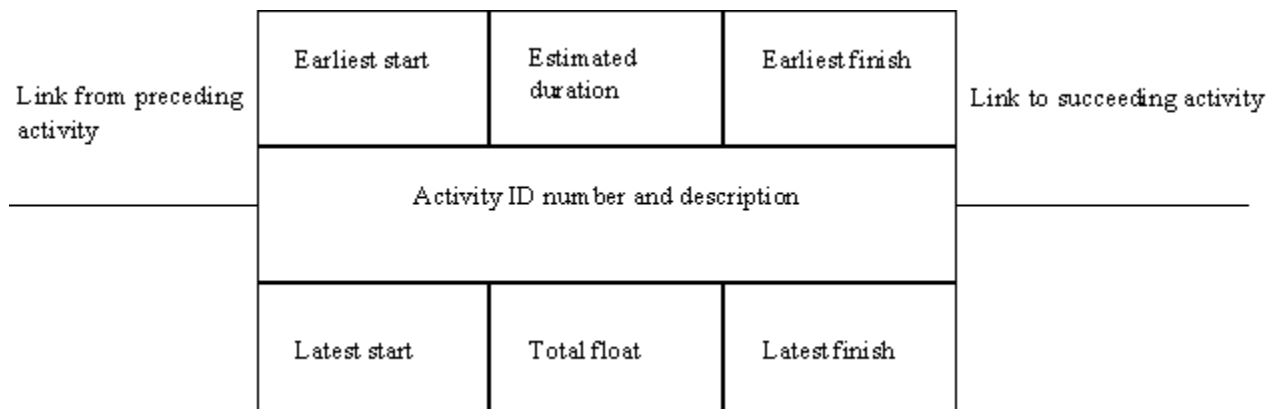


Figure 5: An Activity in Precedence Notation

Each activity is given a unique identification number and they are linked by arrows. Duration estimates can be made in days, weeks or months as appropriate and the total project duration calculated by passing from left to right (the forward pass). The latest permissible times to finish activities can be calculated by a backward pass which identifies the float or amount of slack available for starting and finishing an activity.

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The chain of activities where the earliest and the latest times coincide showing a zero float also show the completion of the project in the earliest possible time - the **critical path**. A worked example of which can be seen at:
<<http://www.mindtools.com/critpath.html>>

Risk management

All projects have elements of risk associated with them, largely because they involve new activities and innovative work. A general analysis of the risks associated with the project should be performed at an early stage to identify them and scope their potential impact.

For a digitisation project, an analysis of risks would include consideration of factors such as:

Staff: do you have the right mix of people and skills employed on the project?

Equipment: is appropriate equipment in place? Is it reliable?

Dependencies on external factors: extent to which successful delivery of the project relies on external parties, such as other consortia members or suppliers.

Extent of innovation or novelty of project: to what extent does the project involve new and innovative work?

Risks can then be graded with a **hazard rating** low, medium and high and the likelihood of their occurrence estimated. Contingency and containment plans for activities with a degree of risk associated with them, should be created which include any relevant adjustments to timescales and costs.

For a more detailed analysis of the likelihood of identified risks occurring, software is available for calculating statistical probabilities, such as OPERA which is part of the Open Plan Professional system.

A more detailed exposition on risks and risk management can be found in the document 'Risk Analysis 0.1', which can be found in the project folder on Raptor.

Monitoring and controlling

Once implementation of the project has begun, progress must be monitored. Various routine staff management and supervisory approaches can be adopted or more formal methods introduced where updates on tasks are gathered regularly. Reports may be produced as part of this process. One type of monitoring is to use exception reports which only cover areas or activities which are at **variance** or diverging from the plan. The advantage is that "paperwork" is kept to a minimum and only appropriate level of detail and content is passed up the management chain. However the drawback of this approach is that it relies on good team communication and awareness to ensure that the project manager is kept informed.

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Documentation and reports

The project will generate a large amount of documentation. There will be a project plan which is constantly updated. There may be an evaluation plan and a dissemination strategy. There may be a technical or requirements specification, software documentation and user guides.

There will be notes from project team meetings. More formal meetings with the group and supervisor will have agendas and minutes.

In all cases, version control is vital to maintain an audit trail and for archiving purposes, it may be necessary in larger projects to consider some form of document management system.

People and roles

The project involves a team of four group members and a supervisor.

We have identified five key roles within a digitisation project whilst acknowledging that there will be additional roles depending on the nature of the project, which could include designers, digitisers, interpreters etc. Whilst the Project Manager and Technical Officer would normally role assigned to individuals, the other roles would not necessarily be ascribed to specific individuals as each project will need to determine its spread of roles and posts according to its individual circumstances.

Project Manager: responsible for managing resources including the project team and the overseeing the budget

Technical Officer: responsible for systems maintenance, software development, and providing technical support to the project team

Information and Communications Officer: responsible for creating and implementing a dissemination/marketing strategy

Evaluation: responsible for creating and implementing an evaluation plan

Learning resource creation: responsible for developing learning resources from digitised content

We have agreed to adopt a strategy where everyone in the group will gain exposure to each of the roles mentioned above, and that specific roles will not be allocated.

A project is more likely to be successful if the team is working well together and the team dynamics are good.

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Group and Supervisor Meetings

The projects will consist of two group meetings and one supervisor meeting each week. The supervisor will have an active role in the project to advise, guide and help the project team. Updates on progress, evaluation, dissemination and future plans are common agenda items. The meetings will be chaired by a different member of the team each week.

Conduct of meetings:

- There will be two group meetings and one supervisor meeting each week.
- The Group will reach decisions on the basis of a consensus and in the absence of consensus, resolution will be achieved by the advise from the supervisor
- The quorum for meetings is 4 members.
- Members can nominate an appropriate person to attend in their place.

Functions of the group:

- To plan and schedule tasks
- To discuss and generate ideas on the project.
- To implement and carry out tasks that have been assigned in a timely and organised manner.
- To represent the best interests of the group in advising how the project should be improved and enhanced to achieve the highest possible marks.
- To receive regular reports from the x project on its progress, future plans and deliverables; to comment on these plans and to provide strategic direction where appropriate.
- To support and assist group members on task where areas of difficulty have been notified.
- To provide expert advice and guidance in various areas of the project.

Group and supervisor meeting will be very useful for airing ideas, testing political views, seeking external expert advice and gaining support for particular approaches.