



Your First Project – here are some hints and tips for you

So, your boss has just given you your first project. You have been in the organisation about a year and really want to make a good impression. You know that there are some processes and points you should cover in delivering the project but you are unsure where to go next.

Here are some hints and tips to help you deliver on time and to budget and make that good impression!

1. Define your project

We are often called upon to work with project teams who need to deliver a business specific project. One of the first things we do is ask the question "what are your objectives?" This needs to be *your* starting point. Maybe your boss has spoken to you about the project, or has given you a written brief. Discuss with your manager what is expected and turn these into realistic objectives. Discuss with key players what they want and write the objectives down and get agreement from them to what is written.

2. Clarify project roles and have a clear project management structure.

You have been given the project to deliver, however what role do you play? Are you the project manager and if you are, what authority do you have in delivering the project? What role will your senior manager (and other senior managers) play in the project? We have found that having clearly prescribed Project Management roles really helps in delivering what is required. Write down what each role holder should do. It will help, everyone involved.

3. Identify and reduce risks

Many projects are derailed because something "unexpected" happens. A simple assessment of what is likely to go wrong will help identify the most likely events that could affect the project. Identify the level of risk using a simple numbering system and identify who will manage these risks.

Make sure you review all of your risks on a regular basis. Something that is not a risk now may become so in say a month's time.

4. Don't forget the people

You will need to ensure you take people along with you. Project Agency research shows that those projects where stakeholders are identified and well managed deliver better project results than those which take little or no account of this important group.

Stakeholders are people with an interest or will be impacted by the project. Identify what their requirements are and what you need from them. You should also identify the perceived attitudes these groups and individuals will have to the project. Once done, you

can then identify actions to take to manage the individuals or group.

Like risk analysis, you should continue this process regularly checking who the stakeholders are and whether anything has changed.

5. Develop a robust project plan

Ensure your project plan is credible. How? Identify all of the activities you need to carry out putting cost and time estimates against them. If it helps, use post-it notes to show the order in which the tasks will be done and produce a Gantt chart or milestone chart.

How good are your estimates – cost and time? Research shows we suffer from optimistic planning bias i.e. thinking we can deliver an activity in a project in 5 days when it will actually take 7 days. Use percentages to help you e.g. ask yourself how confident you are of achieving the activity in the time given or against the identified budget. If you are less than 80% confident then recalculate until you get to the 80% figure. This process can be used at an individual task level, a stage level or for the whole project.

6. Deliver what you say you will deliver

Develop a monitoring and control system early in the life of the project. Be clear what role your senior manager plays and ensure you do not get too bogged down with completing project reports. Use simple highlight reports to show progress. Hold *brief* project meetings (which should be on your project plan) and challenge and support each other to ensure you are going to deliver when you should.

7. Dealing with project changes

Beware of project changes! Ensure you have a system in place for dealing with them. Identify the impact of the change before agreeing to it and ensure you are clear who can agree to any *major* changes e.g. in budget or objectives. Any system you put in will need to take account of your stakeholders and the project team

8. Stop "project dribble" – project closure

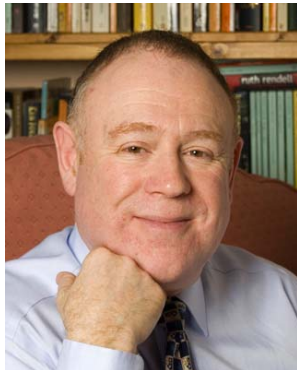
"The trouble is we never seem to finish projects here. They keep dribbling on and on ..."

This was a quote from a course delegate on our Perfect Project course. You need to plan to hold a project closure meeting putting it onto your Gantt chart to ensure it happens. Use a facilitator to ensure all of the learning is shared among project team members and those in the organisation. Identify elements which need to be finished and who will deliver them and close the project.

So, the boss has just given you a significant project and I hope some of the points here will help you. It does not matter whether the project is a new building, putting in a new system, improving customer care or reducing costs. Using these tips will help you by giving you the rigour and structure needed. Of course in such a brief article we can only skim over a much deeper topic. Therefore, you may want to receive a free e-course on project management including a Project Management Tips Booklet. If you do then do go to www.projectagency.co.uk and complete the 2 boxes on the front page.

Good luck with all your projects.

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