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An exploration of the critical steps followed in project planning

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Abstract

Failing to plan is planning to fail. Noah must have managed one of the earliest recorded projects in the Bible which is the project of the building of the ark. He may not have completed it within the budget, but he certainly had to finish it by a specified time that is before the flood and it must have met his performance criteria, as it successfully accommodated a pair of all the animals and followed the project planning steps. There was identification of stakeholders, project goals, project deliverables, project schedule and supporting plans in the Noah's project. This forms the bases of project planning.

Keywords: Project planning, project, project management, planning, plan, Project Schedule

Introduction

"If you do not know where you are going, you will end up some place else." (Yogi Berra). "Good fortune is what happens when opportunity meets with planning." (Thomas Edison). Project management is one of the easiest yet complicated processes because if you do not plan well, the results will not be fruitful. Ideas do not emerge perfectly formed. They are awkward amalgams of experience, insight, hopes, and inspiration. They arrive on stage blinking under the bright lights, hesitant, unsure as to the audience's likely reaction. They evolve and develop, alert to changing reactions and circumstances (Ohmae: 2007). Ideas need proper planning. If one decides to venture is a project, the first thing one needs to do is to come up with the best project plan as it is going to decide the future of the project. The critical steps to be followed in project planning are identification of stakeholders, project goals, project deliverable, project schedule and supporting plans. The automation of the Rowan Martin Building Library project is going to be used to discuss and illustrate the steps of the project.

Definition of key terms

The word PROJECT comes from the Latin word PROJECTUM from the Latin verb PROICERE, which means "to throw something forwards" which in turn comes from PRO-, which denotes something that precedes the action of the next part of the word in time and ICERE, "to throw". The word PROJECT thus actually originally meant "something that comes before anything else happens". (<http://www.pmvista.com/project-characteristics/>). A project is a unique process, consisting of a set of coordinated and controlled activities with start and finish dates, undertaken to achieve an objectives conforming to specific objective, including constraints of time, cost and resources (BS 6079-2:2000). Meredith and Mantel Jr, (2003:9) defines a project is a specific, finite task to be accomplished. A project in business and science is a temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product, service, or result. Basically, it is planned to achieve a particular aim. A project is a temporary endeavor undertaken to achieve a unique product or service or result (The Project Management Institute, 2000). A project is a unique set of coordinated activities with definite starting and finishing points undertaken by an individual or organisation to meet specific objectives within defined schedule, cost and performance parameters (British Guide to Project Management, 1997). Project planning is a discipline addressing how to complete a project in a certain timeframe, usually with defined stages and designated resources. Brown (1998:44) avers that planning requires a large amount of information and the amount and quality of information which you will have is inversely proportional to the length of time between when you plan and when the tasks should be executed.

The major responsibility of the project manager is planning. If project planning is performed correctly, then it is conceivable that the project manager will work himself out of a job because the project can run itself (Kerzner, 2004).

Step 1: Identifying Stakeholders

First, identify who your stakeholders are. Almost any person or organization with an interest in a project can be termed a stakeholder (Lester, 2017). The type and interest of a stakeholder are of great importance to a project manager since they enable him or her to use these interests to the greatest benefit of the project. The process of listing, classifying and assessing the influence of these stakeholders is termed stakeholder analysis. Stakeholders can be divided into two main groups which direct (or primary) and indirect (or secondary) stakeholders. There is need to distinguish positive stakeholders who support the aims and objectives of the project from negative stakeholders who do not support the project and do not wish for it to proceed. Local residents' associations can be either positive or negative. For example, when it has been decided to build a bypass road around a town, the residents in the town may well be in favour to reduce the traffic congestion in the town centre, while residents in the outer villages, whose environment will be degraded by additional noise and pollution, will undoubtedly protest and will try to stop the road being constructed. It is these pressure groups who cause the greatest problems to the project manager. For example, the project of the construction of the Robert Mugabe Airport Road affected other residents who had built near the roads.

For a project of the automation of City of Harare, Rowan Martin Special Library, the stakeholders include the employees, the employer, suppliers, users, the project sponsor, the project manager and project team as well as the researchers. There is need to find out about their power, needs, influence and interest, so that one knows who to focus on. To develop a good understanding of the most important stakeholders, so that you know how they are likely to respond, and how you can win their support. There is need to carry out Stakeholder Analysis and the stakeholder interview. This will also lead to getting the stakeholder's needs and understanding their needs. You can use the opinions of your

most powerful stakeholders to help define your projects at an early stage. These stakeholders will then more likely support you, and their input can also improve the quality of your project.

Step 2: Project Goals

A **project goal** refers to the desired outcome of a project. They are high-level statements that give you an overall context of what the project will accomplish (Chappell, 2022). There are different types of goal setting like performance goals, time goals, and resource goals. Most project goals only define the end results which then may affect the direction. From the prioritized list of stakeholder needs, there is need to create a set of goals that can be easily measured. To achieve the goal of automating the Rowan Martin Special library there is to set clear objectives. Mutongi (2011) alludes that objectives of a project should be specific, measurable, accurate, realistic, and time framed (SMART). Since a project has a time frame that time frame should be clear and known by each team member. Without clear objectives, the project will not succeed. A goal without a plan is just a wish. If you do not know where you are going, you will end up someplace else (Yogi Berra). The goals of the automation of the library include purchasing the computers that are compliant with the library system, selecting the library system among alternatives like Millennium, KoHA, ABCD, Papyrus is a Library Administration System, Librarika, Evergreen, OPALS, OpenBiblio, Invenio, PMB, NewGenLib and CodeAchi. There is also a digitisation goal that is making the manual documents accessed digitally through scanning. The scanners should also be purchased.

Step 3: Project Deliverables

Project deliverables refer to all of the outputs, tangible or intangible that are submitted within the scope of a project. While the term may initially bring to mind the final outputs that get submitted at the end of a project, it actually refers to any project-related output submitted during any of the project phases. Using the goals, that have been defined in step 2, on project deliverables there is need to create a list of items the project needs to deliver in order to meet those goals. It is now being specified when and how each item must be delivered.

Table 1

Deliverables	How?	When?
Library software. The software will determine the nature of computers to be purchases	Demonstration and selection of the following library software: Millennium, KoHA, ABCD, Papyrus Library Administration System, Librarika, Evergreen, OPALS, Open Biblio, Invenio, PMB, NewGenLib and CodeAchi.	By 30 January 2023
Computers	Purchasing of computers through the procurement process	By 30 February 2022
Scanners	Purchasing of scanners through the procurement process	By 30 March 2022
Digitisation	Scanning	By 30 April 2022

Step 4: Project Schedule

The step 4 is called project schedule. A project schedule indicates what needs to be done, which resources must be utilized, and when the project is due. It is a timetable

that outlines start and end dates and milestones that must be met for the project to be completed on time. This is when the creation of a list of tasks that need to be carried out for each deliverable identified in step 3 is made.

Table 2

Task	Period of completion	Who to carry out the task
Selection of the library software	1 month	The librarian
Purchasing of computers	3 months	Procurement
Purchasing of scanners	3 months	Procurement
Digitisation	1 month	The Librarian and assistance librarians

From the diagram above, it is shown that for each task identified there is need to show the amount of effort (hours or days) required to complete the task. The human capital to carry out the task. After the established the amount of effort for each task, there is need to work out the effort required for each deliverable and an accurate delivery date. There is need to always update the deliverables section with the more accurate delivery dates.

Step 5: Supporting Plans

The step 5 supporting plans deals with plans that are created as part of the planning process. In the case of the automation of the Rowan Martin Building library, the supporting plans include:

Human Resource Plan

In the Human Resource Plan, names are identified with a leading role in the project. Their roles will be described in detail. This done to keep the project on track such that the project will be completed within the specified period. The roles and responsibilities of each project team member on the project are set. There is then need to describe the number and type of people needed to carry out the project. For example, in the automation of the special library, there is need of stipulated roles of but not limited to the librarian, assistant librarians, ICT personnel, Database Manager, accountants and the procurement team. For each resource detail there is need to start dates, estimated duration and the method that will be used.

Communications Plan

A communication plan is a policy-driven approach to providing stakeholders with information. The plan formally defines who should be given specific information, when that information should be delivered and what communication channels will be used to deliver the information. It is a document showing who needs to be kept informed about the project and how they will receive the information. For example, in the case of the automation of the library, web 2.0 as a communication tool will be used. There will be a weekly or monthly progress reports that will describing how the project is performing, milestones achieved and work planned for the next period.

Risk Management Plan

It is imperative to identify as many risks to the project as possible in this case the automation of the library project and be prepared if something bad happens. Some of common project risks include;

- Underestimating time and cost.
- Unclear roles and responsibilities.
- Insufficient stakeholder input or their needs are not properly understood.
- Stakeholders changing requirements after the project has started.
- Poor communication resulting in misunderstandings, quality problems and rework.

There is need to monitor risks especially events triggering them. This can be done using a simple risk log. Each risk identified should be added on the risk log. The information on what will be done in event that risk occurs and what you will do to prevent it from occurring and reoccurring. There is need to review the risk log on a regular basis, adding new

risks as they occur during the life of the project. There is also need to incorporate disasters for example flooding, cyclones. At Rowan Martin, there is a tendency of people leaving the taps on when there is no water. This oftenly causes disasters as water gets in the offices including the library thereby affecting the progression of the project. There is therefore need for a Disaster Recovery Plan.

Conclusion

It is of great necessity to make the necessary planning for a project. The critical steps to be followed include identification of stakeholders, project goals, project deliverables, project schedule and supporting plans. The automation of the Rowan Building library was used to discuss and illustrate the project planning process.

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