Six Keys to Planning Your Project So that it Really Works

A White Paper by Jeffrey Belding

Have you ever wished you could snap your fingers and have all team members and management aligned with your project's needs and expectations? While a snap of the fingers may be wishful thinking, there are questions you can ask early on that will make such an alignment happen with much more ease.

1. **Outcomes:** What do you want to have happen? What specifically are the desired outcomes of the project? What is the problem or need that the project will satisfy? Note that the project itself is often not the desired outcome but rather a way to get there (a sales campaign is the project, for example, but the desired outcome is increased revenues).

2. **Project End Result:** What will the project look like when it is complete? How will you and your team know when you are done? Use your statement of the project's end result to educate others about what you are up to. Use their feedback to make it easier to understand, more relevant, a better solution. Having some very specific measurable results will go a long way toward enrolling others in your project and securing needed resources.

3. **Critical Success Factors (CSF):** This is often where a project falls apart. Identify these factors by asking yourself: "What makes me nervous about this project?" Typically, a CSF falls into one of three categories: people issues, management issues, and technical issues. Defining these issues for your project in advance and identifying corresponding actions to resolve them are critical at this juncture.

4. **Project Scope:** What are your project's requirements to achieve the desired end result? What isn't part of this project that people might assume will be included? What resources (staffing, financing, tech support) do you need? Calculating specific amounts of staff time/manpower and financial outlay will make things much easier for everyone who has to sign off on this project.

5. **Key Relationships:** Who needs to be on the team? Who needs to be consulted? Who needs to give approval? Whose project might be impacted by yours?

6. **Project Schedule:** What do you need to do to complete this project? What are the deliverables? The milestones and the tasks to get there? What are the due dates (deadlines)? Whose schedules need to be coordinated with the project's schedule?

How do you know you're ready?

You have a clear goal.

Everyone involved is clear on the end result and why it is important to pursue. The project's success criteria are clearly defined, have been communicated, and have been acknowledged.

You have secured commitment from all necessary parties.

You have enrolled team members, upper management, colleagues, vendors, clients—all the stakeholders in the value of this project, outlined their contributions and their duties, and gotten verbal or written agreement to participate or support the project.

You have a clear action plan.

All team members and supporting players are clear on how the work will be done. All critical success factors have been addressed and resolved.

Momentum is building.

A sense of moving forward, of "we're rolling" is already happening. The team members see the beginning of the project as an already-done deal.

Project management is more than knowing how to use project tools. It is also about enrolling, motivating, and influencing team members and stakeholder supporters so that the work gets done and you deliver the results you've promised. Using these steps as a form of due diligence make all the difference in a project's success.