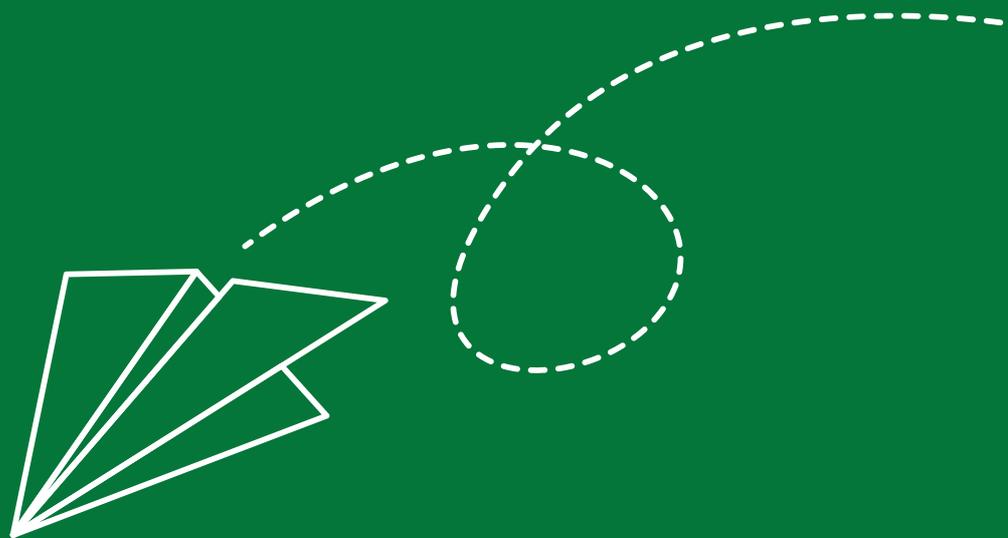


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Project Management: Tips & tricks



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In this booklet, we will:

- Offer tips & tricks in the context of project management
- Distinguish the different concepts of project management
- Explore relevant models, such as the Project Lifecycle and the Phase Model

Intro

How can I turn an idea into reality? How can my idea contribute to solving a (social) problem? And how can I ensure that my project is as successful as possible? In order for a project to be successful, a lot of different factors need to be taken in consideration. In project management, there are a set of best practices that guide a project from beginning to end. In this booklet, we will explore some of these practices by going through the four stages of a project's lifecycle: initiation, planning, implementation, and closure. In each stage, we will also dive in deeper into some of the stages of the phase model, while offering suggestions and reflections on the different topics.



PROJECT INITIATION

Every project starts with an idea. This idea can be abstract in the beginning, as it will be made more and more concrete throughout the stages. During the first stage of a project, the project is defined. This includes identifying the objective or need, investigating different possible solutions to address it, envisioning the first aspects of the project, and setting goals.

This is a crucial stage to the project's success. Without clarity around what needs to be achieved and why, the project runs the risk of not accomplishing the end goals and meeting the expectations of the stakeholders involved.



1. Investigation

With all of the tools, techniques and processes within creating a project, sometimes we lose sight of the basic principles of project management. An easy and useful tool that can be used to start a project are the five W's, which can provide context and perspective for the low-level details found within the individual project plans. For this, an investigation should be conducted for the different aspects of the project. This includes:



- **WHAT?** Referring to simply answering the “What do I want to do, what is my idea?” question.
- **WHO?** This question can be divided in two parts: for who and by who.
 - “For who is the project being done?” is related to the target group. Who do I want participating in my project?
 - “By who is the project being done?” is related to the organizing team. Who could I do it with, who are some people or possible partners that can support me in this project?
- **WHEN?** The weather can have an impact on the activities implemented. Which time of the year would I like my project to take place? What is the duration of my project?
- **WHERE?** What is the optimal location for the work to be performed and what are the places available? Keep in mind if you want your project to take place indoors or outdoors and what facilities you’d like to have.
- **WHY?** Possibly the most important, this question reflects on the objective or need behind the project. Why am I doing it? Am I solving a problem or creating an opportunity? Is it necessary, is it something my target group needs?

2. Analysing

Once the investigation is complete, a first draft of the project can be made. During this phase, all the information collected is put into words and made visible. By mapping all the relevant details, different views and perspectives on the project are created and the information can be prioritized.



3. Problem defining

This phase builds on the WHY question and it's the foundation of the entire project. We might ask "Why are we doing this project?" once or twice, but how often do we really try to understand the fundamental root benefits and motivations that are driving its existence?

It's important to understand the reason why the project should happen. What is the need or problem behind the whole idea? What am I trying to solve or improve with this project?

Once this is clear, the WHO question can be reflected upon again. Who is this a problem for? Does it match my target group? As a project manager, it's important to keep going back and forth on the stages to guarantee that all aspects of the project make sense and are in line with the objectives defined.

4. Goal Setting

For the project's essence to be clear, it's not enough to recognize the underlying problem. It is also necessary to understand how the project in question will overcome or improve this problem. Some questions that can support this reflection are, for example:

- How can I address the needs of my target group?
- What needs to be there in order to tackle the problem?
- How to get from the unwanted behaviour to the wanted behaviour?

In this phase of the project, the goals that you want to achieve with the project should be set. These goals should be SMART and related to the problem previously defined.

S – Specific. Make it as concrete as possible. What needs to be accomplished?

M – Measurable. Ensuring you have a specific way of measuring your goal makes it easier to track progress and know when you've succeeded.

A – Achievable. It's good to be ambitious but are your goals possible to accomplish?

R – Relevant. Does this goal make sense for what you're trying to achieve? Is it in line with your objectives?

T – Time-bound. What is your timeframe? Having a deadline helps you be accountable and staying motivated.



PROJECT PLANNING

The next stage, the planning stage, is where the steps necessary to achieve the project's objective are determined — the “how” of completing a project. In this stage, the project is further developed in as much detail as possible. The team identifies all the work to be done. The project's tasks and resources requirements are identified. A project plan is created outlining the activities, tasks, and timeframes.

Once the project team has identified the work, prepared the schedule, and estimated the costs, the main components of the practical planning process are complete. Next, the context can be created and a strategy can be defined. Below, you can find some of the steps included in the planning stage.



5. Practical planning

After investigating and gathering all the information necessary, the project can be developed in more detail. In this phase the five W's can be made more concrete, for example by:

- **WHAT:** conducting a more thorough investigation on the specific topics covered by the project.
- **WHO:** making a clear profile of the target group, including age, area of residency, background, culture, etc. Specific stakeholders and partners can also be defined.
- **WHEN:** agreeing on specific dates for the project, in accord with the location.
- **WHERE:** defining the venue and looking into the possibilities of the place and what is allowed.

Another practical aspect of the project to take into consideration during this phase is the budget. The project team should create a project budget by providing cost estimates for all the necessary resources, such as labour, venue and materials. The budget will be used to monitor and control cost expenditures during the project implementation. Other aspects that can be arranged are, for example, the liability and insurance, and the number of facilitators and participants.





6. Creating a context

Besides the practical arrangements, there are other aspects to be considered. One of them is the context created for the whole project. The context in this case refers to the approach we choose to take to the situation we have. When thinking of what context we want to create, we should think of values, attitudes, behaviours that we want present in our project. This covers but it's not limited to the workspace, the communication with partners, the relation with the customers, the team dynamics, and so on.

Some questions that can support this phase are, for example:

- How am I going to profile myself in this project, based on what I think is required? Out of which perspective will I perform?
- What is the approach of the facilitator/s, regarding state, language, posture, etc.?
- What emotions do I want my target group to experience and how can I bring this to them?



7. Defining a strategy

The last phase of planning is defining a strategy. In this phase, the concrete implementation of the project is designed. Besides bringing all the elements previously mentioned together, the strategy should include clear action steps and their sequence, the methods that will be used, if the project will start with a logical or psychological order, for example by starting with what is bothering people the most or with something that people are interested in, and a risk assessment, where we identify and try to deal with anything that might pose a threat to the successful completion of the project.

In this phase the HOW the project will be managed is established, therefore the different phases of the learning cycle (referring to Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle) and the different learning styles (referring to Kolb's Learning Theory) should also be taken into consideration.

PROJECT EXECUTION

During the execution or implementation stage, the project plan is put into motion and the actions previously determined are performed. This stage includes monitoring and measuring progress, managing quality, mending risks, managing the budget, and making adjustments to the original plan when necessary.



8. Performing

As explained above, performance is the implementation of all the phases described before and the constant monitoring of all the aspects in the project. This is the moment when the project is put into action. All the work done upfront should pay off now, so it's important that all practical matters are clear, such as how to approach people, how to use the time, which role is filled by who, and so on. During the project implementation, the organizers are carrying out the tasks, and progress information should be reported through regular team meetings. It is the role of the project manager to keep an overview on the whole project and constantly check if everything is happening according to the purposes.

Some questions that can support you in the performing phase are, for example:

- What are the unforeseen complications and how am I handling them?
- What did I miss in the planning and how can I correct it?
- Are all the agreements being followed? If not, how come?



PROJECT CLOSURE

In the closing stage of the project, activities are concluded. It is the time to celebrate your hard work. This final stage also includes a final evaluation of the project to examine what went well and what didn't.



9. Closing

For projects with an ending date, this is the moment in which the project is reaching an end. During this phase, the emphasis is on delivering the finished product or service to the stakeholders, handing over project documentation to the subsidizer, terminating contracts, releasing project resources, and communicating the closure of the project to all parties involved. A ritual or ceremony can be part of it, but this moment should be well defined. In this phase a final reflection of the learning outcomes can also take place.

Often closing and evaluation can be mixed. Closing is a ceremony at the end of the activity. It's an acknowledgment for all the people involved in the project.





10. Evaluation

During the evaluation phase, a final assessment takes place. This is the time to take a look from far away on the project execution. The evaluation should examine what went well and what didn't, and it should be done for the participants, as well as for yourself.

For the participants it should be clear what is being evaluated and how you are going to use it. Be aware that most evaluation, specially at the end of a project is also rapport of the mood of the participants, which is affected by many other factors.

For yourself, it can useful to reflect on what went as planned, what could be improved, what can you learn from it, and how the evaluation from the participants gives feedback on the previous phases of the project.

Through this type of analysis, the wisdom of experience is transferred back to the project organization, which will help improve future projects.

END

