

Begin with the Middle in Mind

Developing the process of projects

David Dahl
Associate Dean of Libraries
University of Maryland, College Park

Introduction

- Love the ideation and planning portions of projects
- Committed to project visibility for all interested parties
- Not certified, learned by doing and watching a thousand Lynda.com videos
- More often in the role of sponsoring projects these days
- Cherry-picked elements from the Prince2 methodology are the basis for these practices
- Strong aversion to the “packing a suitcase” analogy for planning a project!



More like a road trip...



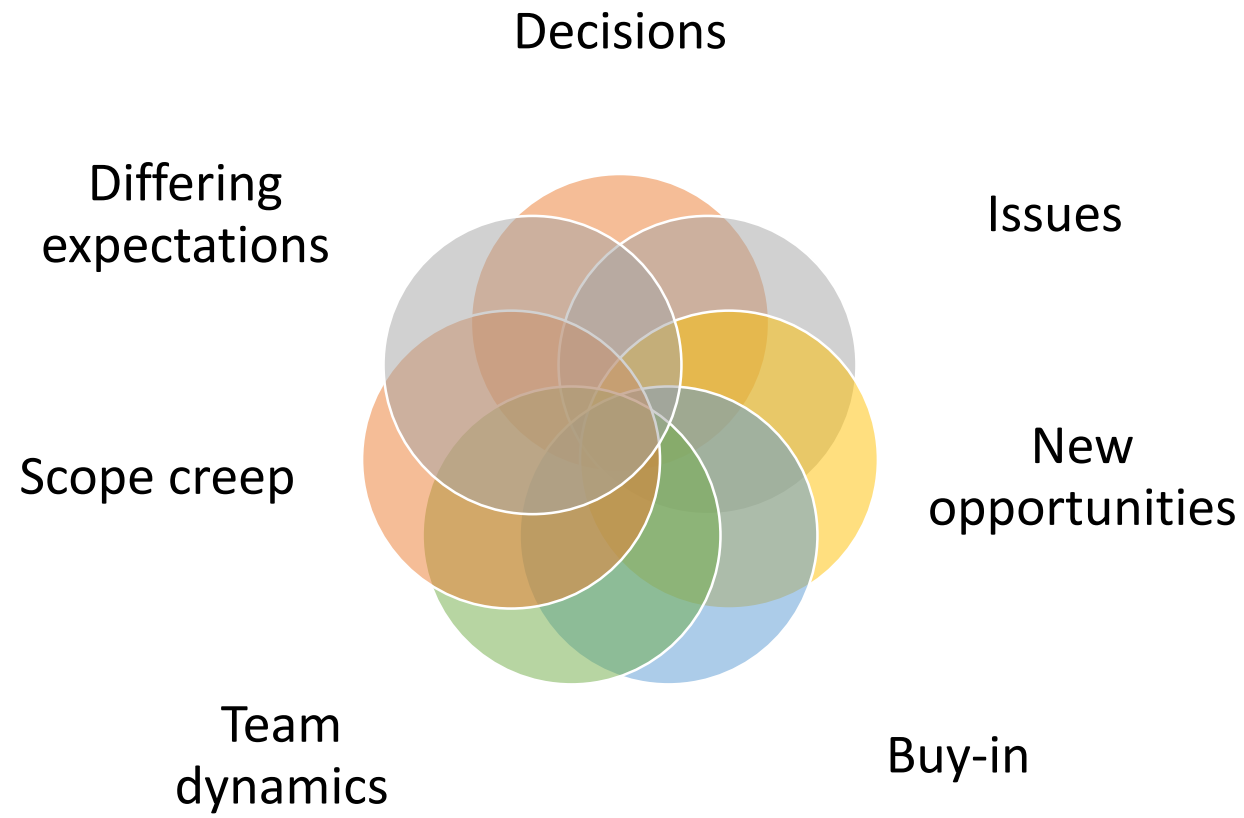
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/trainor/287330616>, CC BY 2.0

Planning with the end in mind...



“There’s a slowdown in 600 miles. Would you like me to reroute you?”

Project roadblocks



Elements to successfully navigate detours

- Set objectives and outcomes
- Establish decision-making approach
- Identify assumptions
- Identify risks
- Establish communication approach
- Establish quality management approach

Two projects

Intranet Selection and Migration

- Just getting started (about to move into Planning stage)
- Task force as project team
- Process elements documented, or referenced, in a Project Initiation Document (PID)
- PID and referenced logs, schedules, and plans are developed and communicated over Initiation and Planning phases
- Lots of hopes and dreams for a new intranet

Consortium ILS Selection and Migration

- Currently in an implementation stage
- Complex project team
- Process elements documented, or referenced, in a Project Initiation Document (PID)
- Different collaboration/productivity tools across institutions
- Multiple levels of communication
- Multiple levels of decision-making
- Wide impact with lots of anxiety

Sidebar: Change Management

Getting to the end isn't the goal, bringing everyone along to the destination is

Process is an important component of change management

A transparent process is dependent on *having* a process in the first place



[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Home Alone House.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Home_Alone_House.jpg), CC-BY-SA-2.0

Set objectives and outcomes

Purpose

- Address the “Why?”

Details

- Objectives are the project’s targets. They should be “done” when the project is done.
- Outcomes describe the state of things (hopefully improvements) on the other side of the project.

Admission

- Okay, this is starting with the end in mind, but bear with me...

Example: Consortium ILS

Objectives

[We] will evaluate, select, and implement a library management system (ILS) in order to accomplish the following:

- continue the core library operations of acquisitions, cataloging, and circulation currently managed through [current ILS]
- continue core consortial programs for resource sharing, consortium-wide discovery, centralized systems support, and shared print retention
- incorporate e-resources management (ERM)
- enable self-service reporting and analytics

Outcomes

- improve the user's discovery to delivery experience
- optimize library staff efficiency and effectiveness
- position [ourselves] for future partnerships and initiatives

Establish decision-making approach

Purpose

- make clear where authority for change approval resides
- minimize the quantity of executive-level decision-making
- adjust the project accordingly when changes arise

Details

- Determine who can make which decisions
- Decisions are tracked in a decisions log
- Develop a process to accept and manage change requests


Admission

- Not all decisions might be considered changes, but it's helpful to use a change request approach for handling/tracking decisions

Example: Library Intranet Changes

- *Authority:* The Task Force has broad authority to make changes to the project plan. Changes with personnel, financial, and/or significant timing impacts will be approved by [administration].
- *Process:* Anyone can request a change to the project. Change requests will be submitted to the Task Force, documented, reviewed, and acted on by the Task Force or [administration] as appropriate. Decisions will also be documented in the Decisions Log.

Decisions Log Example

ID	Description	Decision Type	Decision	Decision Date	Decision Authority	Proposer	Related Items	Comments (How and why the decision was made)
4	Remove Reporting & Analytics SMT from teams that will be formed initially; distribute responsibilities to other SMTs as relevant.	Project Change	Approved	 15 Apr 2021	Project Advisory Board	@ David Dahl	<p>Project team structure and project Portal space will need to be updated.</p> <p>SMTs scope of responsibility will expand to include reporting needs for both individual libraries and the consortium.</p> <p>PAB and other reviewers will ensure that reporting requirements are adequately addressed in RFP.</p>	<p>Why: No volunteers have stepped forward to serve as leads or members of this group; this would block moving forward with the project schedule as currently planned. Many reporting needs may be better handled by SMTs that focus on a particular aspect of the system (e.g., ERM, Access Services, etc.).</p> <p>How: PAB discussed the change and voted to approve the change.</p>

Identify assumptions

Purpose

- Establish a shared understanding about the nature of the project
- Eliminate sources of risk

Details

- Assumptions get recorded in an Assumptions Log
- Assumptions are confirmed or rejected as the project progresses

Admission

- Identifying others' assumptions is challenging. Listen for phrases like "I thought that..." or "Aren't we going to..."

ID	Assumption	Status	Steps to Confirm	Assignee
3	Project completion is feasible within contractual and technical time constraints	Confirmed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify time constraints• Prepare project plan that accommodates time constraints	Project Manager
4	An LMS is available in the marketplace that will meet, at a minimum, all critical requirements	Confirmed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify critical requirements• Evaluate proposals during RFP process	Core Project Team

Identify risks

Purpose

- Prevent risks from becoming issues

Details

- Risks are documented in a Risk Register
- The Register needs to be reviewed regularly
- Every risk should have a mitigation strategy

Admission

- Determining probability, proximity, and severity feels like a guessing game sometimes.

Library Intranet Example

Risk

Project risks will be documented and monitored by the Task Force in a risk register. Documented risks will be reviewed regularly.

Risk Register Example

ID	Identified Risk	Type	Status	Date Raised	Last Updated	Reporter	Owner	Cause(s)	Effect(s)	Probability (H/M/L)	Proximity (Far/Mid/Near)	Severity (H/M/L)	Mitigation Strategy
1	Desired features won't be available in new solution	Quality	Open	2023-09-27		David Dahl	Task Force	insufficient requirements gathering; limitations of new solution	lack of use/engagement; operational inefficiencies	M	Far	M	-set expectations and scope for what intranet will/won't do -develop comprehensive understanding of needs during R&D phase -validate features/configurations during implementation -identify other tools for unmet needs
2	Procurement and associated reviews (security, T&Cs, etc.) will take longer than planned	Schedule	Open	2023-10-05		David Dahl	David Dahl , DST Helpdesk, BBS	overly-optimistic time estimations; lack of clear processes; procurement staffing capacity	delays in downstream project activities; staff frustration	M	Mid	L	
3	Procurement and associated reviews (security, T&Cs, etc.) will be denied	Quality	Open	2023-10-05		David Dahl	David Dahl , DST Helpdesk, BBS	selected solution does not pass one or more reviews	an alternative solution will need to be selected; that alternative may not meet all identified needs	L	Mid	H	-incorporate understanding of campus reviews, based on previous experience, into solution evaluation/selection
4	Selected solution will exceed available funds	Budget	Open	2023-10-05		David Dahl	David Dahl , ALT	lack of funds allocated for procurement and annual renewals; sought-after feature set leads to high-dollar solutions	an alternative solution may need to be selected, resulting in a lower quality solution; increased intranet funding reduces funding elsewhere	L	Mid	M	-determine financial commitments as part of solution evaluation -verify available funds prior to making a recommendation
5	Libraries personnel will deem the selected platform difficult to navigate, edit, or use in other regards	Quality	Open					the new system has a steep learning curve and staff are busy	the intranet is a less useful tool for sharing information, causing frustration from employees				- get user input during the selection and implementation process - provide training and documentation for using the intranet

Establish communication approach

Purpose

- Develop shared understanding of how and what to communicate
- Improve project visibility

Details

- Establish communication methods, principles, and quality controls
- Includes a communication plan

Admission

- Communication is hard! For the ILS project, we've recently added some communication "guidelines" to our approach.

Consortium ILS Example Communication Management Approach

Communication is one of two components that will help the project achieve its core principle of transparency, which is key to the "Engagement of People" quality management principle. A well-defined framework for communication, structured around audiences, content, and methods, will be critical to the project's success.

Communication Methods

- Project Website: <https://usmai.org/portal/display/NEXTILS/>
- Email: individual and project-specific email lists
- Meetings: Webex UMD account, other platforms as necessary
- Messaging App: Webex Teams

Communication Principles

- Communication to each campuses' stakeholders (e.g., faculty and students) will be managed by the Campus Team
- Deliver information through the website rather than email

Quality Criteria

- All stakeholders/audiences have been identified
- Stakeholders communication requirements are verified
- Stakeholders perceive delivered communications as effective
- 100% compliance with communication plan is maintained

Example Communication Plan (in-progress!)

ID	Audience	Content	Method	Frequency	Sender
1	All Libraries' personnel	Status Updates, especially completion of milestones/deliverables	Libi Blog	Ad hoc	David
2	Task Force	Team-Wide Communications	lib-libimig-tf@umd.edu	Ad hoc	Task Force
3	All Libraries' personnel	Project documents and deliverables	Libi (w/Google Shared Drive integration)	Ad hoc	David
4	All Libraries' personnel	Status updates	Staff meetings	Monthly-ish	David or Task Force members, as assigned/volunteered
5	Task Force	Work planning, issue resolution, decision-making	Task Force meetings	Monthly (minimum)	Task Force
6	Task Force	Feedback	Open forums	Ad hoc	Libraries' personnel
7	Task Force	Working documents	Google Shared Drive	Ad hoc	Task Force
	All Libraries' personnel	New platform "sneak previews" (i.e. teasers of new functions, content, etc.)			
	Libi Advisory Team	Status on their role in either the Migration or future Libi?			

Establish quality management approach

Purpose

- Ensure that the project produces high-quality results
- Controls the quality of project deliverables and work outputs

Details

- Establish quality management principles, roles, and tools/techniques

Admission

- Don't reinvent the wheel. I've used [ISO Quality Management Principles](#) as a starting point.

Example: Library Intranet

Quality

Principles: The project will be guided by the following quality management principles as identified in the ISO 9001 Quality Management standard: Engagement of people, Customer focus, Leadership, Process approach, Improvement, Evidence-based decision making, and Relationship management

Roles:

- Task force members: Represent various constituencies to ensure the implemented solution meets critical needs
- Administration: Ensure operational and financial sustainability of the solution and alignment with organizational goals
- Libraries: Provide feedback and insights. After launch, incorporate Libi into daily work practices

Tools and methods: expert judgment; research; data-informed decision-making; product sandbox environments and evaluations; testing and validation of feature implementation; demonstrations for end-users; user feedback

Looking Forward

Challenges to address

- Adjusting project team's focus from Who/When to Why/How
- Better collaborative activities for developing process-related artifacts
- Large number of “accidental PMs” across the organization leading to a variety of approaches
- Projects getting executed before they get initiated
- Feels “heavy-handed” for smaller, simpler projects

Room to expand

- Standardize across the organization
 - Recommend tools
 - Develop templates
- Incorporate other process elements
 - Lessons log
 - Quality register
- Develop an intake/startup procedure

Takeaways

- Don't over-engineer
 - Better to have *some* process, than none
 - Iterate process improvements throughout the project
- Requires upfront work by the PM or project lead(s)
 - Develop initial plans, approaches, and register/log content for feedback
 - Brainstorm individually with project team members
- Share widely and seek agreement/approval
 - Broad understanding of, and agreement to, the project approach pays dividends when issues arise
- Prioritize project visibility and opportunities for engagement
- Review regularly

A photograph of a brown and white dog lying on its side on a sandy beach. The dog is facing left, with its head down. In the background, the ocean waves are breaking, creating white foam against a deep blue sea. The sky is not visible. The overall scene is peaceful and serene.

You have reached your destination.

Resources

- [Prince2 Wiki](#)
- [ISO Quality Management Principles](#)
- [University of Minnesota Libraries Project Management Process Handbook](#)
- [USMAI Library Consortium ILS Migration Project Initiation Document](#)