

## 2.16 Project management

*Prepared by Shane Cheek, Enterprise Education Group, University of Adelaide.*

Project management is a skill that no student can go without. Most university students need to balance personal commitments and possible part-time work with multiple assessments and study.

On entering the workplace, graduates from all disciplines are finding that they need to manage many projects at the same time and often with limited resources. Thus, project management has become a standard work-skill.

Project management skills allow a person to cope with many and various tasks by focusing on the planning, implementation, control and coordination of the project from beginning to end, while also meeting time, quality and budget constraints.

### ***Defining a project***

Meredith and Mantel (1995) define a project as “a specific, finite task to be accomplished.” A project can be identified by a number of attributes:

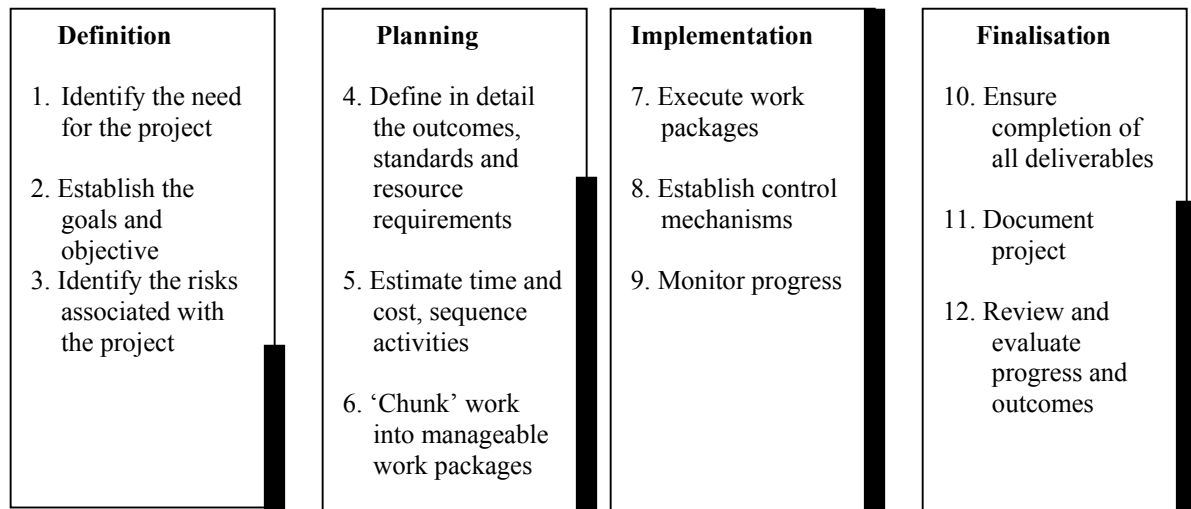
- Purpose: a project is usually developed to achieve a clear goal or objective (eg mid-term assignment, consultancy report or construction of a bridge)
- Life cycle: a project has a beginning, middle and end
- Interdependencies: projects nearly always interact and affect other projects
- Unique: a project always incorporates one or more elements that make it unique
- Conflict: as projects compete for resources (time, money, skill, equipment) there is invariably conflict.

### ***Project stages***

Each project has a life cycle with a beginning, middle and an end over a finite time span. Each stage will consume different levels of various resources. A project life cycle generally follows four main phases (see figure 1).

When multiple projects are operating at one time it is clear each needs to be planned, monitored and documented carefully. Obviously, multiple projects place added pressure on timelines, resources and the quality of outcomes. There are a variety of tools and methods that can be used to plan and monitor complex projects.

**Figure 1: Phases of a Project Lifecycle**



\* Dark bars indicate effort level.

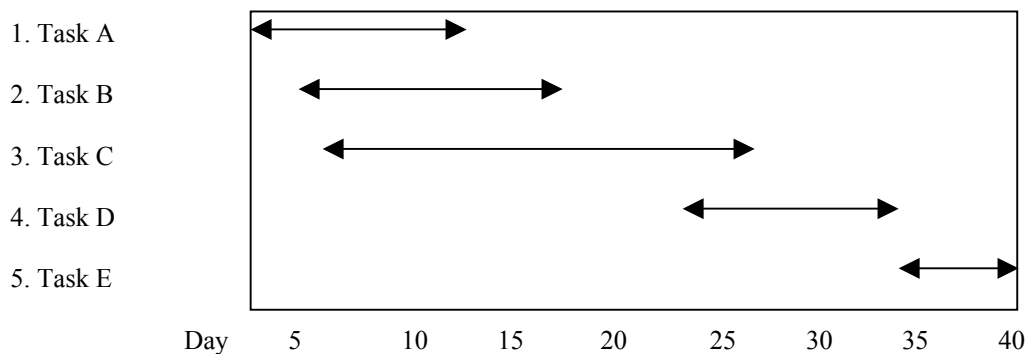
**Gantt chart**

This planning tool is simple in its construction and very easy to read (see figure 2). Haynes (1997, p31) describes a simple way to create a Gantt Chart:

1. List the actions required to complete the project
2. Estimate the amount of time you will need to complete each of the actions
3. List the actions down the left (Y) axis of the chart and the time intervals, perhaps in days, along the bottom (X) axis of the chart.
4. Draw a horizontal line across the chart for each of the listed actions, starting at the beginning date and finishing at the completion date.

At any time place a vertical (date) line through the chart and observe the current progress of tasks (ie completed, in-progress, yet to begin). Using this method one can quickly see the minimum amount of time necessary to complete a total project, the sequence of actions to undertake, and the steps to be carried out simultaneously.

**Figure 2: Gantt Chart**



Other simple planning tools that can assist you in your project planning and management include:

- A diary and notebook to record your thoughts, log actions such as phone calls and document your progress
- Special purpose filing structures such as reference bibliography or computer files
- Progress reports or whole project reports
- Use of an “Action Planning Worksheet”, as illustrated below.

Task	What	Resources	When	Progress
Assignment 1	Finish intellectual property paper	1. Notes from lecture 2. Borrow laptop	End of Semester (4 <sup>th</sup> June)	40% complete as at 1 <sup>st</sup> May

### **Personal time management**

Good project management also relies upon personal management. Time is possibly an individual’s most unique and valuable resource. Being aware of personal time-management issues is a sure way of staying on top!

Here are some hints:

- Understand your energy cycle. Know when you work at your best and, if possible, allocate the important actions during this time.
- Set priorities. Attribute one of the following values to each of your daily tasks and actions, (a) must do, (b) should do, and (c) nice to do.
- Understand how you set priorities. Generally, personal value judgements based on timing (ie deadlines) and relativity (ie compare one task against another) are the best way to set priorities.
- Apply time management techniques such as:
  - Using an action worksheet, Gantt Chart, Weekly worksheet, Daily plan
  - Keep a diary of events/tasks.
- Be aware of ‘time-wasters’ such as:
  - Disorganisation
  - Procrastination
  - The inability to say no or refuse a task
  - Visitors
  - Telephone Calls
  - Meetings
  - Junk Mail/E-mail.

### **Additional resources**

Project management software, eg Microsoft Project ©.

Adelaide University Centre for Professional and Continuing Education (ph: 8303 4777) delivers training in the use of project management software.

The Adelaide University Learning and Teaching Development Unit (ph: 8303 5771) provides students with courses in time management skills.

Meredith, J R. and Mantel, S. J. (2000) *Project Management – A Managerial Approach*,. 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, Brisbane, John Wiley & Sons.

Haynes. M. (1997) *Project Management: From Idea to Implementation*,. London, Crisp Publications