

Managing projects

Fact sheet 8: Implementing a Project

What is implementation?

Implementation is the carrying out or execution of a plan, a method, or any design for doing something. As such, implementation is the action that must follow any preliminary thinking in order for something to actually happen. In project management terminology, it refers to the process of carrying out the project plan by performing the activities included therein.

The challenge of project implementation

Once a project has been planned, the execution of the work can begin. In theory, this is an easy task: since an agreement already exists on the project definition and work plan, and the project management procedures are already in place, the only challenge is to execute the plans and processes correctly. However, no project ever proceeds entirely as planned. The challenge is therefore to have the rigour and discipline needed to apply the management skills correctly and proactively.

Key elements of project implementation

- **Manage the work plan**
The work plan is the basis for the implementation of the project. Therefore, it needs to be reviewed on a regular basis to determine how the project is progressing in terms of schedule and budget. For a small project, this may need to be weekly. For larger projects, the frequency might be every two weeks.
- **Monitor the time schedule**
As the project activities proceed, activities that have been completed during the previous time period must be identified, and the work plan must be updated to show that they are finished. Also, one should look for activities that should have been completed, but have not been. After the work plan has been updated, it can be determined if the project will be completed within the original effort, cost, and duration. If not, the critical path must be revisited, and ways must be found to accelerate these activities to get the project back on track.
- **Monitor the budget**
In monitoring the expenditure, the project manager should look at the amount of money the project has actually consumed and determine, based on the work that has been completed, whether the actual expenditure is more than estimated. If so, a proactive approach must be followed to solve the problem. This may involve working with the team to determine how the remaining work will be completed to within the original budget, or run the risk that the allocated budget will be exceeded.
- **Manage Risk**
Risks refer to potential events or circumstances outside the project team's control that will have an adverse impact on the project. When the planning work is occurring, the project team should identify all known risks. For each risk, they should also determine the probability that the risk event will occur as well as the potential impact to the project. Those

events identified as high-risk should have specific plans put into place to mitigate them to ensure that they do not, in fact, occur. Medium risks should be evaluated as well to see if they should be proactively managed. (Low-level risks may be identified as assumptions. That is, there is potential risk involved, but you are 'assuming' that the positive outcome is much more probable.)

- **Manage Issues**

In spite of the best efforts at risk management, all projects of any size and complexity will have issues that need to be dealt with and resolved. If one has not done as good a job managing risks, chances are that more issues will arise to deal with. The best practice is to resolve issues as quickly as possible. If there is no urgency to resolve the issue, or if the issue has been active for some time, then it may not really be an issue. It may be a potential problem (risk), or it may be an action item that needs to be resolved at some later point. Issues by their nature must be resolved with a sense of urgency.

Look for Warning Signs

It is important to always pick up the signs that the project may be in trouble. These could include:

- A small variance in schedule or budget starts to get bigger, especially early in the project. There is a tendency to think one can make it up, but this is a warning: If the tendencies are not corrected quickly, the impact will be unrecoverable.
- Activities that were expected to already have been completed are still being worked on.
- There is a need to rely on unscheduled overtime to hit the deadlines, especially early in the project.
- Team morale starts to decline.
- Deliverable quality or service quality starts to deteriorate.
- Quality control steps, testing activities, and project management time starts to be cut back from the original schedule.

If these situations occur, their visibility must be raised through risk management, and a plan must be elaborated to proactively ensure that the project stays on track. If the problems cannot be successfully managed through, an issue must be raised.

Further reading

- National Public Health Partnership (2000). *A Planning Framework For Public Health Practice*. Melbourne: National Public Health Partnership.