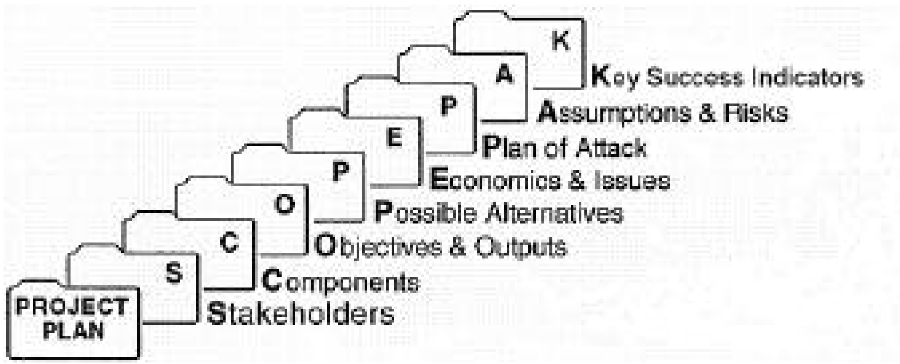
Scope-Pak Project Planning
Instructions for conducting a Planning Workshop - in Eight Simple Steps

This is simple planning technique that you can use to quickly get your project up and running, organized and under control. The technique is best suited for flip chart presentation. It can be done on a white board or even on 8 1/2" x 11" sheets at your desk, if necessary. Gather 4 to 6 people with relevant project experience, especially those expected to form part of the project team, and ask them to help organize your project. They will form the initial 'brains trust' planning team and you will be the team's 'facilitator'.



This is the Scope-Pak eight-step approach. It is simple, fast and fun! First, you take one or two minutes to organize the project and define the opportunity or problem. Then you ask leading questions to draw out ideas from your team. You will accumulate eight or so pieces of paper that will form a viable initial Project Work Plan - and you can do it in less than 60 minutes! This approach works because 80% of most projects, tasks, or problems can be quickly identified within this time. The other 20%, the lesser items, can be added later and rarely result in any significant change in the final project direction or scope. You finish by thanking your team, releasing them and promising to distribute the results of their labors.

Start: By Assembling and Briefing Your Team

Assemble the initial members of your team, and describe your project mission. Tell your team what you want to accomplish, and how you're going to go about it at this workshop.

Check the time: 60 minutes from now you will be through. At that time you will quit, absolutely and positively!

Explain that the Scope-Pak approach is a very disciplined method and you, as project manager, group leader or facilitator, have to be very conscious of time. You cannot afford to tie up endless project manhours on organizing details!

You will not permit your team to evaluate or debate responses to questions. Just keep the ideas flowing. Keep your team working on the answers to your prompting questions. Cut off superfluous conversation. Get ideas out of minds and on to paper! Use prompting questions to control discussion and to focus your 'brains trust' team on the project mission.

STEP 1: Stakeholders

Label the top of a flip chart sheet 'Stakeholders'.

Start listing the most obvious people to be contacted for help, information or opinions. Whose money is it? This person is the project's 'Sponsor'. Together, these are the project's 'Stakeholders' who will contribute to, or be affected by, this project. If the list looks like getting too long, quickly prioritize them into major and minor players.

STEP 2: Components

1. Now label the top of another flip chart sheet: WORK LIST; WBS (Work Breakdown Structure); TASKS; or TO DO list (whatever fits best)

2. Ask for key, major, or significant work items and record all suggestions.
   Do not screen or evaluate. You can do that later. Get the major ideas down quickly. You want to take advantage of the process of 'brainstorming'.

3. Ask leading questions like:
   - What else is involved?
   - Are there any other Items?
   - Does this cover all the work involved, or required?
   - Has any work been left out?
   - If we did all this, would we have completed the whole project? (or solved the problem?)

4. Limit your items to around 30 (consolidate work items into groups if there are too many). You will not usually have time to handle more than this.

5. When discussion sounds like the team is really se arching for items to add, cut off the discussion and move to the next step. (Note: Have masking tape ready, tear sheet off the flip chart pad, and hang sheet on nearby wall.)

STEP 3: Objectives & Outputs

Normally, if you follow textbook theory, you state your objectives first and then talk about all the work that has to be done to achieve those objectives. However, most of the time it is difficult to get a clear idea of the objectives (outputs or 'deliverables') to start with, and time is wasted just arriving at a definition of what is to be accomplished.

In any case, people find it easier to "work the problem" by thinking of all the things that have to be done, and get that off their chest, so to speak. Typically, everyone can think of pieces or parts of the work that need to be done. This gets people warmed up, and you can then arrive more quickly at a much better definition of the project's objectives. That's why it helps to talk about work items first (in Step 2).

1. Either write down an objective or ask, "What is it we're here to accomplish?", and "How should I word that?"

2. Listen to the answers and formulate a consensus.

3. Tidy up the statement of objectives, then move on to outputs.

4. Define what output should result (shape, timing, format, etc.) if it is not clear from the objective statement.

5. Quickly double check your work by asking: "if we did all of the work items (listed in Step 2), would we accomplish our objectives? Does the statement of objectives include any (significant) work items that we left off our list?" If so, quickly add them to the list of Step 2.

6. Immediately move on to Possible Alternatives.

STEP 4: Possible Alternatives

1. Label a flip chart sheet "Possible Alternatives". Quickly but briefly list alternatives that would generally satisfy the overall project goal. Select the alternative that represents the most effective response.

2. Ask the question: "What alternatives should we consider as a part of the chosen work, or what things do we need to study or evaluate?" If there are significant alternatives to some of the major work items of the chosen project 'solution', list them now. This will help when you come to examine any risks involved and how these could be reduced (mitigated).

3. Be aware that this step may generate additional major work items, so go back and add them to the list of work items.

4. As discussion dwindles, go immediately to the next step.

STEP 5: Economics & Issues

1. Label top of sheet "Economics & Issues".

2. This is the area where method studies or cost evaluations need to be done. All work items will eventually have to be estimated, but ask "What significant calculations will also need to be done?". Ask in relation to each work item, and list them.

3. Continue prompting for Other Issues. For example:
   - Who is 'sponsoring' this project and why?
   - What is the project's priority (relative to other projects)?
   - What is the funding strategy?
   - What approvals must we get?

- What authority, latitude, must the project manager have?
- Who will undertake the project assignments?
- What resources will we need, or be available?
- What is the project time-frame (timeline),
- What are the critical dates?
- What coordination will be required?
- What other issues have we encountered?

4. Ask: "is there anything that should be included or excluded as a part of this project/problem?". That question will help to define the parameters, dimensions, and boundaries of a problem or task.

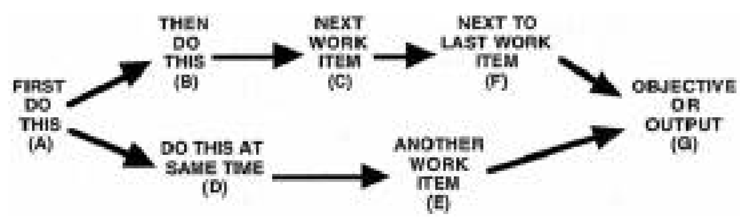
5. .Also ask: "What other information might we need? Where can we find it?" Make a list of the most obvious references, books, papers, organizations, people, sources, or any other place where you may need to check or research for pertinent information.

Note: A good listing of information and data sources can start a new project team person off and running - and hence be efficient - on their very first day on the job.

6. Solicit comments from the team with "Are there any other items we should add?" As soon as discussion dies down, move to the next step.

STEP 6: Plan of Attack

Now prepare a logic diagram or Flow Chart of how the project will develop.



1. Point to the list of work items and ask: "Which of these should be done first?"

2. Label that 'A'.

3. Continue on with B, C, D, E, F, etc.

4. Start asking what can be done concurrently with A, or B, or C, etc.

5. Try to arrive at a simple logic diagram, arranged from left to right, that expresses the sequence of accomplishment.

NOTE: In a larger project (30 or more activities) it may be easier first to identify items according to the separate major phases of the project, e.g. Concept; Development; Execution; Finishing, or their subsets (stages). It is then much easier to deal with these shorter lists of activities.

STEP 7: Assumptions & Risks

1. Ask questions like: "What assumptions have we made? What assumptions must we make?". List them.

   Draw out additional assumptions by pointing to a work item and saying: "Are there any assumptions connected with this piece of work? "Should we set or adopt any guidelines for this item/work/area/activity", and so on.

   Most important, establish who is going to do each activity!

2. Identify potential risks with each work item by asking 'What problems could occur with this item?". List them.

3. How can we mitigate these risks? What 'workarounds' might we adopt? Check back with Step 4 - Possible Alternatives.

STEP 8: Key Success Indicators (KSIs)

Note: In some organizations, Key Success Indicators are known as "Key Performance Indicators" or "Project Success Criteria".

1. Check back to the list of Stakeholders (Step 1). Who are the three or four who are the most important? Mark them. Now ask "What is it that is most likely to make them happy?" Hence, list three or four of the most important 'indicators' that can be used to demonstrate that the project has been successful.

2. Describe how each can be measured when the project is completed.

   Note: These Key Success Indicators, or KSIs, will not only demonstrate the measure of 'Stakeholder/Customer Satisfaction' when the project is completed, but will provide guidance in the management of the project when alternatives and tradeoffs need to be selected.

3. As discussion dies down, you check the time and notice that 60 minutes exactly has passed. At this point, you hang up your marker or pen and quit. Positively quit!

Finish: By assembling the Flip Charts and releasing your Team

Quickly gather the results of the team's efforts for later summary, presentation and use. Then state: "if there is no further discussion on this plan, I will have this material typed up on 8 1/2" x 11" paper and distributed to you. Subsequent work will clarify the project work plan in greater detail but at least we have a plan of attack." At that, heads will nod in agreement.

This is your cue to thank your Brains Trust Team for their enthusiastic help, and let them go!

Comments On The Scope-Pak Technique

I guarantee that you will generate more concentrated and focused thought in this approach to organizing a project than by any other method that you have seen.

This technique can be used by the boss, chief, chairman, middle manager, project manager, or group leader. Remember that you, the leader, are responsible for the group's (brains trust) output. How effectively can you use them? You have to lead the group very positively in order for Scope-Pak to be fully effective.

Therefore, develop a positive moving style and assertive question prompting technique at the start of the session, as you list the items. You and your group must really move to get done in 60 minutes. As your team catches on, you'll find they respond readily and find it a fun exercise because it ends boring hours of discussion of unorganized trivia.

Notice what you have done. You have organized a project by defining its objectives, by listing the significant steps towards its accomplishment, and by planning how the job will be conducted according to the interrelationships between tasks. Notice, also, how each step builds on the previous steps and helps to validate their contents. You have now caused the project to go down a certain path, it is going to move in a controlled direction.

Now look at another aspect. You have identified the stakeholders, clarified the objectives and defined the outputs. Defining significant alternatives, economics and issues, allows you to check for more significant work items that may have been missed. These are now exposed so that you can provide managerial perspective, supervisory overview and quality control. In short meaningful communication.

Similarly, the data sources are also exposed. You can direct a new person to the pertinent data sources and help them to be more immediately effective. Indeed, have we tapped all of our available resources?

After the application of this technique, there are not too many areas where a subordinate may be spinning his or her wheels. As a leader, you now have a checklist with which to monitor activities for effective supervision.

Notice one other thing. You will have built a strong commitment to results in the minds of your project team members. They will be keen to get going on the real work in your project.

You have also established the basis for project management by determining the real criteria for project success!

Evaluation Check List

1 Was this exercise itself seen as a **Project**?

2. Was a **Project Manager** appointed to lead this team exercise?

3. Was a **Project Schedule** prepared for this *exercise*, complete with time allowances?

4. Did it have **Float**?

5. Was a **Time Manager** (scheduler) appointed to monitor progress?

6. How many thought about **delegating** part of the project (i.e. part of this exercise) and running **Parallel Activities**? (**Note:** This is only possible with a team of 6 or 7 or more)

7. Did any team consider changing the sequence of the Scope-Pak methodology (e.g. Step 8 KSIs might be raised to Step 2)?

8. Was a **Quality Manager** appointed to verify conformance to the process (i.e. the exercise instructions) and required deliverable?

9. Were all the Project's Stakeholders identified?

10. How many **components** (i.e. activities, work packages) were identified to achieve the deliverable?

11. Were the core constraints of scope, quality, time and cost used as a 'tickler' list?

12. Was the original scope (i.e. Objectives and Outputs) maintained?

13. Were **viable** Alternatives considered?

14. How many Economics and Issues were identified?

15. Was a **Flow Chart** or **Schedule** prepared (as per instructions), complete with time allocations?

16. Was this Flow Chart/Schedule segregated into **Project Phases**?

17. How many **Assumptions** and **Risks** were listed? Were **Contingency** responses identified?

18. How many **Key Success Indicators** were listed?

19. Were they prioritized?

20. Was the **Project Report** (i.e. the results of this exercise) presented with emphasis on **Project Success**?

 Email: max_wideman@sfu.ca