Defining and planning a project a fundamental step for success

1 INTRODUCTION

In Proakatemia, teampreneurs create project ideas and learn project management by doing. Depending on the types of projects, how we define plan and execute them varies a lot. Although project management is a big part of our study, defining and planning part of it is often skipped or underestimated. This essay aims for gaining a deep understanding of defining and planning a project: how does a project define success, purpose, and objectives. Also, how we plan it by using the WBS structure and estimate the work. To begin with, what is a project? A project is a work performed by an organization one time to produce a unique outcome. "One time" means that there is a definite beginning and ending points, and "Unique" means that the work result can be different from the one the organization has produced before. (Horine 2005, 8) As companies are adopting projects as the way to do business, the demand for effective project management has risen. (Horine 2005, 15-16) Avokeittio is a project idea that I and Thais started building this summer, which means "an open kitchen" in Finnish. Avokeittio helps micro-entrepreneurs who want to open a restaurant business easier here in Tampere by offering a kitchen space and acceleration program. Currently, Avokeittio aims for using platform 6's existing kitchen for the following reasons: Avokettio's values are aligned with Platform 6's one because it is a non-profit organization of serial entrepreneurs, startups, and local community builders that helps startups. In addition to that, the kitchen has many problems that can be solved by Avokeittio. In this essay, defining and planning a project will be discussed and avokeitto example will be actively used. What is a "successful" project and what can we learn from troubled projects. Also, how do we build a project plan, and how to estimate the work.

2 DEFINING A PROJECT

2.1 What is a "successful" Project?

Learning from failures is important and it is an inevitable process on the way to success but understanding what could bring success to a project is as equally important as avoiding what not to do. What does "success" mean to you? "Success" is a word that can be varied a lot depending on how to define and measure it since we all have different values and objectives. It is the same for the project, and that is why it is critical to setting the stage for the success of the project. (Horine 2005, 28) Although it can be hard to tell what a successful project would be, there is a common aspect that can be defined. A successful project would mean that it delivers all the stated deliverables with good quality, completes on time and within budget, achieves its original purpose, and meets all stakeholder expectations. (Horine 2005, 28) Horine (2005) suggests identifying, documenting, reviewing, and approving a success measurement during the project is a key step to be taken during defining and planning a project.

2.1.1 Setting a stage for Success

Absolute Beginner's Guide To Project Management highlights the importance of defining and planning a project, claiming that 20% of the total project should be invested in it. (Horine 2005, 41) At the beginning of Avokeittio, the team experienced turbulence and a lack of commitment from its members, because it neglected the importance of defining and planning a project. Moreover, each one of the team members' expectations and objectives was not aligned. Participants' agreement on seven project definition questions should have been prioritized. 7 questions indicate, 'Why are we doing this, what organizational level goal does this project support? How does this project fit with the other projects that are going on? What is the expected benefit from this project? What are we going to do? Who is impacted by this and who must be involved? How will we know when we are done or if the project was successful? (Horine 2005, 40)

Regarding Avokeittio, several questions can be answered.

l Avokeittio's purpose is to make a micro-entrepreneurship-friendly city by generating more diverse entrepreneurship here in Tampere city.

l Our goals are to offer the kitchen place and information package to create an easy entry for people who want to open a restaurant business, and eventually to make a firm community for restaurant micro-entrepreneurs.

l Avokeittio can fit with the Platform 6 test kitchen because as it is mentioned above, the values and objectives are in alignment with each other.

l The expected benefit from it could be that more micro-entrepreneurs can get support.

l To be able to make it happen, we are going to make a service package for our customers that helps plan their business and offers an event that benefits them.

l Team members and people who are responsible for the platform 6 test kitchen are involved.

l Within a schedule and budget that is specified in a proposal, if Avokeittio delivers more customers than now to platform 6, it can be said that the project is successful.

2.1.2 Project Definition Document

Project Definition Document refers to the document that contains a consensus of all stakeholders about important project-defining questions which are mentioned above, and it is often called as 'Project Brief, Project charter, Project initiation, Scope statement, and Statement of Work' (Horine 2005, 42). There are nearly 10 must-have elements to the document and additional information to consider.

l **Purpose**: Currently in Platform 6, there is an established industrial kitchen that is barely used by customers due to the lack of a committed team who runs and promotes the kitchen. Avokeittio can solve the problem by bringing more micro-entrepreneurs to the kitchen.

l **Goals and Objectives**: Avokeitto is going to accomplish creating marketing materials for the kitchen that can be used on platform 6 social media channels. We are going to bring at least 15 different customers, strongly targeted to micro-entrepreneurs at the beginning stage of their business.

l **Success Criteria**: Posting activities regarding platform 6 kitchen to social media every twice a week and get at least 2 customers from social media

platform. Delivering certain amounts of customers (15 people) and helping our clients to take a further step, for example, budgeting, getting clients, and connecting to the right people.

l **Assumptions:** One of the assumptions is about pricing, that future customers see the rent of the test kitchen too expensive. The second assumption is that our customers do not find a clear reason to pay a 100 euros fee for just using the kitchen space. We assume that not a lot of people know about the kitchen exist.

l **Constraints:** Avokeittio team members lack of experience in the restaurant industry when it comes to establishing and maintaining a business. Avokeittio does not have enough human resources since it consists of two members.

l **Risk:** Due to high inflation, there is a possibility to raise the kitchen usage fee which can affect customers, considering that we are mainly targeting micro-entrepreneurs who are more exposed to economic vulnerability.

l **Stakeholders**

Stakeholder	Roles
Customers	Pay the kitchen usage fee, Provide feedback
Platform 6	Offer a kitchen space, respond to facility emergencies
Seungyeon Shin	Food acceleration program, managing reservation
Thais Araujo	Food acceleration program, marketing
City of Tampere	Fund the project, provide feedback

Table 1. Avokeittio's stakeholders

Likewise, defining a project by using a Project Definition Document can be helpful to solve any gaps with stakeholders. In addition, it is suggested to check if our set goals are 'SMART' which stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Rewarding, and Time-based (Horine 2005, 45). Before going to the next step, it is better to make sure to check if SMART goals and the desired future state are clearly documented or understood by all stakeholders.

3 PLANNING A PROJECT

Defining a project is about "what" it will do but planning a project is more about "how" it can be done. It is not a one-time activity that is held at the beginning of the project, but it is a "living" process, as it takes several repetitions to get a full-scale plan as the project is moving forward. (Horine 2005, 50) Key questions that need to be answered in the process of detailed planning include,

l How exactly are the objectives going to be achieved?

l What work should be done by whom, when, and where?

l What kinds of resources are required and how much does it cost?

l How is the project performance measured and updated to stakeholders?

l What kinds of risks exist and how to cope with them? How will the changes be handled?

Project planning is about asking questions to the team and getting agreed answers from stakeholders. (Horine 2005, 52-53)

3.1   Building a project plan

The first step to build a project plan is to validate the project definition document. It is especially needed when there has been a big-time gap between project definition and planning. When it is revalidated, the next step is to determine what works need to be done and the level of resources. All these need to be decided and measured in detail when the team is developing a Work Breakdown Structure which will be explained later. Important questions that should be answered when it comes to resources management are first if it is possible to get the "quantity" of resources and where to get them whether from in-house or external suppliers. Also, double-check if the resource is going to be available when it is needed.

Role	Team member	Training needs	Project started date	Projected roll-off date	Percent Allocation

Business process leader	B gates	Process modelling, Power PowerPoint User	6/1/2022	11/30/2022	80%
Lead Developer	S Jones	Advanced enterprise web development	15/1/2022	11/30/2022	100%

2. Basic example of a resource management plan (Horine 2005, 55)

The next step is to estimate the work like the effort and duration of each work task. Then develop the project schedule and update the stakeholder roles and responsibilities. Lastly, determine project costs and budgets.

3.1.1   Work Breakdown Structure

Scheduling is an essential part of project management. Yet, it is still one of the most challenging parts of the process. Is Work Breakdown Structure (WBS) a new name for project scheduling? Horine (2005) brings up this question for reflection and the answer is no. The team should have a full understanding of the terms used in the project. The idea behind WBS is literally breaking down the structure of the project to find out the ideal schedule, needed sources, tasks, and budget and determine the stakeholders' expectations. More than just a project plan or a project schedule, the WBS is a hierarchical representation of the work to be performed. Below, a representative image of a WBS documented.
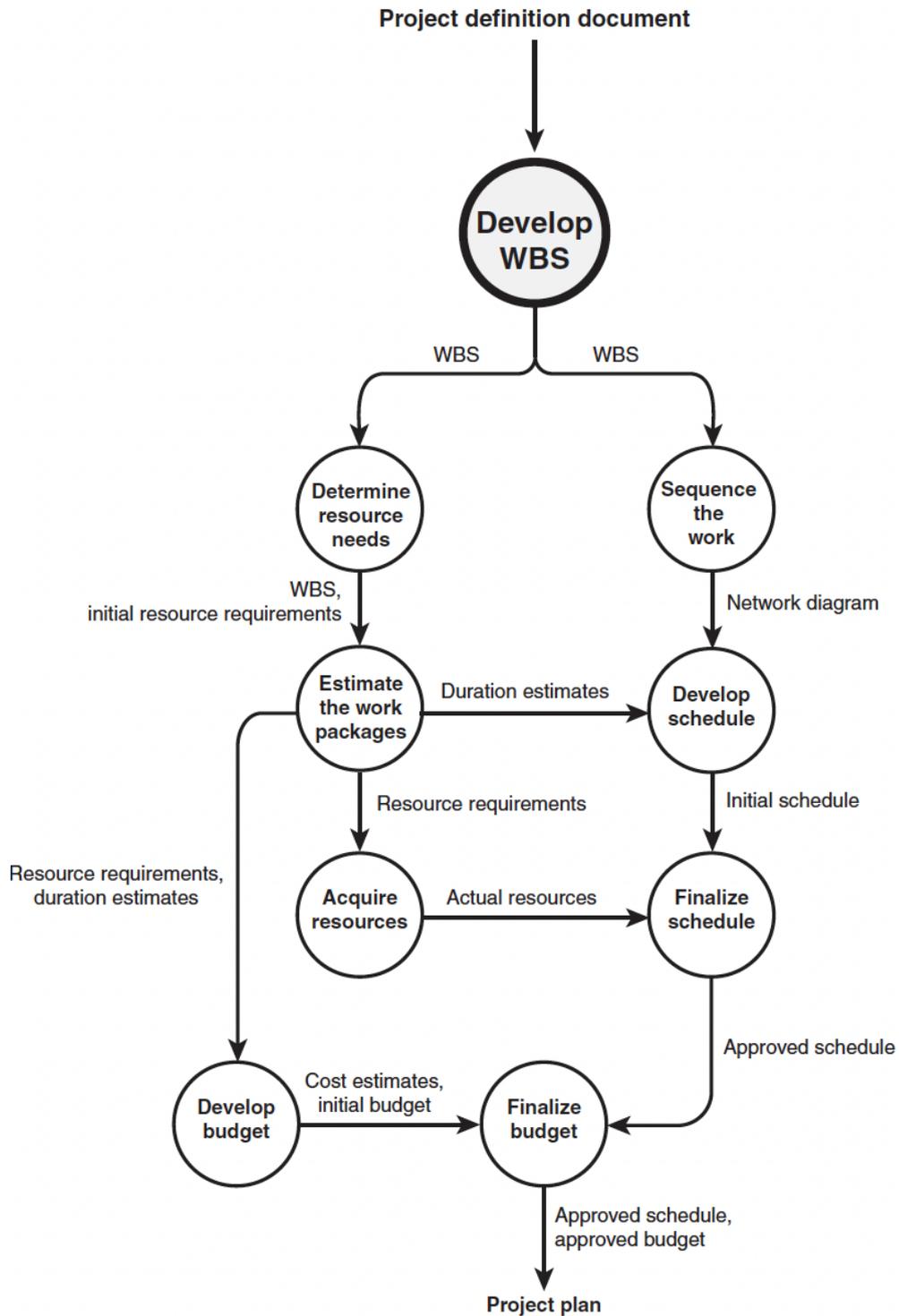
Project definition document

FIGURE 1. WBS's role in project schedule (Horine 2005, 75)

WBS has so much value and impact due to its targeted deliverables well structured. WBS can be clearly differentiated from a project plan because it doesn't involve task ownership/assignment or due date (Horine 2005, 75)

. It's a more compact version where the project manager and stakeholders can track and report the achieved steps. During the establishment of Avokeittio, we didn't apply the WBS system. We used the lean start-up methodology to validate our assumptions and quickly make changes effectively. We didn't use the WBS system because it wouldn't make sense to structure the hierarchy of a project that can change in a couple of weeks. It means we didn't have a clear view of the project. It would be hard to think of determining the resources needed or developing a budget without being sure if the problem we were trying to solve with our project during the summer was an actual problem. After validating the issue, we could finally develop a WBS. Having a proposal ongoing to Platform 6, we could break down our project into different tasks and stages. The main point of WBS is not to define the success or the timeline of a project. WBS is a tool for organizing hierarchically clear tasks or steps for the project. Bellow a draft of our first WSB developed.
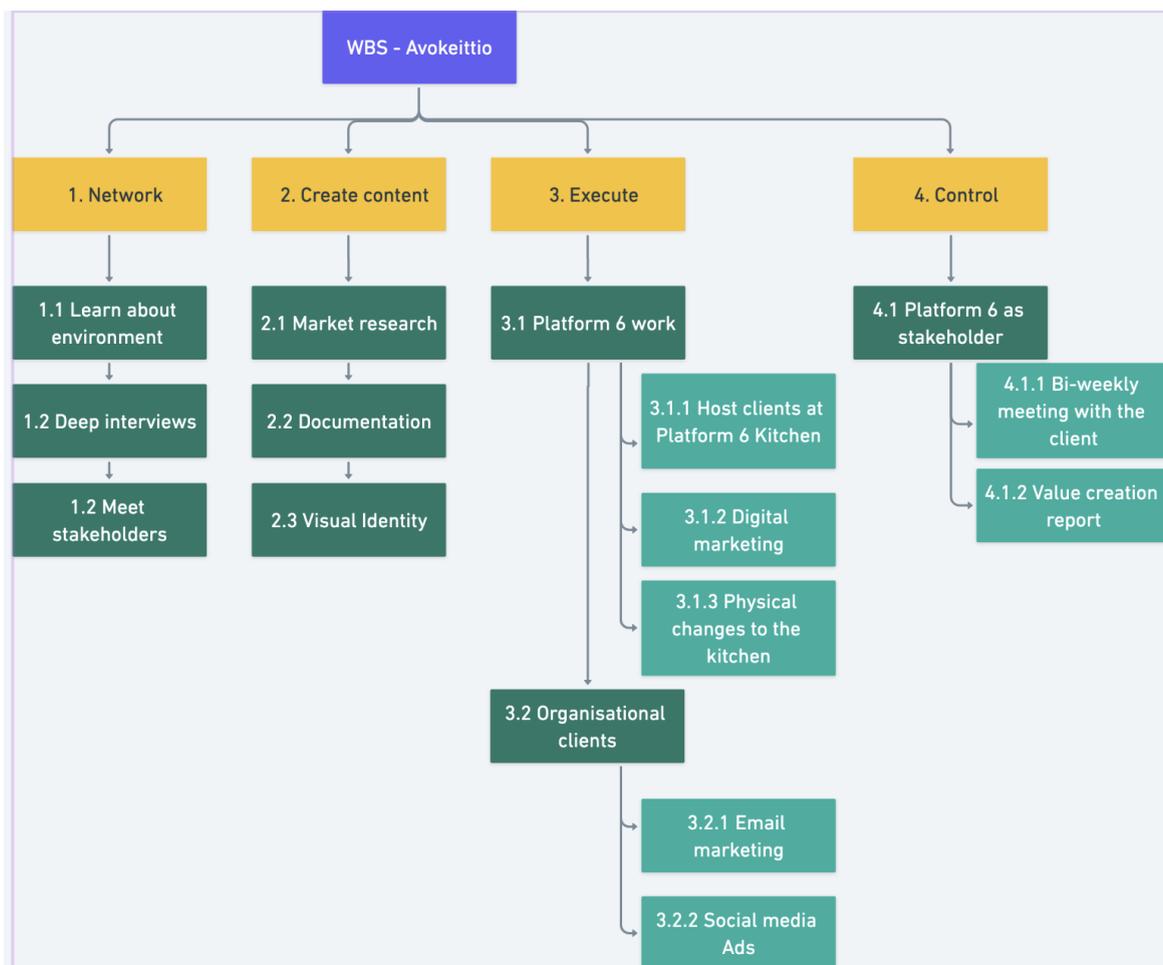

FIGURE 2. WBS example from Avokeittio 2022

One of the many benefits of WBS, and maybe the main takeaway from it so far for Avokeittio, has been the ability to identify risk factors in such an early stage. A clear image of what needs to be done and what needs to be researched is clear from the very beginning of the use of WBS. Thinking of a project as one big component can be overwhelming (Organ 2022, 8) and as a result, slows down the project management performance. Breaking it into bite-size components results in a step-by-step, non-overwhelming picture of the project.

3.1.2   Estimating the Work

Estimating the work of a project is seen as one of the trickiest parts for a project manager due to the tough expectations it usually involves. This piece of the project does not need and should not be a burden. Estimating the work is one of the central concerns in any project. In order to deliver quality deadlines and results, a task needs to have clear, detailed information; How much time it takes, how much human force is needed and what tools are needed to complete it. To achieve the desired quality level, breaking down the work into small parts, as explained previously with WBS, supports the work of estimating each task individually. Estimating the number of resources needed for each task will allow the project manager to prepare the cost estimates with accuracy.

Risk management is a powerful tool for the challenge of estimating the work when the project manager wants to satisfy the stakeholders. On one side, we are measuring the budget and schedule. On the other side, we have the risks we can take along the way (Horine, 2005, p88). In the between of the two parallels, estimations and risks, we have the assumptions taken. The project would nearly be an extension of these assumptions. It can be interpreted that the project plan should be essentially the assumptions made based on the work estimation and risks.

There are many effective tools to succeed in an estimation. Although the tools can be succinct, an almost effortless thought process is to avoid common mistakes along the project planning journey. Horine (2015) lists seven of them while explaining the best way to estimate work:

Improper work definition – The quality of information and details here is essential, and their lack results in failure.

Wrong people estimating – Most of the time, who knows how long time takes to do a task, is who works on the shop floor. They are the people who have the experience to share and estimate at best. It is common for the leadership to assume dates and make a poor estimation on their own.

Poor communications – One of the most straightforward ways to fail is because communication typically has many ends where the information should pass through. All the stakeholders, all the estimators, and all the assumptions should be on the same page. If one piece of the communication in the ecosystem fails, the overview of the work estimation might fail as well.

A wrong technique used – Here, it follows the same idea from the Wrong people estimating, budget decisions top-down instead of bottom-up is a recipe for failure. Not taking advantage of the team skills is another way to describe the wrong techniques to be used. Not check data and experiences from similar projects.

Resource issues – Not necessarily an estimation issue; sometimes, the professional's performance doesn't match the expected goals for a specific task and m up the estimated deadlines.

Lack of contingency – Working with new technologies, methods or techniques usually faces challenges not accounted for during the estimation. It is expected that some factors would not be identified, and not being prepared for it money-wise or time-wise turns out to be a big issue.

Management decisions – A reflection of the previous mistakes described. Senior managers, backed up by the idea that their decisions are safely covered by their own experience, easily make the mistake of not investing in bottom-up resource allocation. They can accept non-achievable budgets decided from the work

estimation or compromises the contingency levels to meet the client's or project's deadline.

This a great visual example of how risk management relates to other spheres of a project's planning structure:
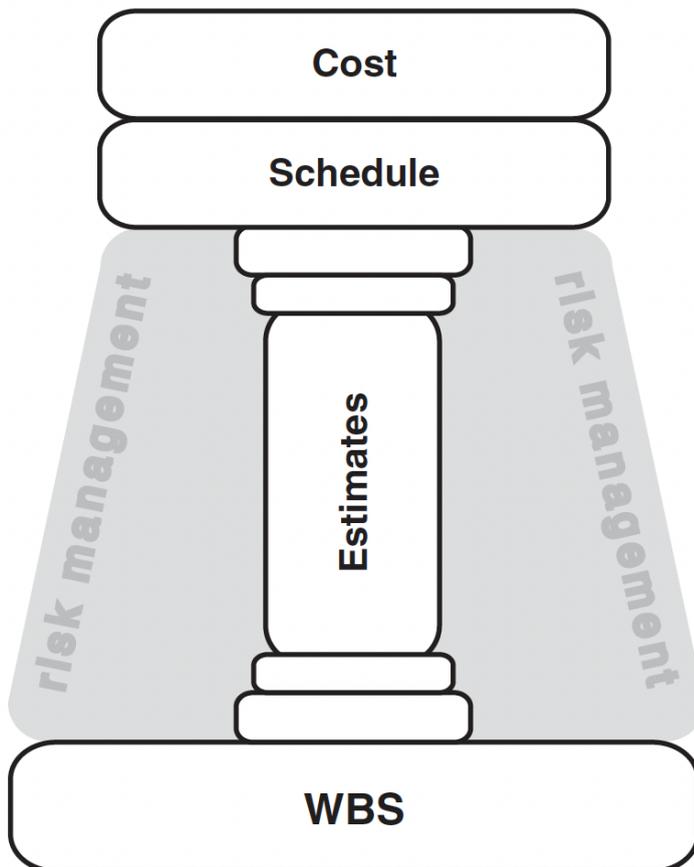

FIGURE 3. Work estimation role in planning process. (Horine 2005, 87)

In the first stage of Avokeittio, a couple of wrong estimate work techniques were used. The team had five members with good marketing, finance, and leadership qualities. Top-down decisions from the core team were made even if they were unaware of doing so. The application of wrong techniques happens effortlessly, and this was the main issue factor to realize the problem. The lack of experience leading a team gave the fake sensation of running a flat organizational team. In reality, only the core team was aligned with the main issue to solve, the solution to develop, and the actions to be taken for the project's next steps.

Among the available techniques, Avokeittio team highlights some of the methods they have put into practice and want to use in the future. Historical information was used on a large scale, estimation was used while
collecting data from professionals from the fields needed during the project process, risk factors is the technique that the team wants to use more effectively, mainly for future proposals.

4 CONCLUSION

Management skills are developed at every step of the process. There is no need to hurry or speed up the learning process. If the project manager is aware of previously described techniques, they are one step further. The proper use of them can work as a shortcut and achieve better results even with short management experience.

Defining a project, planning, and breaking the scope into more steps is a vast field of study. Covering these few first steps in project management allows a project team to have some reassurance of confidence to take a project out of the paper because it is clear and visual of what needs to be done and what resources are necessary to do so.

Collecting project data from similar projects is a positive way to achieve better results and avoid known mistakes from the field or the ecosystem. Managers can use the collected data to set realistic goals for each team member and offer accurate stakeholder expectations.

Going through different kinds of mistakes and putting together different attempts hasn't been in vain for the Avokeittio team. As a result, the team learned valuable lessons and techniques and, most importantly, learned what not to do while planning a project and estimating work.

5 REFERENCES

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