

Planning for Uncertainty: Collaborating to Build Trust in the Midst of Uncertainty in Digital Humanities Projects

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The importance of project planning has increased dramatically due to work shifting to hybrid or remote environments during the coronavirus pandemic, and there is now an even greater need to communicate across teams and between individuals. Centers for Digital Humanities and Digital Scholarship Centers (CDH/DSC) now widely practice project management, and project management skills specific to DH have been taught for over a decade in courses (Bailar and Spiro) and workshops (Siemens 343). Yet, communication needs themselves may shift in hybrid and remote contexts. For example, the Princeton CDH (Center for Digital Humanities) recently changed their project charter in response to how projects were working in practice. Two projects, including one chartered fully remotely, were key in the center's decision to make those changes. Their work plan became "a more abstract roadmap that divides planned work into stages" rather than a detailed plan because work changes as the projects develop (Budak). In other words, the work plan acknowledged inevitable uncertainties. While uncertainty has always been a reality in digital scholarship work because the field changes rapidly, remote work has encouraged a rethinking of how to plan for this uncertainty with more flexible models. In addition, remote work has increased the need to intentionally build trust in collaboration. Derek Thompson writes that "it's hard to build true intimacy via Zoom and chat. One of the most profound things that I've heard in my two years reporting on remote work is the idea that digital communications can be a minefield for trust" ("The Biggest Problem"). DSC/DHCs now often need to create project planning documents that include uncertainty: this includes uncertainty in how the field is developing, how staff will build new skills to meet the new demands of the field, how external collaborators will respond to project plans that have uncertainty built into them, and uncertainty in working in remote and hybrid teams. While not all of these uncertainties are specific to digital scholarship work, uncertainty is constant in the field. For DSC/DHC, a central concern throughout project planning is the importance of balancing uncertainty with the need to trust staff and build trust with external collaborators (e.g., faculty). With this in mind, this paper aggregates project planning literature from the point of view of DSC/DHC management in order to analyze three questions inherent to project planning that have not yet been brought together: First, how can management determine the feasibility of taking on a project while also transparently communicating professional development needs to external collaborators? Second, how can management provide professional development opportunities for the team to build skills while simultaneously putting those skills into practice? Third, how can management invite faculty collaborators (or external collaborators more generally) to join in project planning while still ensuring that

the project remains feasible in terms of the work the DSC/DHC is performing?

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