Elements of Effective Project Planning

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- The 8 Key Elements of Effective Project Planning

- The details are important for any project. But the problem is that when you start any new project, pinning down those details can be difficult—which can cause overwhelm. This overwhelm can contribute toward the project never getting off the ground in the first place.

- The better approach is to focus on basic milestones and goals. To help you with this, here are 8 crucial elements that you should incorporate into the project planning process.

- 1.THE IDENTIFICATION OF STAKEHOLDERS NEEDS
- Stakeholders include anyone affected by the project. These could be end users, employees, project sponsors, and clients. Regardless you need to consider all stakeholders and their needs.

- Identify the stakeholders, meet with them, write down and prioritize their needs. If you're still struggling to prioritize, use Eisenhower's Decision Matrix which helps you prioritize based on urgency and importance.

- However, when meeting with stakeholders make sure you lead a structured conversation. You don't want your stakeholders to lead you astray which may mean that at the end of meeting all you're left with is a long list of desires that aren't relevant to the project.

- You want to keep it on point and list only what's important for the project. By all means, acknowledge other concerns and demands, but let them know you don't think those points are relevant right now. Instead, suggest to "park" them for later on.

- 2. SMART PROJECT OBJECTIVES
- From the stakeholders' needs, create project objectives. The objectives need to be specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely. Consider these 2 objectives:

- Increase website traffic
- Increase website traffic to a client's site by 50% on 21 August 2018
- The second objective is far more specific and gives you a clear projected path of what you want to achieve. You can use it as a benchmark to measure how well you've increased traffic.

- The objective "increase website traffic" would imply that a 1% increase in traffic would be a success. And, I'm sure that's not what you'd want.

- 3. CLEAR DELIVERABLES AND DEADLINES
- What specific products or services do you need to deliver to your client? These are your deliverables and, for each deliverable, you should set a due date.

- A deliverable for "increase website traffic" may be to "provide monthly traffic reports," or even "improve on-page and off-page SEO." On-page SEO refers to optimizing your website's pages to improve SEO. Off-page SEO refers to methods you can use to improve ranking in search engines that extend beyond your site such as social media promotion.

- 4. A DETAILED PROJECT SCHEDULE
- Your schedules include the deliverables, tasks for each deliverable, due dates for each task and deliverable, and who will complete them.

- Assign Tasks to Each Deliverable

- By breaking up each deliverable into manageable tasks, it'll be easier to meet your project objectives. Think of the entire project as a cake. Each slice is a deliverable, and each bite of a slice is a small task.

- If improving on-page SEO is your deliverable, a task may be to produce 4 blog posts per month as part of

- 5. DEFINED ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES
- Beyond specifying who's responsible for each specific task you also need to define all roles. These include indicating who's responsible for the entire project, each deliverable, what client roles are and who reports to who.

- For example, a content writer may be responsible for producing blog posts and report to the content editor who manages a team of writers and the content schedule. The content director, in turn, reports to the project director, and so on.

- Defining roles, responsibilities and reporting structures ensures everyone knows what's required of them and remains accountable throughout the project.

- 6. PROJECT COSTS THAT HELP IDENTIFY SHORTFALLS
- Any plan should specify upfront costs so that you can allocate budgets and identify shortfalls. You can deal with these shortfalls by using proven ways to get more working capital.

- Additionally, you should also have a plan for monitoring and controlling costs. This will allow you to remain on budget and may include regular team meetings and meetings with the client.

- These meetings are important because going over budget is sometimes unavoidable. But by tracking and communicating with clients, you'll receive less resistance when you tell them you're over budget and that they may need to pay more.

- 7. A COMMUNICATION PLAN THAT KEEPS THE PROJECT MOVING FORWARD
- The success of any project hinges on good communication. You should communicate when there are project changes. You should also communicate and let the client know when you need their input. And so it goes. This all forms part of your communication plan which should specify:

- How often you'll communicate to project stakeholders. Will it be daily, weekly or monthly?
- The updates the client expects to receive: Are these face-to-face meetings, weekly status reports sent via email, or even telephone calls?
- How often the client expects to receive these updates
- The project checkpoints that require client input before the project can proceed

- 8. THE RIGHT PROCESS AND SYSTEMS TO TRACK AND MANAGE PROJECTS
- All 7 previous points are an essential part of the planning process, but an often overlooked one, is the processes:

- What procedures will you use to communicate to team members?
- What systems will you use to track projects?
- Will you give clients visibility into the project?
- Should they have access to your planning tools?
- How will you ensure that you deliver what your client wants?
- Now, you could create all these schedules in a spreadsheet and manage projects and communication via email and telephone. The problem is that this often leads to miscommunication. That's not to mention the endless digging through your inbox to find emails and files. And, let's not forget the challenges of running a remote team?