



The Power of Planning

Failing to plan – is planning to fail, someone said, and I will give my 5 cents on what you get out of making your plan

The objective of this article is to inspire project leaders to remember why the project planning is so very important – irrespectively if it is a plan-driven or agile project.

We need to be able to communicate the why, what, when, how and who.

Why do we need a plan?

Besides some of the obvious benefits and mandatory requirements there is also a number of valid benefits leading your team through the steps of making a plan.

The project plan shows how we work our way from current state to achieve the new end-state.

A project plan **instils trust** to your stakeholders that you and your team have a plan for getting through the change.

The mere process of planning the project gives your team transparency and creates a reference for discussion. Your plan is just as dynamic as the environment you are doing your change in – so your plan will not be final until you have delivered what you set out to do.

What is a plan?

A plan can be high level and show the path and approach for the project, but you need to dive into the details to ensure that your deliverables meet your sponsors expectations. This also means that once you have been trusted with leading a project – make sure you agree on how the plan is communicated and maintained.

In larger programs you will have plans from different teams, as a program lead, I recommend that you facilitate the planning of the projects to **achieve a cohesive** program plan – your projects will be more resilient if they know the dependencies and your program plan will bring all the efforts together and create the

Create the Gameplan

I always make at least 2 levels of a plan, but often end up with 3 or 4, this is also a good way of challenging the plan and show how we work through the details of execution.

The first abstract is the Gameplan. This is where you and the team create the overall approach, people, milestones, major deliverables and goals. We document the initial risk and agree success criteria.

This is also the abstract of the plan which should be used in communication material to the steering committee and stakeholders. The Gameplan is very useful when leading a program and bridging the different projects.

I was introduced to the Visual Gameplan back in 2012 and have used it several times for starting the planning activities with the team.

The gameplan consists of 5 steps of planning, and depending on the constellation of your team(s), you can facilitate the steps with different breakout sessions.

- **Forming your Team;** who's who, roles, how will you collaborate
- **What is the specific goal(s)?** Bridge the gap from purpose and intentions to Goals, objectives and deliverables
- **Identify the stages;** Break down the plan into stages or phases and agree on criteria for accepting a phase, agree on primary deliverables in the phases.
- **Challenges;** identify and discuss the key challenges, you will get a lot of risks and issues which are valuable for starting the RAID log
- **Success factors;** Personal, Team, Project across the phases and project

I have created Gameplans with teams over a period of 2 hours for a smaller team, and over 2 days for a large program with multiple project gameplans which were "merged" into a program gameplan



I also find the Gameplan efficient for agile projects again to have an eye on the end product and to discuss issues and development with the product owners.

Making the plan is a team effort. You will need several **iterations** with your senior stakeholders and team before your plan is in a form which can be accepted and communicated to a wider audience – create a buzz around your project is important so people know what you are doing and give you a good mean of talking with stakeholders who are indirectly impacted by your project

Who makes the plan?



Creating the **efficient plan** is a team effort and as a leader of change you need to involve your team in the process and question the “what”, “why” and “how long” to get the tasks described. This is also when you start digging into the dependencies and maybe stumble across specialists who are not in your project or mandatory processes like a change board for deploying releases if you are releasing an IT product etc.

So, get your planning activities booked with your team and start working your way through the phases top-down – and bottom-up this will give your team the confidence that you have a joint plan – use a whiteboard, post-it notes any visual aids to draw and visualise the plan, it works equally well in Teams and Zoom for distributed teams.

I am already brewing the next level of the plan and would be interested to hear what you do when you start up the planning process.

Have fun and good luck on creating an efficient plan