Managing projects

Fact sheet 3: Planning of Content Work Packages

What is a work package?

A work package is a building block of the work breakdown structure that allows the project management to define the steps necessary for completion of the work. As such, a work package can be thought of as a sub-project, which, when combined with other work package units, form the completed project. Breaking down the work into work packages allows multiple teams to work simultaneously or sequentially on different components of the project. Each team follows the steps defined in the work package plan and completes them by the specified deadline. When all teams have finished their individual work packages, the whole project comes together and the objectives have been achieved.

Depending on the kind of tasks, a distinction can be made between content work packages, which focus on the tasks that will lead to the project outcomes, and horizontal work packages, that are concerned with the management of the project.

Key elements of a content work package

As a work package can be considered as a sub-project, the key elements of a work package resemble those of a project. They include the following:

Work package objectives
Each work package aims to achieve one or more of the project objectives. The description of the work package should start with the statement of those project objective(s) which the work package aims to achieve. As for the project in general, the work package objectives define the methods, actions, and evaluation of the work package outputs and deliverables.

Description of activities
To achieve the work package objectives, a series of activities need to be undertaken by the project team. The work package plan should describe these activities in a comprehensive, logically structured and clear way. Specifically, attention should be paid to:

- the link between the objectives, methods and activities, and outputs and/or deliverables of the work package
- the link with the objectives, methods and activities, and outputs and/or deliverables for the project in general.

Timetable with milestones
All activities to be undertaken in the work package must be presented in a realistic timetable, taking into account the fact that some activities must be completed before others may start. In most projects, months are used as the unit for the timing of the activities.
In addition to the earliest start date and latest completion date of the work package, the timetable should also define clear *milestones*. A milestone is a scheduled event signifying an important decision making moment or the completion of a deliverable. Milestones can be used

as project checkpoints to validate how the project is progressing, thus allowing a proper monitoring of the project implementation.

Outputs and deliverables

The activities of the work package should result in specific *outputs,* which are the products, services, activities, or attributes resulting from the activities and linked to the objectives. The work package plan should clearly state which outputs are foreseen.

Certain work package outputs may take the form of *deliverables*. A deliverable is a physical output related to a specific objective of the project, e.g. a report, publication, newsletter, tool, website, or conference. A distinction can be made between external deliverables, which are created for customers and stakeholders, and internal deliverables, which are produced for the purpose of executing the project, and are usually only needed by the project team and the commissioning authority. Both types need to be specified and listed in the work package plan.

Roles and responsibilities

In multi-partner projects, work packages are usually divided between the organisations which collaborate in the project. Although different organisations can contribute to a work package, it is important that one organisation is in charge. The work package plan should make clear which organisation is responsible for the work package. Furthermore, it should be specified which tasks will be carried out by whom and with whom, and who in the organisation will oversee the completion of the work package. This may be a manager, supervisor, team leader, or a designated team member.

Relationship to other work packages

Breaking down a project into different work package is a way to manage the steps that are necessary for the completion of the project, and not a way to create projects-within-a-project. Therefore, it is important to ensure the integration of the work of each work package within the broader project framework. The relationship of work package to other (horizontal and content) work packages can be made explicit by stating how the actions build on the results of other work packages, and how the outputs and deliverables will be used by others. The interrelation between the work packages can also be made explicit via a Gantt chart, diagram, or flowchart.

Further reading

- Bollars C, Kok H, Van den Broucke S, Molleman G (2005). European Quality Instrument for Health Promotion User Manual. Woerden: Netherlands Institute for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention (NIGZ)
- Haughey D. (2009) Project Planning: A step by step guide. www.projectsmart.co.uk
- Miller DP. (2008). Building Your Project Work Breakdown Structure -- Visualizing Your Objectives, Deliverables, Activities and Schedule. New York: Auerbach/Taylor and Francis.
- Project Management Infokit. Jisc Infonet. http://www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk - Wiliams M. (2008). The Principles of Project Management. Collingwood: Sitepoint.

- WORK BREAKDOWN STRUCTURE TEMPLATE
- EXAMPLE OF A GANTT CHART