Event Project Management: an introduction

“You can have it faster, better or cheaper. Pick two.”

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The paper is a first introduction to project management. By studying the material you will:

1. Understand of the basic principles of project management;
2. Apply project management to event management;
3. Be able to create a work breakdown structure (WBS) for an event;
4. Be able to use the WBS to estimate cost of the event and the event planning schedule.

Introduction

This is divided into three parts - the scope of the event, the cost and the time. As an event manager or coordinator you will have to first plan these three areas and second keep control of them. If you loose focus of any of these areas then the event can risk failure. Sometimes the amount of time that can be devoted to any one area of the event has to be sacrificed because of changes in the cost - or budget, or it could be changes in what is on at the event. In other words the event manager needs to juggle each of these areas if the event is to be a success. Fortunately the body of knowledge :project management has developed a number of processes that can assist the event manager.

What is Project Management?

A brief background of project management will help you understand the concepts introduced in this section. A project is a one time venture that has a finishing date and a definite objective. A festival for example is a project. As it occurs once ( and even if it is an annual festival each year will have unique aspects to it) it means there is a unique combination of factors -such as volunteers, venue, and budget. Project management is the planning and control of those unique factors to create a successful end product. The principles of project management have been used for ventures as diverse as NASA's man on the moon, the Olympics and a local wedding ceremony. But do not be scared by the fact that it is used on
huge projects, the principles are the same for very small events and for parts of the event. All these events require the organizer to manage the three areas of:

1. Scope
2. Cost
3. Time

**Scope**

**Facts**

The scope of the event is the content of the event and the work required to put it all together. The later is called the scope of work. It is essential to understand the amount of work that has to be done to get the event happening. Without understanding the scope the event manager can not plan the event let alone control all the myriad of changes that will happen. The tool to use is the Work Breakdown Structure (WBS). The WBS is a method of breaking down or decomposing all the work needed to create the event into manageable chunks. For example the work for a music festival in the local park would be first divided into Site/venue, Promotion, Entertainment, Finance, Human Resources and Staging as illustrated in figure 1.1. Each of these categories could then be subdivided as shown in figure 1.2. Then on the next level of detail it can be divided again. As shown by figure 1.3. In this case only one area - the Internet - is shown.

Figure 1.1 First level of the Work Breakdown Structure

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Work Breakdown Structure

Music Festival

Site  Promotion  Finance  Human Resources  Entertainment  Staging
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Figure 1.2 Second Level of the WBS
From the WBS many other aspects of event management can be created. For example who is responsible for each of the areas of the event can be written next to each of the work units. In Figure 1.3 a person's name can be put beside the web design. They then become responsible to produce the web design. In this way all the work can be apportioned out to the event team - or may be you will have to do it all yourself. But at least you will know what has to be done. These particular bits of work that can be given to one person (or a subcontractor) are called tasks.
Steps and Questions

1. Select an event. It could be one you have worked on, one you have been to or an event you might like to manage.

2. In a group discuss what will be on at the event and create a list of all the activities. This is often called the Product Breakdown Structure.

3. Decide on the major categories of work that need to be done to organize this event.

4. Create a WBS for the event.

5. Assess the WBS - is there anything important that has been left out?

Time

Facts

Once the WBS has been completed and some of the work given to members of the event team, the next question to answer is ‘When does all this work have to be finished?’ It is pointless having all the work listed if it doesn’t get done in time for the event. To stop this from happening is the aim of time management. Just about every event has to occur at a certain date or time on a date. That means that all the work of organizing the event has to culminate in the event itself. The major problem is that so many of the tasks that have to be done are dependent on other tasks being done. For example the lights can not be used until the generator is working. The lights will allow the marquees to be erected and the generators will allow the pneumatic hammers to be used - or the tea urn to be turned on! - and so it goes on. It is a myriad of tasks. If this complexity is not sorted out earlier on in the event organizing you will be forever running around trying to get things done - or putting out grass fires. Also there is no point in having all this information in your head. It must be told to the event team in a way that they can understand and get their jobs completed. Project management has a number of tools to assist this. The main tool is creating a schedule. It can be as simple as a to-do list or as complex as a production schedule.

The process is:

1. List all the tasks that have to be done

2. Work out approximately how long each task will take

3. Work out what tasks are dependent on others

4. Arrange it all so that there is a sequence of tasks.

( even with sophisticated software, a handy hint here is to use sticky notes and arrange them on a spare wall)

The wall should now have lots of sticky notes and there is probably a pattern there. In particular you should now know that some of the tasks are so important that if they don’t get done on time you are in trouble. These are critical tasks and when they get done they are regarded as milestones. In project management a lot of attention is paid to these critical tasks as they tell you if everything is running smoothly or if there are going to be problems.

Another tool that is handy for event managers is the Gantt Chart. An example of a Gantt Chart for the set up of the Music Festival is shown in Figure 1.4. Note that this is only a
sample and a summary. However even in its simplest form the chart can give everyone involved an idea of what will be done and when. This is very helpful if you use volunteers.

Figure 1.4. Sample of a Gantt Chart

Run sheets or schedules

On the day of the event the volunteers and event staff will need to know exactly what is happening. This is the role of a run sheet. The headings that are used in a standard run sheet is found in the Appendix.

It will list what has to happen, when, where and who will be responsible. All the run sheets may be placed into an event production book or an event manual.

**Steps and Questions**

Look at the last level of your WBS

1. How long would each of these tasks take.
2. Which tasks are dependent on the others
3. Identify the critical tasks
4. When would you estimate each task to be completed? Will they have some spare time called buffer - just in case they are not completed on time?

Look at the event you chose in Section one and put together a Gantt chart for:

- Promoting the event
• Site or venue preparation and set up

• Sponsorship sourcing and managing

Put together a schedule for day of the event itself. Decide who will need run sheets.

**Cost**

**Facts**

Finally we come to the third of the concerns of event project management, the cost. Although the cost is often measured in dollars, it includes the resources needed to get the event up and happening. That can mean materials, human resources, equipment, as well as dollars. How do you decide on the costs? It is by returning to the Work Breakdown Structure. By looking at the level with the most details the event manager can get an idea of - or estimate - the cost of the whole event. The process is

1. Estimate what each task will need to be completed - for example getting the generator running will need
   a. A generator
   b. A cleared and safe area
   c. Fuel and storage of it
   d. Skilled and semi skilled people to work and maintain it
2. Cost each of those resources
3. Add up all the costs of each of the tasks to give a cost of the event.

Once this process has been done it gives everyone - including the finance department or council financing the event - a good idea of what needs to be committed to the event. It becomes the budget and any movement from this plan can be identified and controlled.

Also this process will give you an idea of what resources are needed for the event. These can be listed separately and used to see if there is any way savings can be made. For example a task that requires an electrician should not be done at the same time as different task that needs the same electrician. This type of resources analysis should be done throughout the event. Once again this is an example of event project management where the manager juggles the cost, time and scope to the advantage of the event.

**Steps and Questions**

Using your WBS

1. Determine the resources needed for all the tasks
2. Estimate the costs of the tasks
3. Estimate a cost for the whole event
4. Survey these costs and see if there are ways of making savings - for example hiring an expert or supplier and giving a number of tasks to them.
5 Are there areas that can use less resources but not effect the whole event?

6 How will you know if things happen that will cause a blow out in the budget? How can you stop them?

**Conclusion**

Event management is a part of project management. The tools that create successful projects can be easily adapted to events. The basis of this type of management is planning and controlling the cost, time and scope. This has to be done over the whole *life cycle* of the project - from the birth of the event idea to the event itself and its shut down. At no time can you take your attention away from these three areas as each development in getting together the event will mean a change in one, two or all three of these basic elements.

**References and further reading**

There are many books on Project Management. Most use the civil engineering or computers software development as their examples. However this just means a little *reading between the lines*.

Our book Corporate Event Project Management (O’Toole and Mikolaitis - Wiley NY) has all this in detail.

The web contains lots of information on project management as well. The site for the Project Management Institute in the USA has their Body of Knowledge. The book reference for it is:

*Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge*, Project Management Institute Project Management Institute PA USA

**Appendices**

Action Sheet headings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Where</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Runs Sheet headings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Staging</th>
<th>Audio Visual</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>