

Introduction

In the introduction to his paper, 'First Principles of Project Management'¹, R Max Wideman makes the following important point:

"There appears to be very little material available when it comes to identifying basic principles [of project management] and the theories that might support them. This absence means that the building of the project management profession or discipline is presently based only on project experiences and opinion and not on any reasonable theoretical foundation."

In an attempt to fill this gap, Wideman defines seven 'First Principles' of project management (a first principle being an unquestionable or self-evident idea that provides the necessary foundation for the further development of thought and practice).

First, Wideman sets out five assumptions to his subsequent argument:

Wideman's Five Assumptions

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- Everyone is working towards the same goals.
 - Everyone is honest.
 - There is a requisite level of skill and experience.
 - Everyone wants the project to be a success.
 - Everyone knows who the customer is.
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With this in mind, Wideman identifies seven 'first principles' of project management as follows:

1. The commitment principle

A fair and mutual commitment must exist between the sponsor and the project team before the project can succeed.

2. The success principle

The measure for project success must be confirmed and agreed upon before the project can start, and before activities can be assigned.

3. The tetrad trade-off principle²

Scope, quality, time and cost must all be attainable and must exist in equilibrium.

4. The strategy principle

A strategy includes planning and implementation, and a definite series of sequential activities that must be in place before the project can begin.

¹ www.pmforum.org

² four point rule

5. The control principle

Policies and procedures must be devised to control behaviours and ensure commitment.

6. The single-point responsibility principle

One person needs to be in charge. This individual will be the point of contact between the sponsor and the team.

7. The cultural environment principle

There must be a supportive culture and environment in order for the project to succeed. Management should work to foster this.

The Project Life Cycle

There are three key stages in the life of any project that you must address in order to guide the project successfully to completion.

Planning and Initiating

Set clearly defined objectives and goals.

Define the deliverables/outputs.

Recruit a project team with all the necessary skills, experience and expertise.

Define the project scope, outlining all the work that will be done on the project.

Create a work breakdown structure (WBS) of the tasks/activities involved in the project.

Work out timescales for completion.

Estimate costs (both time and money).

Assign tasks and responsibilities.

Assess the risks and draw up a contingency plan for dealing with them.

Draw up a strategy detailing the methods you will use to carry out the project.

Implementing and Monitoring

Put control systems in place to monitor time, cost and quality at regular intervals.

Regularly measure the actual outputs against the deliverables defined at the beginning.

Report progress regularly and communicate clearly to clients, stakeholders and project team members.

Put in place a change management strategy to facilitate the smooth implementation of the project.

Continue to plan and assess risks and develop contingency plans.

Closing and Evaluating

Archive relevant documents and correspondence for future reference.

Establish a contact for future enquiries.

Recognise team achievements.

Disengage team relationships, by holding an end-of-project event, for example.

Compare actual outputs to original deliverables/objectives.

Identify if any further work needs to be done.

Measure success in terms of budget, timescales and quality.

Evaluate customer satisfaction.

Reflect on lessons learned.

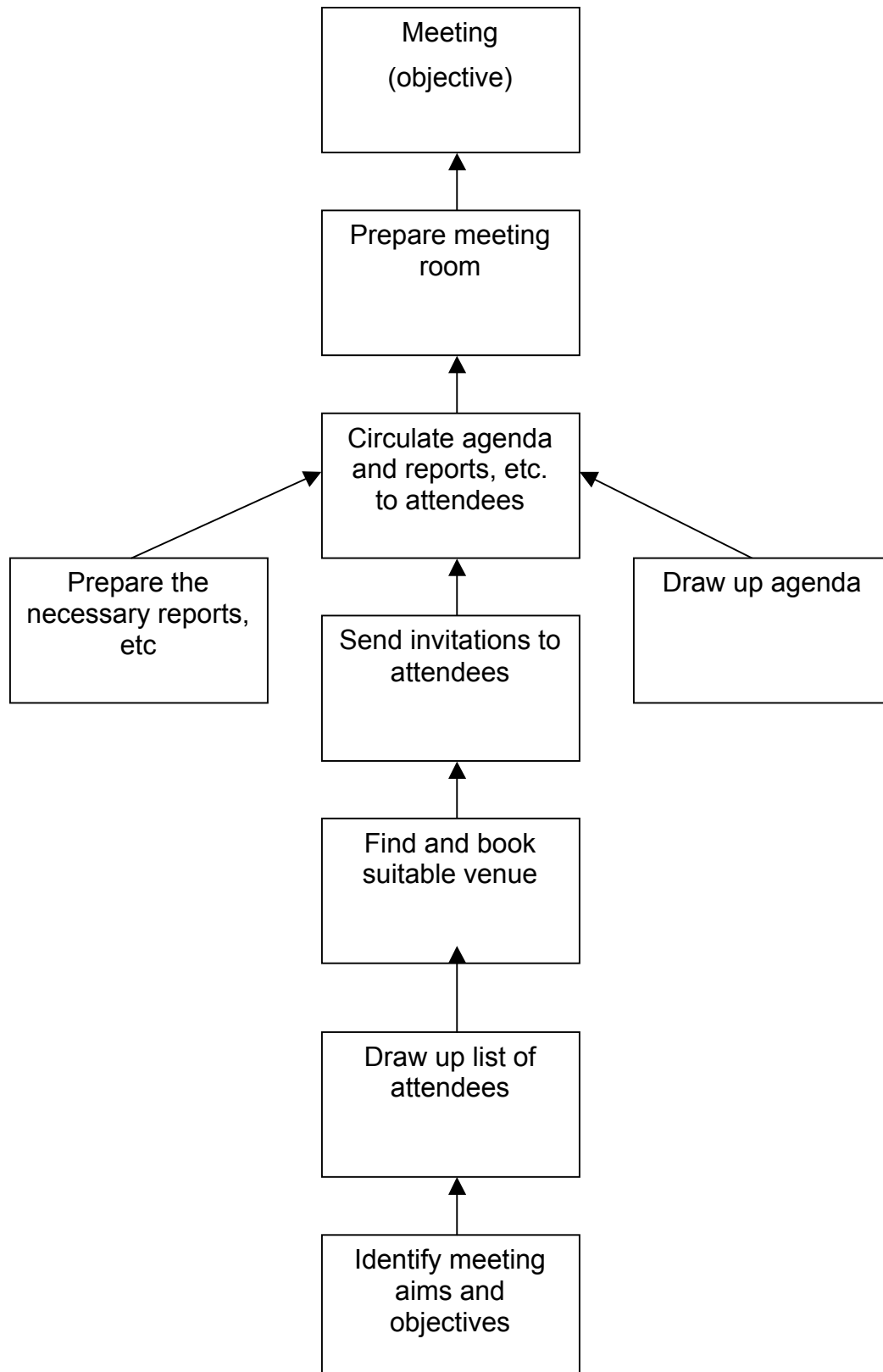
Apply lessons to future projects.

Work Breakdown Structure

The work breakdown structure (WBS) is a tool used in the project planning phase. It is a functional map or flowchart, illustrating all the tasks and activities involved in a project as units of work, all of which contribute to the ultimate objective. The WBS therefore shows the project as a large series of manageable activities that can be easily planned and carried out.

The WBS is an activity-based tool. The ultimate aim is to show the project as the progression of tasks and interim goals towards a final objective. The WBS can be as complicated or as simple as necessary. It does not, however, show start and finish dates or timings. It is therefore advisable to use it in conjunction with another tool such as Critical Path Analysis or Gantt charts. An example of WBS is shown below:

WBS for Arranging a Meeting



Gantt Charts

A Gantt chart is one of the most commonly used project planning tools. It is particularly useful because it provides an easy-to-understand visual display of project activities and their timescales.

An example is shown below. As you can see, the technique is very simple, yet effective. To create your own Gantt chart:

Create a table and list all of the tasks and activities relevant to the project, in chronological order, in the first column on the left-hand side.

Along the top row of the table, indicate time increments. These can be any length.

Then indicate how long each activity will take by shading the relevant boxes.

This technique has two advantages:

1. It allows you to see the project in one concise but complete picture.
2. It makes it possible to represent tasks that take place simultaneously.

Gantt Chart: Creating and Launching a New Product

Week No:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
A. Consult possible clients.									
B. Agree the objectives of the pilot course.									
C. Identify who will deliver the course.									
D. Design the content of the course.									
E. Market the pilot.									
F. Recruit participants.									
G. Conduct the pilot.									
H. Evaluate the pilot results.									

Managing Risks

Some useful questions to ask yourself are:

- Is there some way that I can eliminate risk?
- Is there anything that I can do to reduce the likelihood of it occurring?
- Can I reduce the extent of the impact, if risk cannot be eliminated completely?
- What contingency measures can I plan, so that I can deal with risk if it occurs?
- If the likelihood and/or the impact are minimal, can I accept the risk?

As well as identifying as many potential risks as possible and making plans to deal with these during the planning phase of a project, it is equally important to do so during the implementation phase, as new or previously unidentified risks can present themselves at any time.

By regularly monitoring, you can keep tight control over your project and step in quickly to deal with risks before they occur or their impact becomes too serious. Use this exercise regularly to help you to monitor risks throughout your project.

Risk Assessment

How likely is the risk?	High			
	Medium			
	Low			
		Low	Medium	High
		What is the severity of the impact?		

Are you an Effective Project Planner?

Everyone knows that thorough planning provides a strong foundation for any type of project. This diagnostic will help you to guide projects through this phase effectively.

Answer the questions in this diagnostic to review your current planning skills and to identify areas for improvement. You may wish to use it with a particular project in mind, or as a general analysis of your project planning skills.

Task

1. Answer 'Yes' or 'No' to each of the questions. Answer honestly, considering the full implications of your responses.
2. After you have answered all of the questions, review the diagnostic again, this time considering what measures you could take to improve your planning skills in the areas where you have answered 'No'. Note these down in the 'Action' column.
3. If you are unsure as to how you can take 'action' on a particular point, note down, in the 'Action' column, that you have to 'find out more'.
4. Keep this diagnostic and use it as an action plan to implement any necessary actions that you have identified.

Question	Yes	No	Action
Have you identified SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound) objectives?			
Do the objectives focus on the results of a project rather than the activities involved?			
Have you defined the project deliverables, i.e. the ultimate objective?			
Are there explicit goals and deliverables for every stage of the project?			

Question	Yes	No	Action
Have you drafted a project scope statement that outlines the business case for the project and describes the tasks that will be done during the project?			
Have you chosen the project team members according to specialist skills or roles needed for the project?			
Are project team members clear about their specific roles and responsibilities?			
Have you consulted the line managers of project team members to agree on the time they will spend on the project and to plan your staffing resources?			
Have you broken down the project into its constituent parts in order to plan and manage the different units of work?			
Have you identified timescales for every phase of the project?			

Question	Yes	No	Action
Have you estimated costs for every phase of the project?			
Have you identified potential risks for every phase of the project?			
Have you evaluated the impact of these potential risks?			
Have you drafted a contingency plan for the risks?			
Have internal and external customers been consulted on their expectations and feelings regarding the project?			
Have you devised a strategy for how you will carry out the project (methods, procedures, etc.)?			