



# Project management

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A project is defined as an activity aimed at achieving a specific goal within an identifiable time scale and at an agreed cost. History is littered with examples of projects which did not live up to initial expectations. That is not to say that they were not eventually completed but the delays encountered and the extra expenditure incurred meant that the rate of return on investment was significantly reduced. At the extreme, some projects are never satisfactorily completed and companies can go bankrupt trying to make projects succeed when they ought instead to be terminated.

The aim of good project management is to reduce the chances of this happening and to ensure, as far as is possible given the inevitable uncertainties, that an organisation achieves the best possible returns on its investment. The financial benefits from this aim are clear but there are many other less tangible benefits such as increased personal satisfaction; this leads to increased motivation and enhanced future performance.

Experience over many years and a wide variety of situations has shown that although every project is almost by definition, unique, common features can be identified which provide the starting point for performance improvement. It is also generally applied but that consideration needs to be given to a number of organisational features if these are to be used to best advantage. What does this mean for practice and where should an organisation start?

## **The game**

Participants are divided into teams and set a competitive challenge – for example they need to make a promotional video for the course which they are attending. There are significant time constraints – the whole must be designed, executed and delivered in the form of a presentation of the finished video within a short time period, typically 60 minutes. The winner is the team producing the best film within the time constraints.

They are given nothing else in the way of instructions so must find ways to organize themselves, identify key roles and fill them, work out the key tasks and sequence and then assign people to execute them. Typically they spend a long time in pre-planning discussion and run short on time for execution; films are often only drafts or sometimes merely shooting scripts.

The real purpose is to set up a challenge in which it is easy to fail; from this a reflection and debriefing session can extract valuable lessons about why project management is important and identify simple tools such as Gantt charts to help.