



Planning for commitment

Developing resilient project plans that people believe in

- Do your business stakeholders really understand your project plan, and what it means for them?
- Does your project team believe the plan, and are they committed to making it happen?
- Are project resources and business resources fully lined up to be available at the right time?
- Do people support the plan in public and in private?

If the answer to any of these questions is “no”, then your project plan is unlikely to be resilient enough to fully withstand the rigours of delivery.

What causes lack of resilience in project plans?

Project plans can suffer from a range of problems, including:

Over-optimism:

- underestimating overheads or always assuming best case
- making the plan fit a pre-determined deadline regardless of feasibility

Lack of coherence:

- workstream plans that don't fit or don't cover business resources
- entire plans missing eg only the IT workstream has a detailed plan

Poor communications:

- lack of a simple high-level plan that all stakeholders understand
- project team doesn't understand in detail how their part fits with the rest

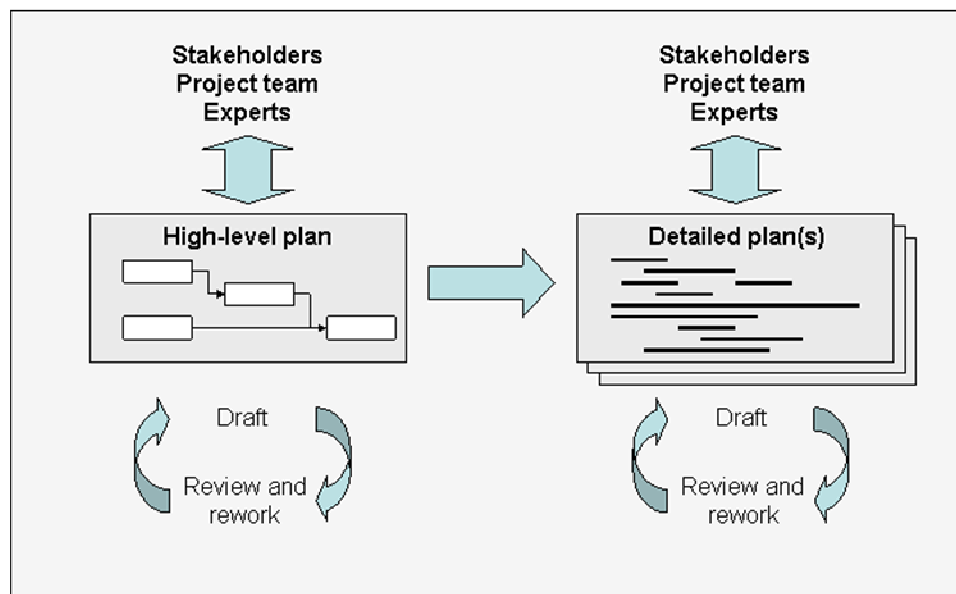
Developed by the wrong people:

- developed by a project manager with no relevant technical expertise
- developed by individuals who will not participate in the delivery

All the above can contribute to a plan with poor buy-in, and which has a high risk of failure or significant slippage.

How do you create a resilient project plan?

The key to developing a resilient project plan is to carefully plan for the plan itself, and in particular to make sure that you involve the right people at the right time. Depending on the size of the project, such a “plan for the plan” doesn’t have to be a massive undertaking. However, it should be written down and it should demonstrate that you have thought through who should be involved when.



What should the “plan for the plan” cover?

As well covering how to develop the “technical” parts of the plan (deliverables, dependencies, resources, activities etc), your “plan for the plan” should also answer the following questions:

Who are the project’s stakeholders?

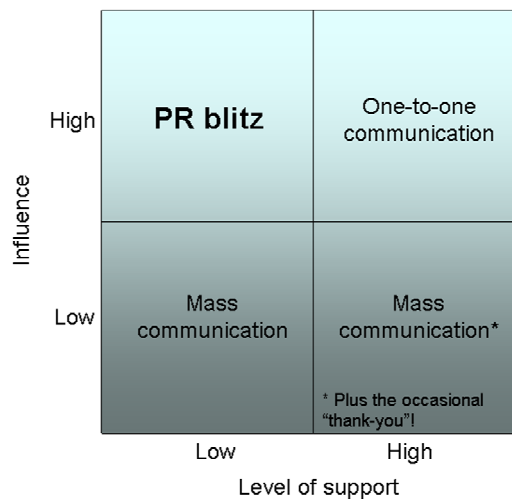
- Analyse your stakeholders by level of influence and level of support (see diagram below) – a quick and dirty analysis is often enough.
- A PR blitz on stakeholders who have high influence but low support for the project will pay dividends later on. At a minimum this can help limit any sabotage, and at best a genuine engagement can turn attitudes around.
- Actively seek help and advice from all stakeholders – this both pays the stakeholder a compliment and increases the quality of your plan

Who are the experts?

- Has anyone in the organisation ever done anything like this before? What did they learn, especially from their mistakes? How long did it take?
- Secure their time to contribute to the planning – even if this is only to review both early and final drafts. Ideally these experts would also be on the project team.

How does it fit together as a whole?

- You should use the project definition to identify the major deliverables, and only then should you work out the activities needed to deliver them
- Map it out at a high-level first so that you and the stakeholders can see the project as a whole – you can then validate this for feasibility once you have the detailed plans



Links

[Project Workout](#) – Chapter 19 has useful sections on preparing a project plan and engaging stakeholders, quoting General Eisenhower: “Planning is everything – the plan is nothing”.

Will it work for you?

If you would like to discuss whether you can increase the resilience of your project plan, contact Ian Hadden of Root Six Consulting for an initial conversation.

