

PODCAST: PROJECT PLANNING AND GOAL SETTING



Co-funded by
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Project planning should be preceded by a situational analysis. It is known that a project does not exist in a vacuum. It is formulated to respond to a negative situation or condition.

The stage of identifying and understanding the existing negative situation that requires intervention is called situational analysis. At this stage, it is necessary to understand the prevailing situation and identify its cause. Situational analysis is useful at later stages when developing a strategy and then specific actions aimed at these causes. A good situational analysis serves as a starting point for the project, shedding light on what needs to be done to address negative conditions in any context.



Next, a gap analysis is conducted. A project always aims to achieve a desired goal. By the time the project concludes, it is assumed to have reached the intended or desired situation, in contrast to the situation from which it started. The project aims to fill the "gap" that exists between the current situation and the desired situation. Consequently, a gap analysis is performed to identify the difference between the current and desired situations.

Now comes the time for proper project planning. At the project planning stage, goals are defined, strategies for achieving these goals are formulated, actions are identified, objectives based on a timeline are established, and resources are allocated to the project. As part of project planning, a detailed implementation plan is also prepared, containing a schedule of activities and a timeline for key milestones. At this stage, a project monitoring plan is developed to assess its achievements.

Discussing the project planning phase more precisely, the first step is to define the project's task, which should be specific and realistic. The second step is to identify the actions that will be taken within the project to achieve the intended task. Next comes the allocation of project resources, primarily in the form of financial means available for project implementation. Money is used, for example, to recruit human resources (project staff) based on defined roles and responsibilities. Physical and infrastructural resources are also purchased, such as office space, equipment, etc., necessary for project execution.

One of the most important and fundamental steps in project planning is to define its goal and tasks. Many people often confuse these terms and use them interchangeably, unaware that they are two different, though related, concepts. Poorly defined goals and tasks lead to ambiguity in project planning and execution. Therefore, it is essential for each project to clearly define its goal and tasks and ensure that all planning and execution are directed towards achieving them.



The task of the project is a specific state that the project aims to achieve and is itself a task. The task derives from the goal, has the same intent as the goal but is more specific, measurable, and verifiable than the goal. For example, if the main issue in a particular city is "high air pollution levels," then the corresponding task would be "reducing the air pollution level from 35% to zero over five years."

The SMART criteria are widely used to assess project tasks.

A task is labeled SMART if it meets the following criteria:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Relevant
- Time-bound

Applying the SMART criteria to examine the task of “reducing the air pollution level from 35% to zero over five years”:

- **Specific:** The task is specific because it directly addresses the issue of air pollution.
- **Measurable:** It can be confidently stated that this task is measurable using the "pollution index."
- **Achievable:** The assessment of whether the task of reducing the pollution level from the current 35% to zero in a city of 50,000 people is achievable, considering the availability of resources, time, and other relevant factors.
- **Relevant:** In defining the task, the project team and other experts analyze whether your project task is important and aligns with the initiative's goals.
- **Time-bound:** It is essential to ensure that the project has a specific timeframe. In the current example, it is expected that the project will achieve its goal within five years.

If the project task meets all five SMART criteria, it is considered a good task.

Another question to consider is whether a project should have one task or multiple tasks. A task is, by definition, meant to be precise, specific, and defined. Therefore, the project should ideally have just one task. The term "project tasks" is often used colloquially. However, this term is incorrect and its use contradicts the spirit of the "project approach." A project fundamentally involves breaking down a large problem into smaller components so that each issue is addressed individually within a single project. It is not about solving all problems at once by trying to find a general solution for various aspects of the problem. A project that has more than one task is likely to lose its focus, while the task becomes open to ambiguity and subjectivity. Therefore, a well-designed project should have one clearly articulated task.

The planned actions must lead to the achievement of the project task. The task also has a higher dimension that goes beyond the project task itself. This higher dimension is the goal to which the project is intended to contribute. Each project, by achieving a given task, contributes to the attainment of a larger goal. It can thus be rightly said that a project "achieves" its goal but "contributes" to its attainment. In other words, the goal represents a macro-level change, to which the project contributes at a micro level.



Thus, the task of our sample project, which is "reducing the air pollution level from 35% to zero over five years," simultaneously contributes to achieving a higher goal, namely "improving the quality of the natural environment in the county town."

Another current example could be a project whose task is to contribute to the goal of improving the quality of the natural environment. Planting more trees, installing more photovoltaic panels, increasing the use of bicycles in public transport by residents, and organizing community clean-up events are just a few of the project tasks that would contribute to the larger goal mentioned above. Therefore, the goal is the intended change we aim for; it has a broad scope and an overarching vision. In this way, many projects can refer to it and contribute toward a single goal while achieving their respective tasks. Thus, it is extremely important to clearly define the goal and tasks to ensure clarity in the planning and execution of the project.