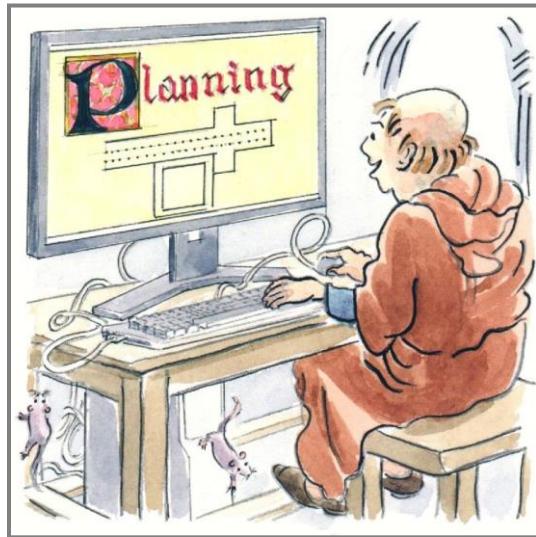


Making things happen

Project management for churches

A44 Articles series: Planning



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This is written for those who have been asked to make something happen in their church. These 'somethings' are often called 'projects' and the whole process known as 'project management' which is based on a 'project plan'.

But 'making something happen' is a more down-to-earth way of describing this subject. Hence our title.

This beginner's guide to project management will avoid the jargon and assumes that those involved in making things happen will have little or no background as professionals in this field. It also assumes that church projects may seem complex but that, in most congregations, they will not be on a scale that calls for the use of sophisticated software.

If you are used to such tools in your day job, or if you are responsible for operations in a large church, that is fine. You may well be able to use software that can clarify what you are doing and aid team communication.

If you are not used to such tools there is no need to go on a training course for a package that assumes something much grander than your church event. This article will aim to keep things simple and assumes a typical church enabling typical church 'things' to run.

Project management terms (avoided from here on)

If you study professional literature you may read about:

- PMBOK – the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK v7 for the current guidelines).
- Prince2 – a national standard.
- PERT – Project/Programme Evaluation and Review Technique.
- Software such as Asana, Basecamp, Monday.com, Trello, Wrike.
- 'Schedule baselines', 'project charter', 'critical path', 'logic network' and other such terms.

Overview

Before considering the main planning process, here are some explanations of what this subject is all about.

Examples of projects

What is being planned might be any of these.

- The organisation of an **event**, either one-off or repeated at intervals. You might be organising a church outing to a national celebration or master-minding the annual carol service.
- The introduction of a **programme or system**. You could be setting up a church theme for the year involving all activities or establishing a new small group structure.
- The execution of any other significant **change** in church life such as a major building project.

Each of these involves a range of different people, inputs, deadlines and costs.

This is not the same as overall church planning, dealing with the question of where you believe God may be taking you all over the next few years, although any short-term project should contribute to that long-term direction. The word 'project' assumes the organisation of a specific event, programme or change. This will have a start point and a finish – when the 'something' has 'happened'.

Here are more examples. You might like to note which of the three categories above each one falls within.

- A church weekend away;
- a concert of any kind;
- the launch of a Messy Church programme;
- a children's holiday club;
- a stewardship exercise;
- a major revision of your small groups;
- the introduction of new church software;
- a two-year programme to assess people's gifts and skills;
- the launch of a new congregation or church plant;
- a transition to a multi-site church or a multi-church benefice;
- the appointment to a new staff post;
- the search process for a new Minister;
- a structural maintenance project;
- a building project of any kind.

'Elements'

In the planning of each of these, several different activities need to be going on at the same time involving different groups of people, but they all need to dovetail in with each other. Everything needs to work together to deliver the intended outcome at the right time, within any controls that have been set such as a budget, and without muddle or frustration along the way. That's the theory!

So 'projects' will have a small number of distinct 'elements', the planning activities that need to fit together. The running of a children's holiday club might involve:

- planning the programme, gathering a team of volunteers and training them;
- choosing and liaising with any external speakers or leaders;
- booking the venue, hiring equipment, catering, insurances, risk assessments;
- publicising the event and communicating with church members for prayer and support;
- running the holiday club itself.

Each of these needs to take place with the right people in an appropriate style at the right time so the holiday club runs on schedule with each element contributing correctly to the whole.

Project planning involves identifying these elements, letting them work successfully together, controlling the process and delivering the result.

The 'project plan'

A 'project plan' is a document that maps out both the execution of the project and the means being used to control this process. This is vital for a more complex project. It might list:

- the foundations of purpose, vision, values;
- the place of prayer within the process;
- the shape of the project and the elements it can be divided into;
- controls to ensure there is proper accountability and transparency;
- the people (stakeholders) who are involved;

- tasks that need to be undertaken within each element to deliver the project;
- assumptions being made (for example, how long each task will take);
- the scheduling and linking of each of these elements and tasks;
- the likely costs with, perhaps, a cash-flow analysis;
- the level of quality expected;
- the resources required at each stage: people, equipment, etc.;
- the means of communication to keep everyone in the picture;
- issues involved in changes to the plans through increased costs or delays;
- a risk analysis for each of the elements;
- details of the launch.

That may look daunting but many simple projects will not require all of these. Use it as a checklist as you prepare a plan – this article takes you through the key stages.

Leader and team

The planning process can either be led by one person, a 'project manager', or by a small team who work tightly together under a clear leader. Together, they provide leadership and coherence to all that is being planned. They are the enablers of the proposed change.

The process is unlikely to work efficiently if handled by a church committee, without anyone clearly taking overall responsibility. But, if a team is involved, it should work as a genuine team and not as a rubber stamp for the leader's ideas.

Good project leadership does not imply heavy control. A small team works best when each member knows exactly what their responsibilities are, and the team leader can keep a constant hand on everyone's involvement to give definite but gentle leadership.

It is sometimes said that such leadership is the guiding force, not the driving force. It is more about the use of a steering wheel than the accelerator pedal.

The choice of project leader is going to have a major impact on the success or otherwise of the whole process. Planning a project calls for a blend of spiritual insight and practical skills, an understanding of people and a commitment to get the task completed on schedule.

If there is a small but tightknit team handling the process, this means that there is much more chance of the necessary range of gifts and experience being present. If you know anything about Belbin team roles you can see them all playing a part in this process.

Running the project team

Here are some hints for how to run the team.

- 1 Build the team under its leader so people know each other, trust each other and are open and honest with each other.
- 2 Give the team a precise purpose (basically, to deliver the project to the required standard by the due date).
- 3 Make the team properly accountable to Church Council, Board, Elders or whoever.
- 4 Keep it small: it will depend on the project but aim for no more than four or five, perhaps bringing in external specialists when necessary.
- 5 Keep formal meetings to a minimum but aim to do plenty in five-minute huddles after church on Sunday, by email, by use a suitable mobile app (you might check out Slack), or by Zoom.
- 6 As you move ahead in the plan, give each member specific responsibility for particular elements and the tasks lists that go with that.
- 7 The team leader is ultimately responsible for co-ordinating the team's work, liaising closely with the relevant governance group and delivering the project on time.

Dangers of inadequate planning

If you take too laid-back an approach to the planning of a complex project, you may find any of the following:

- the outcome failing to fit into the overall church vision;
- one element of the organisation started too late, or too early;
- a failure to make cost-savings by wise choice of purchases;
- an unchecked overrun on budget;
- lack of communication with certain groups of people;
- lots of meetings for little output
- decisions made without proper authorisation;
- stressed members of the project team;
- everything running late;
- poor event attendance or change buy-in.

Dangers of inadequate capacity

There is another danger that easily gets swept under the proverbial carpet in the excitement of starting something new: have you got the human capacity to undertake this project while maintaining normal day-to-day ministry?

This issue applies first to the church as a whole. Churches love starting new things but can easily fail to spot the need to close something else down to free up time and energy for the event, system or change.

Everyone needs to recognise that to stop something may be essential before you start something new. People, whether paid staff or volunteers, have limited time and energy – and projects normally require considerable energy to succeed, even if this is just in people turning up to support.

The issue also applies to the planning team who may need to be released from other responsibilities to give their energy to the project. Otherwise something will suffer, either the new or the existing.

It applies in particular to the project leader. It is their enthusiasm and commitment that will see the project through. If they are burdened with too many other concerns, whether in church, at work or in family life, they may not be able to invest the necessary energy. Sometimes it is even necessary to employ a paid project leader.

Stages in planning

Here are four stages in preparing a project plan.

1 LINES

Ask and answer basic questions in broad outline. These lines in the sand will help you to do the right things. Asking 'Why?', 'Where to?' and background 'How?'.

2 LISTS

Analyse everything that needs to be done or considered. Define each element and create lists of all tasks required for each one. This will help you not to forget anything. Asking 'What?', 'How?' and 'Who?'.

3 LINKS

Sort all these actions into a coherent order, noting which need to link up with each other. Allocate each to one person or team. Asking 'When?'.

Finally, there is the:

4a LAUNCH

This is when the event takes place, the system is introduced or the change happens.

4b LEARN

The review of the planning written up for any next time.

These form the next four parts of this article.

Lines

These are the foundation lines for your project. They represent the initial thinking stage. These are the lines to draw for all the planning that is to follow. Beware people who want to jump in and get on with the action. Get this thinking wrong and nothing thereafter can go quite right. Here are five lines to draw, each one of them expressed in a question format.

1: Why are we doing this?

The point of asking this question is to be able to clarify the purpose and check it is valid. This is the first line to draw.

'Why' questions are challenging. If you cannot discover a worthwhile purpose for your project, better not to start it at all than to carry on wasting time and effort.

So if your project is to organise an event which has taken place each year until now, these answers are NOT sufficient to start the planning:

- because we run this event every year as part of our church programme;
- because the leadership of our church have asked us to organise this event;
- because every other church runs this kind of activity.

Here are two ways to get to the real, worthwhile purpose.

The first is to set out answers such as the above, but then to ask the Why? question about each answer. So you start with:

- 1 'Why are we doing this?' – answers include 'Because we run this event every year'.
- 2 'Why do we run this event every year?' – answers include 'Because we think it's a worthwhile thing to do'.
- 3 'Why is it a worthwhile thing to do?' – answers include 'Because we get local people coming on to our church premises'.

And so on. You get a root diagram with more answers spreading out at each level.

However you quickly find that some real answers start to appear. For example, 'Because we can invite people to an introductory Christian course' may eventually appear on several of your roots. This gives you an idea of the real purpose.

To do this you need large sheets of paper (such as flipchart sheets) and draw the roots down branching out further at each level down. Look out then for similar answers starting to appear on different parts of the diagram.

A second method, which should produce the same result, is to disallow any answer that starts 'Because' as all the above reasons do. This often throws you into the past. Instead, start each answer with the words 'So that...' This takes you into the future. This time you might end up with answers for your event that look like this:

- so that people can work together for an outcome that will increase their faith;
- so that we can invite friends to an event which is not a church service;
- so that we can show those living in this area that we care about local issues.

And so on.

It can be helpful to list negatives too. 'Why are we setting up this youth worker appointment?' It may be important to note that the purpose is not to take over all the work currently undertaken by volunteer church members but instead to lead and motivate them.

When the purpose has been clarified, state it succinctly, perhaps using a bullet point approach. You will then have a context to help you decide how to shape this project, who is involved and how you plan it.

2: What are we praying will be the impact?

This question leads you to the second line, the vision for the project. If purpose is all about what you do, vision describes your faith in what God might do if you fulfil the purpose. By asking the 'Why?' question and answering it 'So that...' you are already providing a picture of the future. But

in vision, or 'impact', you are being specific in what you are praying for.

So a vision might describe what you would see or hear in three or five years' time, in a way that is checkable and which will show God has been at work. It gives you criteria on which its success can be judged. For example, if these are all part of the vision:

In three years' time:

- Can we prove that people's faith has been increased through this event each year?
- Do we see real growth so that by then at least 70% of those attending are not members of our church?
- Are we seeing at least five people each year joining our introductory course?

A specific outcome sharpens your thinking, drives you to prayer, and ensures everyone is working to the same agenda. Without an intended outcome there is little to hold everyone together.

Your vision should be the statement that excites and yet scares everyone, which motivates you to continue and to seek a successful outcome. It's your statement of faith and your prayer focus. Choose it prayerfully.

3: What's the shape?

If you now have an idea of the purpose and vision, you can consider the shape of the project you have in mind. For example, if you are planning a church weekend away, is a weekend the best option or might something like a weekend at home or a day away be better, or a hybrid? Don't make too many assumptions on means before you have considered alternatives.

This is especially important if planning an event that takes place at regular intervals. The temptation will be to organise the next one just like the previous events. But assumptions can be made just as easily for a one-off event. At this stage, question everything.

Start with the vision and list different ways of achieving that. The key point here is to do some creative thinking of means of achieving the outcome you are praying for. So:

- Start by assuming there will be other ways of achieving your vision so being open to new ideas becomes the norm.
- See Training Notes TN103, *How to encourage creative thinking*, on this website for a range of practical ideas.
- Check out what other churches do for this kind of project. The idea is not to copy as that can be dangerous, but to open yourselves up to alternatives.

- Evaluate the alternatives you come up with
 - trying to be ready to risk something different rather than staying in the comfort zones everyone is used to.
- Consider not only the means to achieve your vision, but the timing and size of the project too. It is possible to think in terms of something bigger than you need or smaller than real faith allows. Then decide.

4: How shall we go about it?

There is a fourth line to purpose, vision and shape, often called 'values'. This term is not well understood but describes the attitude adopted. This will be the church's way of going about things applied to the project.

Values can be seen in three levels (as described in Training Notes TN74 on this website, *Understanding values*). The first two apply here:

1 Non-negotiables

These might include the foundations of the Christian faith, the lordship of Christ or any doctrinal basis that the church adheres to.

2 Church culture

These remind you how you normally do things. Between them they create a culture for your church. They mark out what matters in the way the church goes about its work.

There is no point in having church values if they are not the ones every project is planned to. For example, if reliance on God through prayer is a non-negotiable for your church, this says that the planning of your event or system must also have prayer in its foundation. If 'team' is a key concept for the church, this should impact both the project and the way it is planned.

In fact the way the project is run may offer a great opportunity to put the church values across to everyone in a highly visible way.

Worked example: Global mission strategy

Training Notes TN42, *A review of global mission strategy*, on this website provides a worked example of how one church tackled a review and then devised a new strategy for this area of church life.

The description here is concerned with defining exactly what the change would be, and the delivery was to a Church Council for authorisation.

5: How will it be controlled?

This is a key issue of governance. If you are vague in your thinking in this area, you may hit real problems later on, especially if something goes wrong along the way.

It is assumed that a project team has been appointed with a leader (see page 3 above). But it is vital to ensure that there is proper accountability and that it is clear which bodies make which decisions.

It is important to know:

- to whom the planning team report (eg. Council, Trustees or whoever);
- in what form and how often they provide their reports;
- what the planning team's authority level is
 - so what kind of decisions they can make themselves, and what kind they need to seek guidance on from the group they report to;
- what the financial budget looks like and what limits the planning team are to work within;
- what happens if the project runs behind schedule or over budget – which body takes control of the situation;
- what happens if the team fails to work together successfully.

For most church projects the controls should be straightforward, but still need to be clarified and stated. If the project planning goes smoothly, you will hardly need them. But if something goes wrong everyone needs to know where they stand.

It is vital that both the planning team and the governance group both agree these guidelines at the start and recognise their responsibilities. A governance group that takes no interest is as dangerous as a planning team that oversteps the mark. If control issues are not clearly known, this can sour relationships as well as putting the success of the whole venture at risk.

Summary

These five guidelines for the project will save you veering off course. These lines might be drawn by the leader and planning team at the outset of their work, but it is more common for the governance group to draw them first so that they are a given for the leader and team to follow.

One danger is to make plans and then ask God to bless. This whole process should be seen as an exercise in seeking God's guidance and so prayer from the outset becomes a priority.

Lists

The next stage in the process is to create a range of lists.

- First of all to divide the project into the different **elements** that create a realistic breakdown of activity.
- Secondly to list all the actions or **tasks** that are required within each element.

For a simple one day event this is straightforward. For a complex project such as organising a church weekend away, a change to a multi-church site or a major building project, this will take time and needs to be something you keep coming back to as you think of further items to add. But the idea is to write down everything you can think of that needs to be considered and actioned, and then keep the lists open so you can add to them as planning proceeds.

If you are into ‘mind maps’ or other tools of that kind, these can be really helpful to generate everything that needs to be done. If not, straight lists work fine.

First, the three fundamental stages.

1: Lists of elements: What?

‘Elements’ were explained on page 2. What you are seeking to do is to define distinct areas of planning activity. Aim to have no more than about eight of these. Most projects will need only five or less.

Creating the elements works well as a team exercise in a brain storming way. Start with broad categories. Use a flip chart with post-it notes, white board or digital screen. If team members come up with ideas that are ‘details’, park them on a second chart so you don’t forget them but so they do not get in the way of seeing the big picture.

On page 2 you read suggested elements for a holiday club. Here is what you might come up with if organising a Christmas carol service:

- music: band/orchestra, rehearsals;
- people: leader, readers, drama, children involvements;
- practical issues: candles, fire precautions, take home literature, refreshments;
- promotion: leaflet distribution, website, press;
- follow-up: mailing list, January course.

You may sometimes need to think in terms of stakeholders and make those the elements. For example, for a rearrangement of children’s activities on a Sunday, stakeholders include:

- the church as a whole and how this fits in with the services;
- group leaders for young people and teens groups;
- children;
- teens;
- parents who are church members;
- parents who are not core members.

What order they all come in and exactly how they dovetail can wait until the next stage, ‘Links’. For now the idea is to build a list of broad activities you are going to have to undertake.

2: Lists of options: How?

Now take each of these elements and build a list of broad-based options for how it might happen. If the first list was answering the **What?** Question, this is more to do with the **How?** Take the element of the carol service music. Here are some of the **How?** issues that you might address.

- options for style/content given the purpose, vision, values: is this to be a traditional lessons and carols, an all-age event, or something built round a dramatic presentation?;
- options on who to involve: existing music group, a larger choir, a children’s music group, etc.;
- options for a music co-ordinator: who might best fill this role?

If you are planning a church weekend away, these are often quite expensive so the element of cost/payment options might be broken down into these options:

- payment by families subsidised by others;
- bursaries on offer;

- no fixed charge but ask everyone to pay what they can;
- payment in instalments;
- early bird discounts;
- camping in the grounds as a cheaper alternative.

You have now defined and listed the main elements and considered options for how to run each one. Next, choose carefully your option for each element.

Now the time has come to get rather more detailed.

3: Lists of tasks: What? (again)

Now you need to go back to the process of asking the What? Question, but this time for each element. In more detail, what is it that needs doing now we have decided how to do the whole? These are to be your lists of ‘tasks’.

If you have decided what types of band and choir to employ for the carol service, you now need to list various tasks in planning the service.

Examples might include:

- obtaining sheet music and checking all copyright issues;
- approaching people to be involved;
- rehearsals for each choir and band;
- church layout to accommodate music groups: furniture moving;
- advice on PA issues;
- and many more.

Some elements will need lots of tasks listed. The way to do this is to get the planning team to think of everything they can that needs doing under each element in turn, putting each of these on a post-it note and placing them on grids prepared on flip charts (so you can keep moving them around). Later you can transfer the final arrangement to printed sheets.

It is unlikely that you will think of everything to do at one session, so circulate the sheets, keep the lists open, and encourage everyone to keep adding tasks. They are already grouped by element, but a further breakdown for each element may be necessary.

So the process so far looks like this:

- 1 What **elements** should we divide the project into? Decide on a short list.
- 2 How might we undertake each of these? List **options** and decide.
- 3 What **tasks** do we need to undertake for each ‘element’? Long lists of everything you can think of.

- 4 Sometimes you may need another round of How? for some of the ‘tasks’ and then another What? But for a simple project you should be there by now.

The whole point in this process is to consider everything that needs to be decided. Creating lists or mind maps and returning to them again and again as you think of new things to add, is one way of minimising the risk of omitting something.

Having a planning team from a range of backgrounds helps here. If one person does it all for the weekend away and is wealthy, they may not think about how to help those who cannot afford the accommodation fee.

So you now have **elements**, a chosen **option** for each one, and lists of **tasks**. Before you move on, consider the following.

Lists of obstacles or constraints

It is wise to also construct lists of obstacles that may limit the achievement of your plans. These may be internal (such as lack of human resources or money) or external (such as local opposition to your plans).

For the planting of a new congregation you may need to consider losing key members of the mother church and their financial giving. But you may also need to consider the lack of any suitable building to rent or buy in the area you are planting into. Keep these lists in parallel with your ‘tasks’ lists.

For some items the word ‘constraint’ will be better than ‘obstacle’.

- First, there will often be constraints of **time**. For example, if you are organising an event at a given date, you have a very clear deadline which has to be met.
- There will often be constraints of **cost**. You are given a budget to paint the hall which may mean you have to use volunteer labour rather than getting professionals. For some projects you may also need a cash flow analysis.
- There will often be constraints of **attitude**, especially if you are planning a major change in church life. Perhaps there will be opposition to what is being planned and people who lead a proposal for something different or no change at all.
- Finally, and linked to the last point, there will often be the constraint of **apathy**. This can often be harder to overcome than outright opposition.

Many projects will also require a risk analysis under your Health and Safety Policy, covering areas such as cash flow, cancellation, low numbers, safeguarding, travel, etc.

But against such obstacles Christians must also take account of the resources that their faith in God can produce. Nehemiah would never have planned his project to rebuild the Jerusalem walls if he had only considered the obstacles in his way. They ranged from the state of the masonry to Sanballat and his crew.

Lists of people

The issues here are to name who is responsible for each task on your lists, and what authority they have to proceed.

If you have a small planning team, you may want to allocate the tasks to members of the team and give them enough permission to get on with this, with a team leader keeping a finger on the pulse of all the different activities.

But the work does not have to be done by the team alone. Each member may well need to bring in others to work with them, and to have experts they can call on for advice.

Don't forget to produce lists of those from whom permission is required or whose views will matter for the actions you are proposing. If you are planning a change to how the crèche operates on Sunday mornings, stakeholders include both parents and the existing crèche helpers. To plan ahead without consulting such people could lead to distress and opposition later on.

Links

So you have sorted out the foundational **lines** for your event, system or change. You have long **lists** of what needs doing under each element, and ideas of how you might go about each one. Now the time has come to **link** all these up into one coherent plan.

The question you are asking here is 'When?'

Putting tasks in an order

If you have broken your project down into elements, it may be possible to plan ahead with each element in parallel, all working to the same deadline. But this is unusual. It is much more likely that one element needs to fit into another, or that one task in one element cannot be taken until certain other tasks in a couple of other elements have been completed.

If you are contemplating a major building project to be funded by church members, it is unwise to proceed with the work until you know that you have a good chance of seeing all the money raised. So getting pledges up to, say, 70% of the total may be necessary before you know you can contract with a builder. Here tasks in the element of finance and building work have to link up with each other.

For many activities, promotion needs to be prepared early in the whole process, but not so early that you are not sure exactly what the activity is going to look like. So you may want to announce the date first of all, then plan the theme and speakers and book the venue, then get people to put their bookings in. On the other hand, some external speakers take bookings for

Worked example: **Church weekend away**

The organisation of a church weekend away (or at home) is a particularly complex project for most churches. There is detailed advice in Article A30, *Take your church away*, on this website.

There is a supplement to this article, A30a, *A weekend away checklist*, that provides you with detailed lists of tasks to be taken into account under various headings and at different points in a timed schedule.

These are the **lists of tasks**, described in the previous part of this article, shown on a timeline of what needs to be done at different stages of the planning process.

The **elements** of the project have, for the most part, all been brought together to produce this timeline.

There are other ways of showing the tasks to be completed – see next page.

at least one year ahead, so the planning process may need to be timetabled over a long period.

If you book the venue and then your speaker, only to find the speaker cannot manage the date of the booking, you will have to rethink. If you book the speaker and then cannot find a suitable venue available for that date, you are again in trouble.

So it will be clear that different elements may need to be actioned at different times so that each one can input into others at just the right moment. Here are four basic tools you might use.

1: Timeline

This marks a timeline and you then write each task down at its appropriate time making sure that Task A comes before Task B if B depends on A. This will be quite sufficient for simpler projects. You end up with lists arranged as follows:

- launch minus one year (a list of actions);
- launch minus six months (list);
- launch minus three months (list).

And so on, with the times bunching closer together until you get:

- launch minus three days (list);
- launch minus one day (a list);
- launch morning (list);
- post-launch (various lists).

For an example see Article 30a on this website.

2: Flow chart

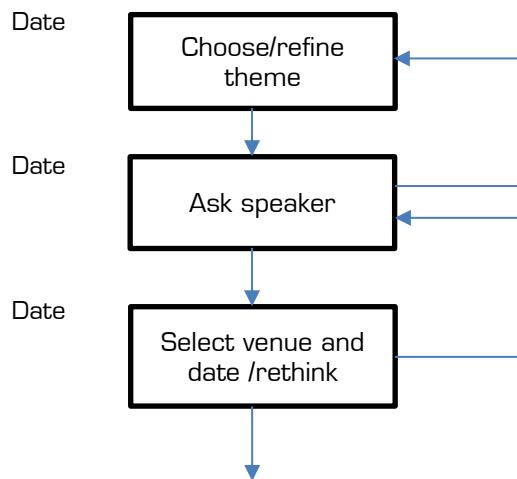
This is a diagram with each task written in a box and the boxes laid out in a way that means you can see which order you follow. You can then draw lines with arrows on them from one to another. But instead of in a simple list, you can show that after one box you then need to double back to an earlier one and repeat the process or have lines of boxes for each element which then show links between them.

Taking the speaker and the venue issue above, the flow chart at this point might look like the diagram in the next column.

Proper flow charts have different shaped boxes for different styles of activity or for questions to ask at particular points with YES and NO answers then taking different routes.

This is a more sophisticated version of the timeline provided you put dates and/or times on

it. It allows you to draw linking arrows over different items in a way that the timeline does not do so easily.



3: Gantt chart

(the one piece of jargon we shall use!)

This consists of horizontal bars with a date line running across the page from left to right (these are normally designed in Excel). The bars show the start time for an activity by their left-hand edge and the proposed completion time by their right edge. So some bars will be long and some may be short.

Each task has its bar so the diagram may be quite 'tall' with several bars running across it at different points on a vertical axis. You then see which element needs to feed into another one, which tells you which elements need to be completed before others. So you add linking lines from one bar, or one point within a bar, to one point in another bar.

This is a sophistication of the flow chart. See the example on the next page.

4: Milestones

A very simple tool is simply to define particular dates in the planning process and list what needs to have been achieved by then. For example, for a planning process taking one year, you may want to list milestones at three-monthly intervals and define the position reached on every element at that date.

This is clearly a similar idea to the timeline but with deadlines for completion of tasks rather than just the tasks themselves. It can be used as a checklist with any of the three tools above and is in any case included in some Gantt charts. You can do the same with funding for a project: by this date we need 35% of the funding in to stay on schedule, by this date 50%, and so on.

Communication links

Once you have worked out the main links you can consider the timing of communication with your stake-holders and, in particular, with your congregation. You may decide to make this one of your elements of the project, in which case you will have already considered its tasks and have brought them all in to your lists, flow chart or Gantt chart.

If not, now is the time to link in tasks such as:

- initial announcement of the project, explanations and requests for prayer and ideas;
- means of assessing congregational views received formally or informally and how these are to be brought into the planning process;
- regular updates to keep the congregation informed, using every means of communication at your disposal: oral notices, newsletters, email, text messages, etc.;
- major explanation of the project to everyone with any calls for comments;
- launch of any actions required such as bookings or financial giving;
- preparation for the main project launch.

But there may be other groups to communicate with too such as the local community, statutory authorities, the wider Church. For everything here see further under Launch below.

Monitoring the schedules

So you now have the complete planning process defined and laid out in an order designed to deliver the event, programme or change on schedule.

But things never go smoothly, so you may need to be continually adjusting your plan in the light of progress to date. The speaker may cry off, the venue may not be ready for use in time, a key member of the planning team may fall ill, some tasks may take longer than anticipated and so cause delays to other tasks. Many things could go wrong all together.

Think of it as a complicated railway journey with several connections to make. When the first train runs late you miss the next one, and the whole journey goes awry.

This calls for detailed monitoring of progress. This might be done month by month in the early planning stages, week by week as the launch approaches, and day by day around the launch itself. It is important to build in a monitoring system so that any falling behind in schedule or overspend on budget is spotted while it can still be corrected.

A good governance group will ensure they have regular reports on progress against chosen milestones, and not be afraid to ask awkward questions of the planning team. It should also be clear on action to take when there are discrepancies between planned outcomes and actual results.



Example of a simple Gantt chart

This shows weeks across the top and the list of tasks grouped into four elements down the left-hand column. Someone is shown as responsible for each task. The coloured bars show the start week and estimated finish week for each task – some of which are broken into different periods. You can then add lines linking aspects of each task which enable another aspect of a separate task to begin.

Launch and learn

Stage four involves two distinct processes.

Launch

The launch of a project should be a very obvious moment. The weekend you have been planning takes place, or the day comes for the new structure to be put into operation.

But bear in mind that there may be more than one launch. The day booking opens for your event is a launch itself. And sometimes a launch takes place slowly over time: the gifts exercise launches one month but the aim is to take a full year to apply it to every group.

Any launch is an important event and every part of your planning needs to come together so that no one activity holds others up.

Education and communication will be major features of any launch. A group that has spent three months in planning is likely to overestimate how keen the rest of the church will be to put this into operation now. It is also likely that there will be misunderstandings by different groups. So consider the following.

- You need to sell the activity or change in time for the launch. It is no use waiting until you have the project ready and then planning the launch. Plan it from the outset.
- Involve every means of communication that you can apply. Communication may need to be carried out in a subtle way in its initial stages. If people are not ready, if the vision has not been sold to them, all your planning may come to nothing.
- This may call for a special 'launch element' of the project with someone in charge of this.
- Plan any teaching or programme of prayer particularly well in advance

The launch element may need to include an 'unpack' task. If it has taken a considerable amount of co-ordination to organise the event or change, there may well be complex unpack tasks to close it all down afterwards. Do not underestimate the work involved in this.

Learn

So, it's all over. But now is the time to do some learning and record it so you or others don't make your mistakes another time.

- List what went wrong or was not at the standard you expected. What positive lessons can you learn from the mistakes you made? Seek to be specific and list these in a learning manual of some kind.
- What went right? What are the corresponding lessons you can learn from these for another time? Again, list them.
- What information do you need to record? It can be helpful to list resources you used, suppliers you contacted, team members and their responsibilities, the schedule you worked to, and the quality of the outcome.
- What process did you follow? A brief telling of the story of the planning is helpful.
- As part of this you may want to survey everyone who was involved to get their feedback. This could involve a simple questionnaire (for an online tool use SurveyMonkey or something similar) or a church meeting.
- Don't forget that the work of analysing survey replies can take some time – and you need to have asked the 'right' questions in the first place. So check out a draft on the planning team before you put this round. If you get the questions wrong, the whole exercise may be wasted.

Let the project team meet at least one more time after completion to tie up loose ends and to agree on lessons learned.

Hand the results of your survey to the team leader for the next time this project runs, if it does. Or have it filed in such a way that it is automatically retrieved next time.

So there is a system for planning any church project, for making almost anything happen in church life. It has been prepared with more complex church projects in mind, but in a typical size and style of church. It assumes that the whole process is surrounded by prayer.

The project plan you prepare covers this process step-by-step. Check back to the list on pages 2 & 3 to ensure you have missed nothing out. Adapt all that has been written here to make your plan appropriate for your project. Then, with the help of God, off you go!

This article is available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Articles-index> then A44. See also Articles A4, *Twelve questions to help you plan*, A30, *Take your church away*, and A35, *Mapping your church*, plus Training Notes TN42, *A review of global mission strategy*, TN103, *How to encourage creative thinking*, TN121, *Making a case for change*, TN140, *A checklist for a business plan*, and TN152, *Should a church set 'targets'?*.

John's resources are marked for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication, Administration. File A44 under Planning.

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