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Develop your action plan

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What is it?

Developing an action plan or milestone plan is a key part of implementing a successful project, as long as progress is reviewed regularly by the project team and, where appropriate, corrective action taken. It helps you identify the key areas and individual tasks that will deliver the objectives and ultimately the whole project to time and in budget.

A **driver diagram** can be used to help plan improvement project activities and your action plan. They can be used at the outset of your project to show your theories about what changes will likely cause the desired effects and achievement of your aim but you should review your driver diagram throughout your project alongside your action plan.

When to use it

To deliver your project on time and within agreed resources, eg budget and project team, define all necessary actions and assign responsibilities to individuals for delivering these actions within jointly agreed timescales. The project team should then review these to determine progress at agreed intervals depending on the length of the project.

How to use it

When action planning, break down each of your objectives into detailed tasks and, if appropriate, sub-tasks. This ensures that all areas of required action have been taken into account and enables you to manage the process in stages.

You can also use this to identify interdependencies, ie 'action Y' cannot happen until 'action X' has happened, which helps to identify possible delays in the project early on and also to prioritise actions.

Steps to produce an action plan include:

- Establishing your current position by asking where are we now?
- Defining your objectives by asking where do we want to get to?
- Establishing the steps to achieve each objective by asking what do we need to do to get to our desired position?
- Deciding who is required to achieve the action and asking what is the target date?
- Identifying the interdependencies and possible issues.
- Determining a suitable contingency plan for unforeseen problems.

Figure 1: Action plan example

Objective	Actions	By whom	By when	Possible issues
1	1.1			
	1.2			
	1.3			
2	2.1			
	2.2			
	2.3			
	2.4			
3	3.1			
	3.2			
	3.3			

What next?

Review your action plan at agreed intervals to ensure that actions are being completed in the agreed timescales. Try to save the action plan in a place where the whole team can access it and see outstanding actions and report progress to the project lead.

It is important to agree an approach on updating the actions, ie whether this is the role of the project lead or those who are responsible for delivering each action.

Responsibility charting may be another useful tool to facilitate action planning as it can help you assign tasks to individuals and identify skills gaps and other resourcing issues.

Additional resources

Fraser, SW (2002) *Rolling Out Your Project: Thirty Five Tools for Health Care Improvers*, Kingsham Press.