A Project Meeting Glossary

Courtesy of *Great Meetings Build Great Teams: A Guide for Project Leaders and Agilists*
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Agile/Adaptive. A change-driven approach to managing projects that grew out of software development. It's iterative and adaptive, creating deliverables in short (up to one month) iterations or sprints. Self-organizing teams work closely with product owners to continually create business value. (Compare with waterfall.) Variants include Scrum, XP, and Lean.

Assumption. For the purposes of project management (and in particular for this book, which is focused on meetings), think of an assumption as the seed of a risk. If you assume, for example, that the price of a key material for your project is steady, and that price triples, then that assumption has germinated and started to grow into a threat. The formal definition of an assumption is something considered to be true without any proof. From a meeting perspective, what's important is to make these assumptions widely known and documented – and to consider them when you're identifying risks.

Baseline. A baseline is a reference, based on original project starting conditions, against which all measurements will be compared. Baselines are approved by key stakeholders. Three baselines – schedule, cost, and scope – are used in project management to look for variance and make changes. The baseline can be changed, but only with formal change control. (Waterfall only).

Communications plan. A plan that details how communications will flow within the team and all other stakeholders. For example, there will be a weekly team meeting to discuss action items, schedule, and risks. There will be a monthly steering committee meeting to advise senior management of progress. There will be a lessons learned meeting at the end of each phase to determine what can be done better.

Constraint. A limit that cannot be exceeded. In the case of projects, we're normally talking about budget, schedule, and scope. See *triple constraint*.

Crashing. A form of schedule compression in which extra resources are put on critical-path tasks to get those specific tasks done more quickly. This can potentially bring the project's end date in earlier than indicated by a natural determination of the critical path. It may result in increased risk and/or cost. Adding too many people may lead to the law of diminishing returns. (Waterfall only).

Critical path. In a network diagram, this is the longest path through the network, which, in turn, defines the shortest time possible in which the project could be completed without applying techniques such as fast-tracking or crashing. A critical-path task will have no slack (float), which means that if it slips, even by one second, that one-second delay will cause the same delay in the end date. There may be more than one critical path in a network. See *network diagram*. (Waterfall only).

Critical Success Factors (CSFs). When creating critical success factors, remember that they always relate to objectives. Exhibit E.1 shows how our case study may develop critical success factors from its objectives.

Objective	Critical Success Factor	Success Criteria
Gain 25% more of the electorate with the environment as a top concern.	Assemble compelling information about the sustainability elements of this home.	Ninety percent of appropriate statistics compiled within 2 months of launch
	Assure that the information is conveyed to the target voters.	Fifty percent increase in website hits seventy-five% positive reaction on social media
Maintain a Think Globally, Act Locally way of working in the project.	Use high-profile vendors such as Tesla Roofing but insist on hiring staff from the Escondido area.	Ninety-five percent of all workers are from within a 25-mile radius.
Assure that selected vendors are ethical and responsible.	Use intern staff to vet vendors.	100% of vendors vetted
	Review Lessons Learned from similar sustainable housing projects	At least two other similar projects are used for lessons learned.
	Involve vendor stakeholders early in the project to assure their buy-in to objectives and working principles.	Eighty-five percent attendance rate for key identified stakeholders at kickoff

Achieve and document 45% energy reduction after 2 years.	Baseline current energy use.	Baseline complete by 30 March 2019
	Assure that utility service providers are recording ongoing energy use.	100% of providers have committed by 15 July 2019
	Use intern staff to collect, compare, and report data each month for the 24-month period.	Benchmark: Achieve 30% savings within first year.
	Acquire LEED expert for consultation	N/A

Exhibit E.1. Develop Critical Success Factors from Objectives.

Definition of Done. In Agile, an agreed upon list of the activities considered necessary to move a product increment, usually represented by a user story, to a done state by the end of a sprint.

Dependency. A dependency is a relationship between tasks in which one must be completed before the other. They are represented by arrows in a network diagram. In our case study, we cannot put on the candles, for example, until the two dependencies (Obtain Candles and Frost and Decorate Cake) are completed. (Waterfall only)

Estimate. A forecast regarding how long an activity will take, how many resources might be required, or how much it will cost.

Facilitate. To make it possible or easier for something to happen. For our purposes, it means to lead or guide a meeting to successful conclusion.

Fast tracking. A form of schedule compression in which you do tasks in parallel that are usually, for best practice reasons, done in sequence (for example, making sure that a design is complete before beginning construction). This tends to increase risk and may also increase costs. (Waterfall only).

Float. The amount of time that a task can slip without delaying the project's end date (also known as slack). (Waterfall only).

Gantt chart. The Gantt chart is named in honor of Henry Gantt, an American mechanical engineer and management consultant known for the development of scientific management. It's a visual representation of the WBS with the element of time and a calendar added. The Gantt

Chart uses bars to represent when the tasks start and end, arrows to represent dependencies, and diamonds to represent milestones. It may also track resource usage, percent compete, and other attributes. Exhibit E.2 shows a simple example using our bake-a-cake saga described in our glossary entry for *network diagram.* (Tends to be used mostly in waterfall. Agile uses a higher-level roadmap).
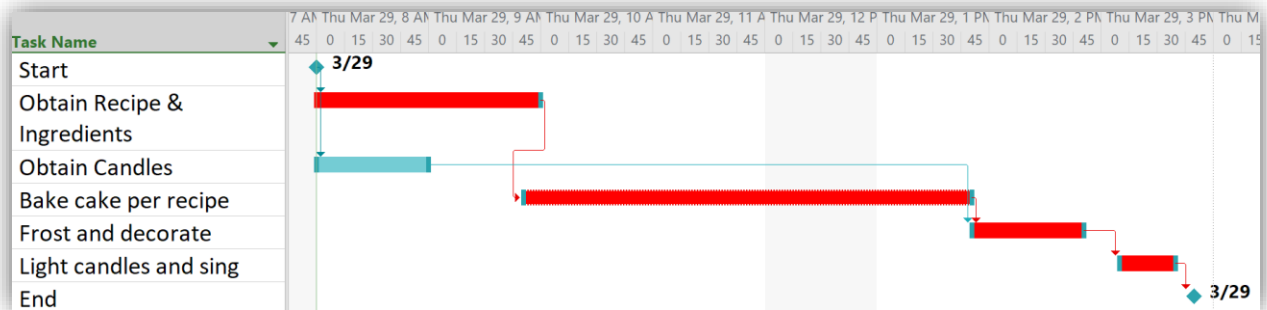

Exhibit E.2. Sample Gantt Chart. (Microsoft Project.)

Issue log. Similar to a risk register but dedicated instead to issues – threats that have already been triggered or are currently occurring. Issue logs are in place to assure that issues have owners and dates for resolution and are tracked *to* that resolution. Issue logs provide accountability.

Kanban board (task board.) An agile project management tool designed to help visualize work, limit work-in-progress, and maximize efficiency (or flow).

Milestone. An important project moment usually representing a key project accomplishment or due date, such as End of 3rd Quarter or Complete Audit or Field Test Complete. Milestones have zero duration by definition and are represented as diamonds on network diagrams and Gantt charts.

Network diagram. A means of displaying the project schedule in terms of project tasks, their durations, and interdependencies. If, for example, you need to know how long it will take to prepare a homemade birthday cake for a party, you need to get ingredients, bake the cake, frost the cake, and decorate the cake. In parallel you could buy candles. Arrows show dependencies and the amount of slack (float) available for each task. It can also indicate any lag times (such as baking time) and lead time (like allowing a task to have a head start).

The network diagram is best for graphically showing the critical path of the project – the sequence of tasks in which a delay of any of them will cause the project to fail to meet its planned end-date. In our highly simplified example, if Obtain Candles turns out to be eight hours, it will make the path Obtain Candles–Put on Candles–Light Candles–Sing the longest path (critical path) through the network. (Waterfall only)
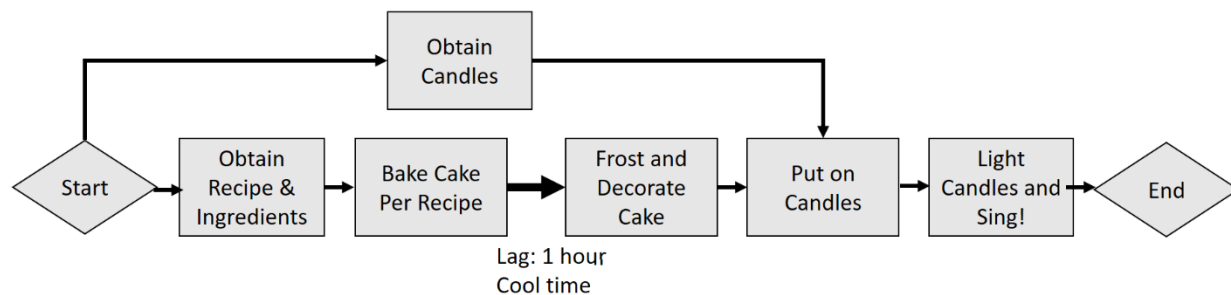
Exhibit E.3. Critical Path for Baking a Cake.

Project charter. The fundamental document that authorizes a project and names the project manager. It's meant to be a terse, concise document that summarizes the objectives, stakeholders, high-level budget, assumptions, and risks.

RACI matrix. This is one form of a responsibility assignment matrix, and it maps the what (the tasks of the project) to the who (the contributors to the project). RACI stands for responsible, accountable, consulted, and informed, and (see Exhibit 9.1) at the intersection of the *what* and the *who* it defines just what the contributor contributes.

Requirement. A capability needed in a product, service, application, or result that satisfies a need – solving a problem or achieving an objective of a stakeholder. Typically, requirements for projects are from customers or the project team itself. An example of a customer requirement: the software must be able to provide its result on a PC, tablet, or smartphone screen. An example of a project requirement: project team meetings must have an agenda.

Risk register. A list of the risks on the project, including both threats (negative risks) and opportunities (positive risks), that captures the risk, risk type, risk owner, planned risk response, possible secondary or residual risks, and more. From a meeting perspective this is important, since risk should be a conscious agenda item at every other project meeting, at a minimum.

Scrum. A framework within which people can address complex adaptive problems, while productively and creatively delivering products of the highest possible value.

Schedule. Although it may be displayed in many forms, the schedule serves to show how activities in the project take place over time and as well as the linkages between the activities. Some examples of how a project schedule could be conveyed at meetings (and in general) depend on the audience and intent of the communication, and include:

- Using a regular calendar with key project milestones highlighted
- A milestone chart or summary table of key milestone events
- A Gantt chart
- A network diagram (with or without timeline)

In all of the cases, the schedule is focused on the when of the project. It's important to note that the scope is determined first, or the schedule won't reflect the full set of project activities and may be missing key dependencies.

Scope. What is *in* and *not in* a project. Scope must not only be clearly defined but must be carefully controlled. Otherwise, the project may incrementally and dangerously expand, leading to increased costs and delayed schedule. After all, scope is one side of the classic triple constraint of project management. The main component of scope is the work focused on the project's outcome.

However, it's important to understand that this has two components – *project scope* and *product scope*. Project scope is the work performed on behalf of the delivery of the project's product, service, or result. For example, if we're building a home, and we discover that having nourishing snacks for the construction workers makes a significant difference in their productivity, we may choose to provide those snacks.

The snacks themselves are not delivered to the homeowners, but they are important and are a part of *project* scope. Product scope, in this example, would include the home itself as well as landscaping, installation of appliances, whatever was defined as the final deliverable(s), and delivered to customers.

Sprint. A time-boxed iteration of a product or project development cycle. It contains a planned amount of work that a development team chooses to complete work to demonstrate to product owner and stakeholders.

Stakeholder. A person or organization that is affected by your project or the project's outcome. If you're building a bridge, the stakeholders would be the construction workers, the project team members, the suppliers of materials, the pedestrians and drivers who use the bridge, the

businesses whose sales may change based on changed traffic patterns . . . as you can see, a stakeholder has a broad definition. It's imperative that you do a broad and deep identification of stakeholders because stakeholders bring with them their own set of risks – both threats and opportunities. The project manager has to balance the competing objectives of stakeholders.

Triple constraint. This is a way to think of the three most important and interdependent constraints that all projects face – time (schedule), cost (budget), and scope (what's in and not in the project). Typically, you cannot change one of the constraints without affecting either one or both of the other constraints. Be sure that your project team is aware not only of this concept but also of the priority of each of these in your particular project. Make that prioritization a recurring theme at your meetings.

User Story. Short, simple descriptions of a feature told from the perspective of the person who desires the new capability, usually a user or customer of the system.

Waterfall. A methodology that defines the project life cycle as a series of phases that must be completed before moving on to the next one (see Exhibit E.4). Phases can be run in an overlapping or parallel fashion at the expense of some risk. Waterfall tends to be very plan driven. See *agile/adaptive*.
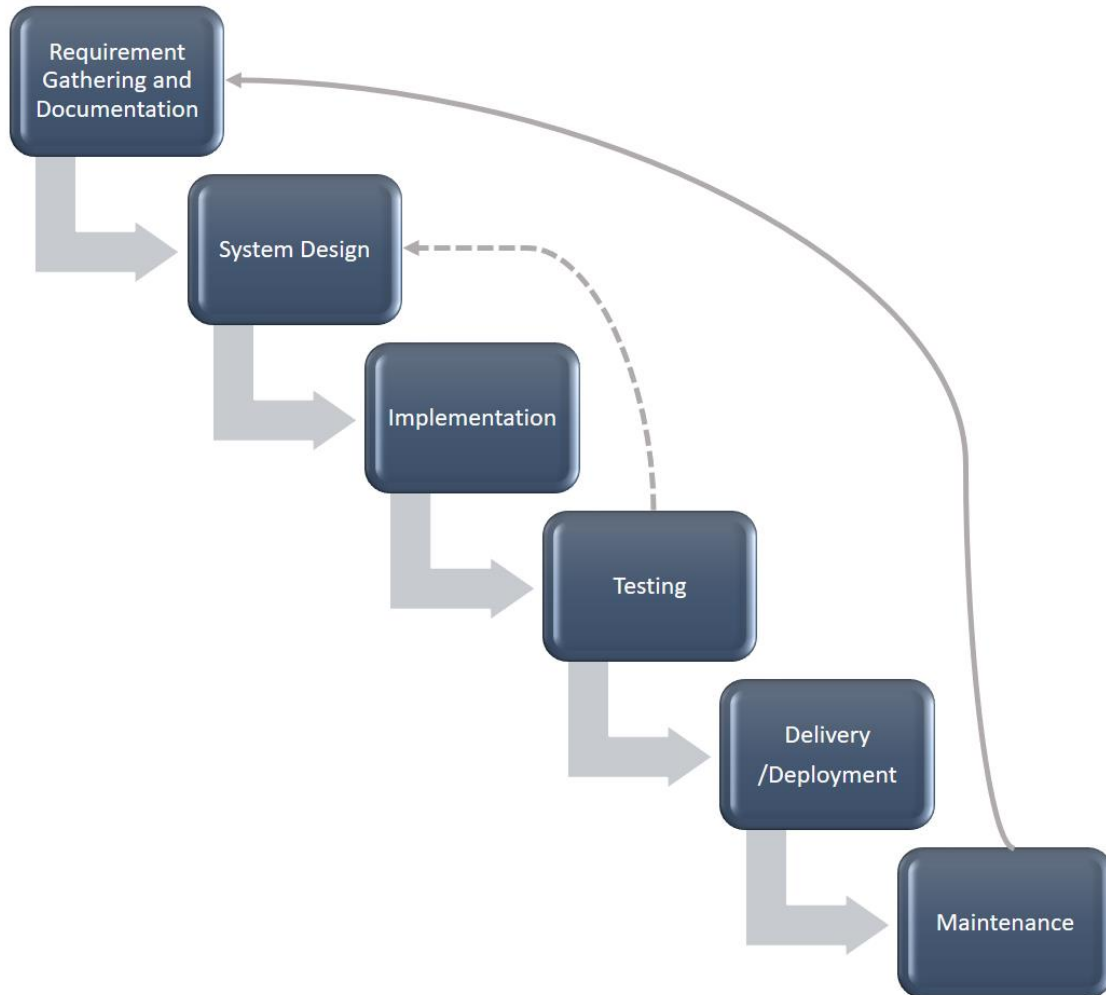
Exhibit E.4. Example of Waterfall Methodology

Work Breakdown Structure (WBS). A hierarchical structure to visualize the scope of a project. Think of it as an organization chart for your project. It's important to remember that the WBS depicts everything that's in your project, including both product scope (the features and deliverables of your product) as well as project scope (aspects needed to deliver that product scope).

The WBS's lower levels will show work packages that can be assigned to individual groups or organizations and can also be used for accounting purposes (charging hours), and that will form the basis of the tasks on the Gantt chart. The sum of all of the elements in the WBS must represent *everything* that's needed to deliver the project's outcome (which will be at the very top of the WBS). A partial WBS is shown in Exhibit E.5 to give you the idea. Foundation,

Frame, etc. would be broken down similar to the way that Electrical and Solar Roof are as shown in the illustration. (Waterfall only) .
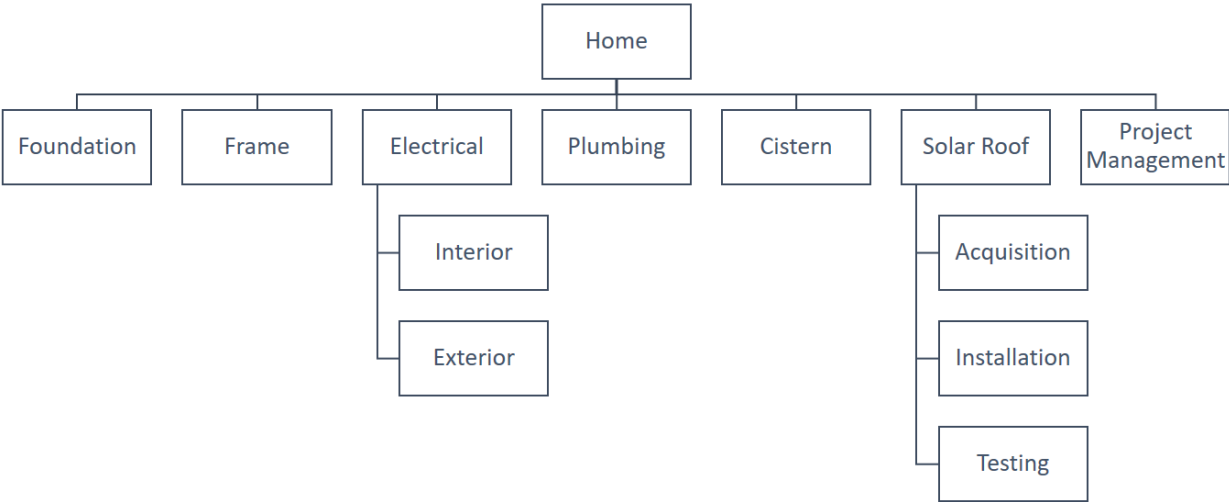

Exhibit E.5. Sample Work Breakdown Structure for Building a Sustainable House.