

WOYCHICK

version 2.0

project planning toolkit

A GUIDE TO MAKING GREAT IDEAS HAPPEN

PROJECT PLANNING TOOLKIT

THERE IS AN ABUNDANCE OF GOOD IDEAS. What is often lacking is a process to turn good ideas into great ideas – and even more importantly – to make great ideas happen.

Does this sound familiar? You're in a meeting to discuss a new initiative. Even as the contours of the problem barely begin to take shape, someone blurts out a solution. Soon enough, the focus becomes tactical, the proposed solution sucks all the air out of the room, and there are enough assumptions to smother further inquiry.

“If I had an hour to solve a problem I'd spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem, and five minutes thinking about solutions.”

– ALBERT EINSTEIN

The point Einstein makes is important – preparation has great value to problem solving. Too often, people are in a hurry to pick out paint colors and drapes before building the foundation.

This toolkit outlines a process that is time-tested and scalable to work with organizations (and problems) big and small. I hope it helps you think about about defining and solving problems in new ways.

If you need help working through this process, or have ideas for improving upon this toolkit, please reach out to dan@woyckdesign.com.

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If you have a project, you have a problem.

PLANNING BEGINS WITH ASKING GOOD QUESTIONS. Sometimes, the answers reveal even more incisive questions. And the first answer is often not the best one.

Great ideas happen when the problem has been properly diagnosed, your audience has been engaged, and the right people have been moved to action. The following framework is one we've used to refine and prioritize project goals, establish a foundation for generating design options, and a criteria for measuring success.

set the stage

WHAT IS THE TRUE NATURE OF YOUR PROBLEM?

identify your audience

WHO EXPERIENCES THIS PROBLEM?

mind the gap

WHAT DO YOU KNOW? WHAT DO YOU NEED TO LEARN?

define success

HOW WILL THINGS BE BETTER IF THIS PROBLEM GOES AWAY?

set the stage



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set the stage

ESTABLISHING GOALS for any project is like a doctor making an accurate diagnosis. If you have an infection, a band-aid won't bring relief. You need to understand the true nature of the problem.

Goals can be tangible – like generating revenue, improving efficiency, and serving more customers. They can also be intangible, such as building awareness, aligning people, and increasing organizational bandwidth.

What problem are you trying to solve?

What are you hoping to accomplish?

What (or who) is driving this need to act?

Why this? Why now?

CHECK YOUR WORK

Have you identified the root cause of the problem?

Does this project represent only a temporary solution?

If so, dig deeper.

ONE MORE QUESTION

How can you involve both your audience and your team to address this problem?

identify your audience

identify your audience

YOUR PROBLEM ISN'T HYPOTHETICAL. Neither is your audience. They are a group of people who share distinctive traits that can be defined.

Complex problems often include audiences with different points-of-view – including both external and internal audiences. You have to identify and prioritize them, and then involve them in generating solutions.

Who experiences this problem?

What do you know about your audience's current situation?

What are their challenges and motivations?

Why do (or should) they choose your solution?

CHECK YOUR WORK

“Everyone” is not your audience. Aim for a minimum viable audience.

If your solution works for a very specific group of people, it will work with a broader audience.

TWO MORE QUESTIONS

What does your audience want from you? What do you want from them?

mind the gap

mind the gap

WHEN BEGINNING A PROJECT, as when embarking on any adventure, you need to take stock of your knowledge and resources. Solving problems involves identifying – and then eliminating – the gaps between what you know, and what you need to learn.

Your solution – in consultation with stakeholders – should bridge the gap between the way things are, and the way you would like them to be.

What is the desired future state?

What is getting in the way?

How can we overcome those obstacles?

Whose perspective do we need to include?

CHECK YOUR WORK

To assess knowledge gaps, look for directional insights, not statistical accuracy.

It's better to make smaller inquiries throughout the life of a project than to get bogged down early.

ONE MORE QUESTION

Have you conducted any recent stakeholder outreach?

define success



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define success

SOMETIMES, THE IDEA OF “SUCCESS” seems so big that it’s hard to wrap your arms around. The safest answer is to describe something completely uninspiring – do what everyone else is doing. Until you have the audacity to dream of a desired future state, there is no way to aim yourself in that direction.

What is the most desirable outcome?

What is it worth to you to solve this problem?

How much will inaction – or ineffective action – cost?

Who needs to be made happy to keep the project on track?

CHECK YOUR WORK

Imagine you and I are sitting down with a drink three years from now and you’re really happy.

What has happened in those three years to make you so happy?

ONE MORE QUESTION

Have you considered both tangible and intangible measures of success?

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summary

SOLVING PROBLEMS is less about following a step-by-step guide than it is the ability to gather information, analyze options, and have empathy for people. It's not a linear process. Context always matters.

As you embark on your next project, I hope the ideas contained in this toolkit help you ask better questions, gain more insights, and achieve new levels of success.

About Woychick Design

We believe design can be a force for good. That's why we help mission-driven organizations make great ideas happen. We see design as a process to solve problems and create successful outcomes. It can help identify opportunities, raise awareness, inspire donors, and move people to action.

To see some of our work, go to: woychickdesign.com.

CHECK YOUR WORK

Remember, your work is done when the problem goes away.

ONE MORE QUESTION

Can we help you tackle a problem?

Contact Dan Woychick at 612-825-5400, or by email at dan@woychickdesign.com.