

12 Golden Rules of Managing an Academic Research Project

1. Planning takes time – don't rush for results
2. Gain consensus on project outcomes
3. Think about QUALITY as well as QUANTITY
4. Build the best team that you can (this doesn't mean self-clones)
5. Develop a comprehensive visible plan
6. Keep it up to date
7. Determine honestly how much resource you need (plan carefully and break it down)
8. Have a realistic schedule (allow 25% cushion on any major task)
9. Don't try to do too much (dissemination / engagement shouldn't get squeezed out)
10. Remember that it's all ultimately about people (management / motivations / networking)
11. Gain the formal and ongoing support of stakeholders (keep them involved and informed)
12. Become a leader – make regular decisions based on objective evidence and be willing to try new things

These sound simple, but think about how many times you see them “broken” on a day to day basis.

Honestly, how many of them apply to your work currently?

Moreover, think about how many problems could be resolved with some simple but careful planning and thought up front.

Ensuring the Project is on a Sound Footing

Title	The Working Title of Your Project is: (keep the big picture in mind!)
Rationale	Why is the project necessary? Why is it necessary now? How does it connect to what has proceeded it?
Overview	A summary of the project's key features including its primary objectives and how to meet them. (HOW)
Objectives and Key Requirements	A clear description of the objectives spelling out what the project needs to achieve to fulfil the funding attached to it. Plus a detailed list of WHAT are the corresponding key requirements that must be met. (What is nice and what is necessary?)
Approach	A description of HOW the project is going to be tackled and the key stages of work that are required.
Scope	A clear understanding of the boundaries that are drawn around the project. (aka WHAT the project is and WHAT it is not !)
Stakeholders	WHO has an interest in the outcome and the project? Who is investing resource, time, effort, interest?
Major Deliverables and Key Milestones	A summary of the outputs of the project and WHEN their delivery timescales are likely to be. WHEN is the ABSOLUTE deadline? (Plan backwards from this!)
Resources	WHAT is needed to carry out the above? (Broken down by type).
Dependencies	WHICH factors are dependent on which to complete the project? (Gives you a far more cohesive overview of the task order).
Organisation / Roles and Responsibilities	WHAT roles are required and what is needed to be done. WHO is going to do the work!? Do they know? Is it accountable to their motivations? (What's in this for them?)
Int and Ext Blockers and Drivers	WHICH things is the success of the project dependent upon? Some will be internal, some external. Some you can control, some you can influence and some are outside of both. (See risks)
Assumptions	What assumptions have you made in your plans?
Schedule	A diagrammatic view of the major phases, milestones, OVIs, tasks and resources. Is it clearly communicable?
Risk Management	WHAT might go wrong and how will you manage these. (Is there a contingency plan? Plan B?!)
Issue Management	What will you do if an unforeseen risk strikes? Do you have a general protocol in place? (essentially you need to understand "escalation")
Quality Assurance	Will the deliverables be fit for purpose? Are all the stakeholders in agreement? Really? Really, really?
Configuration Management	The procedures that will be used to manage the versions of the plan as things change. (How do you review progress?)

Adapted from (amongst others)

Barker and Cole	Brilliant Project Management
Lumley & Benjamin	Research: Some Ground Rules.
Medawar, P.B.	Advice to a Young Scientist.
Sharp & Howard	The Management of a Research Project

Some Guidelines for Feedback

There is no set format but there are some guidelines which can help when you both give and receive feedback. Remember that the person receiving the feedback may not know the guidelines!

Guidelines for Giving Feedback

- **As a Gift** - make sure that you are giving the feedback for the benefit of the other person, not for your own. Think - how would they want to receive this feedback?
- **Speak for yourself** - this is a personal statement, do not hide behind the anonymous 'we' or 'they'. You are not a judge, speak simply from your heart.
- **Be objective** - this is not someone else's feedback or opinion it is based on your observations, needs and values.
- **Be constructive** - what do you want this person to do, how can they improve?
- **Be balanced** - no good news is bad, all good news is not good. People learn from mistakes and from formative feedback.
- **Be specific** - vague generalities do not help. 'You need to be more confident' helps nobody. What specifically do they need to do?
- **Be timely** - now may not be appropriate, days later may not be either.

Guidelines for Receiving Feedback

- **Listen** - to what they are saying, not just to the words. Remember there is a communication gap - you need to listen to what lies behind the words.
- **Do not defend** - they are only saying what they think and feel. You cannot change that, it is arrogance to argue and believe that they should think like you.
- **Do not justify**
- **Do not blame**
- **Do not attack**
- **Do clarify** - make sure that you are as clear as you can be on what they are saying.
- **Accept the gift** - whoever is giving it and however it was given.
- **Reflect** and if it is appropriate, **change**.

- So, how do I give feedback? (PARC)
 - **P**ermission – “can I offer you some feedback?”
 - **A**ction – “when you said / did...”
 - **R**eaction – “I thought.....I felt...”
 - **C**onsequences – “as a result I felt.....”
- How can you get the feedback you want?
 - Ask for it.
 - Receive it with good grace (otherwise you may not receive it again!)
 - Think about how you might effect change as a result, so that others recognise that you are listening and taking notice.