



The concept of project

Origins and meaning of the word: Project

The word “project” was first used in or around the sixteenth century and derives from the Latin *projicere* (= throw forward). The Latin root thus suggests movement, a trajectory, a certain relationship with space and time. The implied process involves:

- A point of departure ...
- Used as a base, from which ...
- One throws oneself forward ...
- Towards a goal.

Historically, the word and concept were first used by architects. In the fifteenth century, Filippo Brunelleschi made two innovations in the architectural practice of his time:

- Work on Florence Cathedral had been interrupted in the fourteenth century, and Brunelleschi was given the task of completing it by adding a dome. Before starting, he produced a drawing (*progetto* or plan) of the dome, using various perspectives to provide a geometrical representation of the future structure, as he envisaged it; through the interplay of these perspectives, the dome itself was supposed to say something about the city’s historical and political context. Florence aspired to be a city open to the world, and so the dome comprised two shells, one external, one internal.
- Brunelleschi rationalised architecture and gave it a new temporal perspective – an approach, which made it possible to separate planning and performance, project and implementation. His example suggests that we should rethink the term “project” and see it as a concept, which serves to organise action.

It was the American thinker, John Dewey (1859-1952), author of the famous “learning by doing” theory, who did most to develop the concept of projects in education.

- For him, a project has four prerequisites:
 - ✓ A communal reflection process, which shapes its growth and development;
 - ✓ Observation of the conditions in the environment where it is devised; knowledge of what has happened in similar situations in the past;
 - ✓ An approach, which synthesises observation of the present and knowledge of the past and so identifies their meaning.

From all of this, we should note that a project:

- Is a method which enables us to move from idea to action, structuring the various stages in that process;
- Sets out to alter the (social) environment in which it is to take place;
- Takes shape in a certain social, spatial and temporal context;
- Has an educational dimension and enables people to learn by experiment;
- Is the product of collective activity;
- Necessarily involves evaluation, which establishes a link between idea and action.

This means that projects have various typical features.

Characteristics of projects

Projects have a purpose: projects have clearly-defined aims and set out to produce clearly-defined results. Their purpose is to solve a “problem”, and this involves analysing needs beforehand. Suggesting one or more solutions, it aims at lasting social change.

- **Projects are realistic:** their aims must be achievable, and this means taking account both of requirements and of the financial and human resources available.
- **Projects are limited in time and space:** they have a beginning and an end, and are implemented in a specific place and context.
- **Projects are complex:** projects call on various planning and implementation skills, and involve various partners and players.
- **Projects are collective:** projects are the product of collective endeavour. They are run by teams, involve various partners and cater for the needs of others.
- **Projects are unique:** all projects stem from new ideas. They provide a specific response to a need (problem) in a specific context. They are innovative.
- **Projects are an adventure:** every project is different and ground-breaking; they always involve some uncertainty and risk.
- **Projects can be assessed:** projects are planned and broken down into measurable aims, which must be open to evaluation.
- **Projects are made up of stages:** projects have distinct, identifiable stages.

Structuring the project along “W-questions”

There are various project models, reflecting different definitions and developments in methodology over time and in different fields of application. Each model is also tailored to certain factors –context, target-group, available resources, etc. Nevertheless, all projects follow a similar pattern.

You can use questions to identify individual elements of the project and how they interrelate. Your answers will give you an overview of the project and let you see how its constituent parts are linked.

Who? – For whom? – With whom?

- Identification of project partners or target groups
- Their roles and relationships in the project
- Their views on the project
- Strengths and weaknesses rooted in these relationships and views

What?

- The main project activities – spontaneous, organised and institutional
- Social, economic, cultural, political and educational dimensions
- The project’s impact on these dimensions

Why?

- Needs and wishes satisfied by the project
- Motivation and interests of participants
- Main objectives of the project
- Project funding options
- Relationship between participants’ objectives and institutional objectives

Where?

- Social context of the project and situation of participants

When?

- What period is being focused on (past, present, future)?
- Short, medium or long-term?
- Background of participants as it affects the project

How?

- How was it done? Organisation and participation process
- Techniques and instruments used
- Input of participants' experience, theories, other projects, etc.

Main Issues	Questions to ask before launching the project
Defining aims, objectives, context and target groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what context will the project take place? • What changes will it entail? • Why carry out this project? • What is the expected result? • Who is the project designed for? • What are the issues at stake?
Content of the project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the theme and content of the project? • What is the chosen approach (methodology)? • What activities are involved? • What is needed for the project to go ahead?
Where and when	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where will the project be implemented? • How long will it last? • When does it start/end?
Practicalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What logistics are required? • What practical matters must be dealt with?
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the overall cost? (planning/ implementation and evaluation), • Where will the necessary funding come from?
Partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who are the partners? • What is their role? • What are the arrangements for co-ordination?
Means of action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the project qualify for any financial assistance? • Can it use existing facilities?(conditions?)
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal communication: how does information circulate within the project team? • External communication: does the project need media coverage? (Why? How? Which aspects?)
Evaluation and follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How and when should it be evaluated? • Which aspects? Why? What follow-up is planned?

Four factors in a successful project

Successful project management is about connecting together four different and sometimes conflicting factors.

The need or problem	The idea and vision
Projects work best when people developing them understand and appreciate the needs and problems they have to tackle. It is important to properly evaluate the need or problem. What are its root causes? What are the symptoms? What is the scale of it? For whom it is a problem?	Projects need a vision to unite all their activities and efforts. It is from the vision that strategies, objectives and work plans flow. The big idea behind the project should be clear enough to show how the project will make a significant and sustainable difference to the needs of the problems.
The opportunity for the project	The capacity
Projects need to have or to create the space in which to operate. Projects need to be actively supported and backed with more than just money. There must be support for the project from key people and an active participation from the target group.	Projects need the right balance of skills, energy, resources and organisation to get up and going and deliver results. They need to be designed so that they are able to make an impact and create results.