

Edexcel Principal Learning

Information Technology

Level 3

Unit 7: Making Projects Successful

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William Arthur Classic Cars Ltd

William Arthur Classic Cars Ltd is a medium sized company that specialises in selling and buying classic cars and spare parts. William Arthur Classic Cars Ltd has grown in popularity over the last five years as a result of the expert knowledge of its employees and its ability to help potential car buyers to purchase the car of their dreams. It operates from six offices with adjoining warehouse space in the south and west of the country and has recently acquired new premises in the north of the country, which will accommodate the main office.

Each office works independently of the others and uses a combination of spreadsheets and databases to keep track of enquiries, purchases, sales and stock. Even though the offices are run independently, there is a high volume of email and telephone communications between the employees as they search the country for stock to fulfil their customers' requirements.

Once the new office has been set up the managing director, William Arthur, will relocate to run the business from the main office. William has decided that he would like to introduce a new IT based solution to run and expand his business.

The new system should enable employees at each branch to access a central database to enter, update and search customer requirements and stock availability. The system should also include management reporting to assist with the daily operations of the business and strategic planning for the future.

The company does not have the necessary expertise to either manage this business change or to develop the bespoke software required. William has therefore employed Ivan Terney as the IT systems manager, whose remit includes improving the use of technology within the company. Ivan has experience of project managing small business change so will also be responsible for managing the project.

An external supplier, KTDB Solutions, has been contracted to design and develop the system. Two system analysts/programmers will be allocated to this contract.

The project will be wholly funded by William Arthur Classic Cars Ltd. £10,000 has been budgeted for the system design and £25,000 for the necessary hardware, software and equipment. As January and February are historically the quietest period for the business, the project must start on 3rd January 2012 and be completed by 29th February 2012.

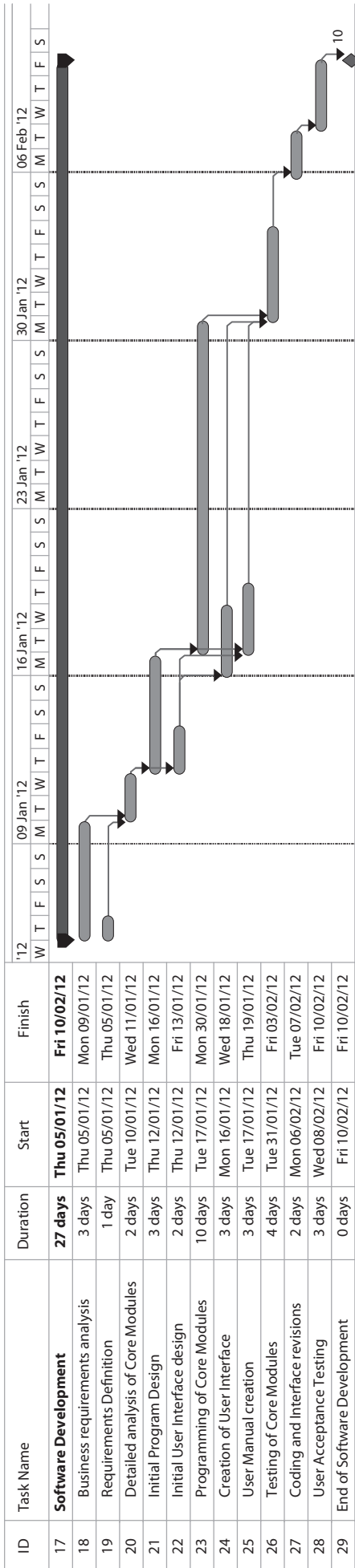


Figure 1
Extract from William Arthur Classic Cars Ltd Project Plan



SMALL BUSINESS SERVICE

Businesslink.gov.uk

The Department of Trade and Industry's Small Business Service is an executive agency responsible for fostering enterprise and providing small businesses with the support needed to enable them to grow. Businesslink.gov.uk is a web portal dedicated to providing small and medium sized enterprises with easy access to the web services of government departments and agencies.

"The Businesslink.gov portal is more than just a web-site. It is becoming a primary access channel for small and medium sized businesses to Government. It is a complex facility – with over 16,000 pages, 30 specific tools (like the business support directory), and 30 decision trees to help firms develop solutions to the challenges they face in growing and developing their businesses.

"www.businesslink.gov.uk attracted 5.7 million unique visitors in the 12 months to March 2006. Our research shows that a significant number of these visitors are going beyond simple information-seeking and are using tools, like the Business start up organiser."

Small Business Service

Cost

circa £17 million set up costs 2002-2004 (part of wider ongoing costs estimated at circa £50 million between 2002-03 and 2005-06¹).

Supplier

(major contractors during set up): web development and hosting – BT; service launch – Opta; web content – Sweet & Maxwell.

Key components of success

- From the outset the Programme's major stakeholders were actively involved in the decision making and oversight of the Programme.
- The Programme team created a culture of shared ownership across the organisations providing content for the site.
- The Programme's leaders successfully created a collaborative working environment between its own team members, suppliers and consultancy staff, which gave the team ready access to expertise.

Timescale

June 2002 – April 2004.

Current status

The Businesslink.gov.uk service was launched on 4 May 2004. It now provides access to the services of seventy departments and agencies.

¹ National Audit Office (2006) *Supporting Small Business*, Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General, HC 962 Session 2005-2006, 24 May 2006. London: The Stationery Office.

Aim

1 In June 2002, the Small Business Service began researching how Government could better support small and medium sized enterprises. It found that small businesses regarded government services as fragmented and lacking in customer focus. Companies had difficulty understanding who they should be dealing with for different regulatory activities and where they should go to get information from Government.

2 In response to the research, the Small Business Service published a policy framework² setting out a vision for a more coherent engagement between the whole of Government and the small business sector. Among the initiatives announced was the creation of a single web portal for small business. The portal would provide an integrated overview of government-related information and services for small and medium sized enterprises, and would act as a gateway into the various e-services provided for business by departments and their agencies.

3 Given the Small Business Service's existing role as the champion of small business and the synergy with its existing Business Link operation, Government decided the delivery and support of the new Portal should be the responsibility of the Service and that the Portal should serve as the main electronic channel, replacing www.businesslink.org.

Ensuring senior level engagement

4 For the Programme team, the web portal itself did not present a particularly difficult technical challenge. However, the team faced considerable organisational complexity in having to deal with a large number of government departments and agencies whose support for the initiative was essential, and whose confidence in the new portal had to be gained before they would allow use of materials from their own websites, or for Businesslink.gov to make use of their logos.

5 Approximately twenty government organisations were asked to participate in the initiative. This involved nominating a representative to sit on the Programme Board, who would be of sufficient seniority to champion the Programme within his or her organisation. Such

appointments were typically at Civil Service Grade 3 or above, and included a number of chief executives. Commitment was further strengthened by representatives agreeing to sign up to a Memorandum of Understanding, which defined the role and responsibilities of the Board including a clear statement that *"the Programme is not carried out on behalf of, but by, participating departments and agencies"*. Collective responsibility was reinforced by rotating the role of Chair among the partners on a bi-monthly basis.

Winning the support of wider stakeholders

6 The web was developed in response to customer needs and built around a number of themes such as taxes, health and safety, and employment. To create a comprehensive information resource, the Programme team seconded senior managers from the relevant departments making them "theme" directors. Secondees sat alongside Programme staff to help design the Portal and to identify the best ways of getting customers to the relevant area on individual departments' websites as quickly as possible. Such secondments were important in reinforcing the collective ownership of the Portal, and within the departments themselves, in helping to overcome any reluctance to allowing the Portal to "deep link" directly into information held on a Department's own website, without having to first visit the relevant home page.

7 In advance of Board meetings, the Programme Director had one-to-one discussions with each member. These "bilaterals" were confidential and gave the Programme Director the opportunity to brief each member about progress, and to discuss privately any departmental concerns about the Programme. The sense of trust built up at these meetings also allowed Board members to share with the Programme Director internal departmental sensitivities, which they would have been reluctant to air at a Board meeting. For example, during discussions with one Department it emerged that internal budgetary issues were causing a reluctance to commit to the Programme. By adjusting the timing of some of the project milestones to provide greater financial flexibility, the Programme Director was able to keep the Department on board.

² *Small Business and Government – the Way Forward*, The Small Business Service, (Dec 2002).

Creating constructive relationships with suppliers

8 The Programme team built collaborative relationships with suppliers with members of their staff operating as an integral part of the various project teams. This ensured that suppliers saw plans early, could offer constructive challenge, and could advise management of any significant flaws or vulnerabilities in the Programme or, alternatively, where there might be scope to make greater use of innovative technology.

9 In terms of skills, the Programme team sought the most able staff from both suppliers and the Small Business Service, making appointments on the basis of merit rather than seniority. This meant that mixed teams of civil servants and suppliers were set up, overseen by those best placed to manage the tasks in hand. Specialist contractors also led projects within the overall Programme. For example, the specialist consultancy Opta was engaged for its expertise in formulating the customer proposition and its experience in launching businesses. It shared its launch protocols with the team, when the site was ready to go live.

Realising the benefits

10 In 2004, Businesslink.gov.uk won the International Visual Communications Association's Gold Award for best business communications in its website category with the judges' citation stating:

"The site has clearly put the needs of the user at the heart of its architecture, design and execution. It is clear, comprehensive, accessible, clean, fast and highly usable with outstanding navigation and powerful tools. It should provide a platform to provide more services and updated content in the future and should be considered a model for public sector websites."

11 In August 2005, the United Nations judged the Portal the best e-content application for business in the United Kingdom.

12 In the twelve months to March 2006, Businesslink.gov.uk had 5.7 million unique visitors, and by July 2006 was attracting over 500,000 unique visitors per month. Repeat customers have also increased from seven per cent in January 2005 to 20 per cent a year later.

13 In the period between March 2005 and March 2006, the site's online tools were used 2.68 million times, with the Grant and Support Directory used over 554,000 times.

14 In a survey of a thousand users, which took place between September and November 2004, 60 per cent of respondents found the website either extremely useful/relevant or useful/relevant and 89 per cent said they would recommend the Portal to others.

15 At the core of the businesslink.gov.uk development process is a rule that each product and service on the site should be usability tested by an independent agency before it is launched to the live site, and amendments made as necessary. Such an exercise typically involves six or seven volunteers drawn from the small and medium sized business community being given a set of tasks to perform using a new product. Their reactions, problems and successes are observed and reported to Businesslink to help identify any required changes. Over 40 of these sessions were run during the site's development, involving more than 250 small and medium enterprise owners and managers. Feedback is taken seriously – in one case a major tool incurred an additional two month delay and rework to make sure it was fit for purpose.

16 The Small Business Service and the Programme Board have recently agreed a new Strategy for Businesslink.gov taking it forward to 2011. This is designed to support the Government's wider IT strategy *Transformational Government, Enabled by Technology* including the creation of a Gateway into Government for Business. The Business Link Portal will continue to act as the primary online entry point for business, joining together information and guidance and business support. Over time, the service will be increasingly personalised to the needs of the user.

17 The Programme will also deliver a range of new projects including "The Transactions Framework" (TxF) designed to allow departments to make transactions within the Businesslink.gov portal itself. The programme will also deliver the "International Trade Single Window" project; to create an expert service for online information and guidance and transactional capability between international traders and Government.

18 In December 2005, the management of the Programme and specialist suppliers was outsourced to Serco plc.

(Source: © National Audit Office)