

3.3: Defining Activities

The **activity** definition process is a further breakdown of the work package elements of the work breakdown structures (WBS). It documents the specific activities needed to fulfill the deliverables detailed in the WBS. These activities are not the deliverables themselves but the individual units of work that must be completed to fulfill the deliverables. Activity definition uses everything we already know about the project to divide the work into activities that can be estimated. You might want to look at all the lessons learned from similar projects your company has done to get a good idea of what you need to do on the current one.

Detailed planning begins by identifying all the tasks to be completed. The project team begins by reviewing the scope of the project which is found in the project scope statement (predictive/waterfall projects) or the product backlog. A WBS allows the team to have a visual representation of the forthcoming work. The WBS is a powerful planning tool. By breaking the project down into smaller, more manageable components, the WBS assists project managers in identifying the specific tasks. The team then determines how long it will take to complete the required tasks.

Expert judgment from project team members with prior experience and from stakeholders that can be consulted can help us define activities while developing project scope statements and WBS. If we are asked to manage a project in a new domain, we could use subject matter experts in that particular field to help define tasks so we can understand what activities are going to be involved. We may want to create an activity list and then have the expert review it and suggest changes. Alternatively, we could involve the experts from the very beginning.

Sometimes we start a project without knowing a lot about the work that we will be doing later. Rolling-wave planning lets us plan and schedules only the portion that we know enough about to plan well. When we don't know enough about a project, we can use placeholders for the unknown portions until we know more. These are extra items that are put at high levels in the WBS to allow us to plan for the unknown.

When we identify activities for the work packages, we can detail the activities in a project activity list which is a list of everything that needs to be done to complete the project, including all the activities that must be accomplished to deliver each work package with activity attributes. This list can consist of, but is not limited to:

1. Activity identifier
2. WBS number
3. Activity title
4. Scope of Work
5. The person responsible (RACI chart can be used. See Chapter 5)
6. Related activities
 1. Higher level activities (WBS number)
 2. Lower level activities (WBS number)
 3. Predecessors (including dependencies, that are FS, FF, SF, SS)
 4. Successors (including dependencies, that are FS, FF, SF, SS)
7. Resource requirements
8. Activity location
9. Level of effort required
10. Activity assumptions
11. Activity constraints

The example in Table 3.1 is based on the project charter we developed in Chapter 2. In Table 3.1 we determine six activities that can serve as the lowest level of activities, which are work packages. That would make it possible for us to allocate resources.

Table 3.1: Activity List Template (Adapted from a template on www.projectmanagement.com)

Activity List for Project “Grocery LLC’s M-Commerce Project”				
Activity identifier	Activity title	Scope of Work	Person Responsible	Predecessors

1.3	Preparation of Project Charter	The project charter that will authorize the project manager to undertake the responsibility of the project and apply the resources to project activities will be prepared.	Project Manager	1.1 1.2 1.3
1.3.1	Develop high-level scope	The high-level scope consists of the project purpose, measurable project objectives, high-level requirements, project description, boundaries, key deliverables, and assumptions and constraints.	Team Member 1	1.2
1.3.2	Identify overall project risks	This includes the identification of the risks that affect the project in general.	Team Member 2	1.3.1
1.3.3	Develop high-level schedule	This includes the estimation of the overall schedule with summary milestones.	Team Member 1	1.3.1
1.3.4	Identify main resources and develop a high-level budget	This includes the initial estimation of all resources (human resources, physical resources, and services), and the budget.	Team Member 2	1.3.3

1.3.5	Identify key stakeholders and project team member roles	Stakeholders with high-interest levels and/or power levels will be identified. The project team's composition will be created. The qualifications required should be detailed. The project sponsor's authority will be detailed.	Team Member 3	1.3.1 1.3.2
1.3.6	Develop project approval requirements and project exit criteria	Based on the project scope and other sections of the project charter, project approval requirements and exit criteria should be detailed. Exit criteria include the conditions that describe the early termination of the project.	Team Member 1, 2, 3	1.3.1 1.3.2 1.3.3 1.3.4 1.3.5

We can explain each column available in Table 3.1 as below:

Activity Identifier: Once the WBS is created for the project, the list of activities required to complete each work package needs to be developed by the project team. Each activity then needs to be assigned an Activity ID, which is placed in this column. The activity ID serves as a reference identification number during planning, developing, and controlling the project schedule.

Activity List: The name/unique label for the activity (in brief) is placed in this column.

Scope of Work: The description of work required to be done to complete the activity is placed in this column (in as much detail as possible).

Person Responsible: One person or more than one who will be responsible for delivering the activity must be mentioned in this column. It is always good to have a primary and an alternate team member assigned to this responsibility.

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