



September 29, 2022

What Is Planning?

BEST PRACTICES

Written by: Craig Vosper, Chief Delivery Officer

Planning gets a bad rap in software these days. I often hear people say things like: “you don’t plan when you’re doing agile,” or “this isn’t waterfall, we don’t make plans”. While I understand their intent (somewhat), ultimately, I think this is carrying a misguided definition of planning from the dark days of waterfall. ***So, what is planning when it comes to managing a project?***

First, we need to define success as it relates to planning. ***Success is delivering the value that was agreed upon with the project stakeholders at a cost and timeline acceptable to those stakeholders.*** Some might argue that this is the definition of success for all projects, and I would agree, which highlights just how important a plan is! Without a plan, we have no way of achieving this definition of success.

There are four key outputs of a good plan:

1. **The value to be achieved.** This isn’t “to deliver the application” or “to build a website,” those are just solutions. This is how the stakeholders know that the delivered solution accomplishes what it was supposed to.
2. **The cost/effort required to deliver that value.** We shouldn’t even consider doing a project where the cost outweighs the value. We need to define a solution with enough detail to provide an accurate estimate to our stakeholders. *Good development teams can do this in a matter of hours.*
3. **The time needed to deliver that value.** This requires that we not only understand what we are doing, but that we have an approach for how we intend to deliver it. This exercise of decomposing a solution based on the delivery of value allows us to greatly improve

time-to-market and deliver quicker, incremental value.
80% of speed-to-market gains from agile come from decomposition.

4. **Prioritizing the delivery of value.** The idea being, that the business should drive priority, not development. Prioritization must be based on the delivery of value, then risk, and then constraints. We need to avoid our natural inclination to do the easiest stuff first and allow value to drive priority.

The key to all these outputs, is that they must be revisited **CONSTANTLY!** Planning is a dynamic, ever-changing activity that is imperative to delivering quality, repeatable results. I learned this lesson back in my army days. Every operation was an exercise in constant planning. As a leader, learning to plan and do it quickly was the focus of my training.

These outputs require complete cooperation between business stakeholders and delivery teams. The stakeholders need to be clear on the value they expect to be delivered, the team needs to be clear on the cost/timeline, and the stakeholders must provide a clear direction of priority.

This is planning - a simple set of activities and outputs that are critical to project success. If you don't have this level of cooperation and transparency in your plans, give me a call.

CONTACT US

