Action Planning Matrix

What is it?

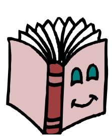
The simplest form of action planning is to clarify Actions, Responsibility and Timing (**ART**), as shown below. This works for most situations and requires little explanation.

Actions	**Responsibility** (Who will do it?)	**Timing** (by When?)

The Action Planning Matrix is an elaborated version of this method. It is used for somewhat more complex efforts, in order to break down the actions required to accomplish a goal in terms major steps or phases, and for each of these to specify:

- **WHAT** — the deliverables or intermediate outputs to be produced by the team,
- **HOW** — the action steps that must be completed to produce those deliverables,
- **WHO** — the individuals responsible for completing those actions, and
- **WHEN** — the timeframe for completion of the assigned actions.

QUOTE: "It sounded an excellent plan, no doubt, and very neatly and simply arranged. The only difficulty was, she had not the smallest idea how to set about it." -- from *Alice in Wonderland,* by Lewis Carrol



How do I use It?

❶ Clarify the goal or objective you are trying to accomplish.

Goal statements should be written in the form

"To + action + object +amount + deadline".

Examples include:

GOAL: To …

… design and deliver Methods training to all customer service personnel during first and second quarter of this year.

… install the xyz system as specified by April 15.

… identify the key requirements of our four main customer segments by end of year.

… test the hypothesis that faulty gaganometers are causing 80% of xyz system field failures by next month.

On the next page is a blank Action Planning worksheet.

ACTION PLANNING MATRIX

❷ Roles

❶ GOAL: *To* ______________________________ Scribe:______________ Facilitator:________________

Date:__________ Participants: Timekeeper:

❸ Goal

❹ Major Steps

1.0

2.0

3.0

4.0

❺ WHAT	❻ HOW	❼WHO				❽ WHEN		
Deliverables	*Action Steps*	*Responsible*	*Approve*	*Support*	*Inform*	*Start*	*End*	*#*
	1.1							
	1.2							
	1.3							
	1.4							
	2.1							
	2.2							
	2.3							
	2.4							
	3.1							
	3.2							
	3.3							
	3.4							
	4.1							
	4.2							
	4.3							
	4.4							

❷ Clarify meeting roles and allow 60-90 minutes.

SMART Goals are:

- **S**trategic,
- **M**easurable,
- **A**greed upon,
- **R**ealistic,
- and **T**imebound.

❸ *Goal* – Review the Goal from Step ❶ versus the SMART criteria, then re-write it in the box at the far left of the worksheet.

POINTER: Refer to Target Table for more on establishing numerical goals or targets.

❹ *Major Steps or Phases* – Write the 4 Major Steps or phases of the project.

HINT: Recognize that 4 Major Steps is an arbitrary guideline. It is intended to help you progressively add more and more detail to the plan.

If identifying the 4 major steps is not straightforward:

- Have individuals and silently brainstorm any and all actions that must occur on sticky notes.
- Group the sticky notes into four clusters, based upon similarity or timing.

POINTER: See the Affinity Technique in Chapter 4: *Making Ideas*, for an explanation of this clustering method.

Advantages of the individual brainstorming method are:

- Individuals do not influence one another's thinking too early, and
- The output of the sticky note brainstorming will provide much of the detail for Steps 5-6.

❺ *WHAT (Deliverables)* – For the each of the 4 Major Steps, brainstorm some of the key Deliverables the team must produce to accomplish this step.

Deliverables are the tangible outputs that must be developed or acquired by the team in order to successfully complete a major step.

As in the previous step, the options are to:

- Have the team do this collectively, or
- Have individuals silently brainstorm, then group individual ideas into clusters based upon likeness or similarity.

The purpose of this step is to get the team thinking in terms of intermediate outputs, i.e., the key things which must be produced "along the way" in order to successfully produce the ultimate, or final output.

Examples of Deliverables, or intermediate outputs might include:

- Requirements definition document
- Gantt chart of milestones for installation
- Agenda or outline of a training program
- Q&A guide for customer interviews

❻ *HOW (Actions)* – Develop a list of key Actions. These should clarify HOW each Deliverable will be produced, and HOW those actions will ensure that each Major Step is accomplished.

Action steps should be written in the form
"Action + object".

❼ *WHO (Responsibilities)* – For each Action step, clarify WHO has what role in completing the action steps. Possible roles can be identified by the acronym RASI, which stands for:

R= Responsible to complete the action item.

A= Approves the work performed or decisions made by the Responsible party.

S= Supports the Responsible party in completing the action.

I= Informed by the Responsible party when the action item is completed, or if it is not done by the assigned date.

To complete the RASI for each action step:

- List names or initials of all team members and other individuals, teams, groups, functions, etc. who will be involved in any way in the completion of the action items.

HINT: While team members are usually identified individually, it is helpful to list the Team as a whole in one column, since it is common for all members of the team to Approve, Support or be Informed of key steps.

For each action item, identify the role each individual or group will play in completing the action items.

- Assign **Responsibility** (R) first. To ensure a single point of accountability, it is best to assign a single individual as the Responsible party. Others may be intimately involved in Support of this individual, but there is less chance for actions to "fall through the cracks" if an individual has ultimate accountability for each action item. After determining who will be the Responsible party for each action, decide…

- Who, if anyone, must **Approve** (A) the work performed by the Responsible party before that step can be considered complete. This may be the team leader, the team's sponsor or gatekeeper, an expert outside the team, or even the team as a whole.

- Who will **Support** (S) the Responsible party in completion of that step. This can be multiple individuals, but limit your list to the key parties expected to provide information or assistance.

- Who should the Responsible party **Inform** (I) <u>after</u> completion of that step. Again, this could be multiple individuals or groups, both within and outside the team, so limit your list to those who MUST be informed.

Often, the need to be Informed is dictated by task dependencies, Start and End dates, etc. (Step ❽)

HINT: There must be an R for every action, but there does need not to be an A, S, or I for each one.

After clarifying roles, let each team member review those actions for which they are the Responsible party.

You may find one person or group has been overloaded. If so, consider whether you can:

- Re-assign actions to others, in order to better distribute the work load.

- Shuffle other priorities or assignments, in order to free up time for key individuals to complete the assigned actions.

- Obtain additional resources on a temporary basis to assist with this project, or to free up time for key individuals to complete the assigned actions.

❽ *WHEN (Deadlines)* – Deadlines clarify the due date for each action, i.e., by WHEN each step or deliverable must be completed. Have those team members assigned as the Responsible party (R) review all their assigned action items and their personal calendars.

Beginning with the first action items and continuing forward:

- The Responsible party proposes a Start/End date for each step.
- The team reviews for feasibility and whether or not that timeframe is consistent with the overall project deadline.
- Those who are to Support the Responsible party should review the recommended Start/End dates, to be certain they can provide the needed assistance during the proposed timeframe.
- Identify task dependencies, i.e., where one Step cannot begin until another Step has been completed or approved.
- Continue until each action has an agreed-upon Start and End date.

After establishing deadlines, review as a team and consider the questions below.

- Have we put too much work in any one timeframe?
- What is the total number of days required to complete the plan?
- With everything else we have going on, is it reasonable to expect the team to devote this much time to the project during this timeframe?
- Given the established Start/End times, will the overall project deadline be met? If not…
- What are the key bottleneck steps?
- What steps could be completed more quickly?
- What steps could be eliminated?

Before concluding, make sure those with Responsibility for completion of action items agree with the due dates, the Approval mechanism, the Support they will be provided, and that everyone understands both who they are to Inform regarding completion or problems, and how they will do so.

POINTER: The *Murphy Matrix* provides a way to identify and prepare for problems that may occur in completion of your plan.