
International Student Union

Local branch development plan, 2007-08

Advisory Report #1



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Executive Summary

'Those who turn good (organizations) into great (organizations) are motivated by a deep creative urge and an inner compulsion for sheer unadulterated excellence for its own sake.'

Jim Collins, author of "Good to Great"

This report is a product of the experiences of ISU NHH during the period 2006-2007, as well as contributions from Eton Williams, to whom I am very thankful for the insightful conversations we have had. Most of the recommendations made in this report have been practiced in ISU NHH and were found to be very successful and are deemed to be possible to replicate. We have put them down on paper hoping to spread the information regarding what we have found to be a successful way of accomplishing certain goals.

The report will try to challenge some of ideas that have become the convention while suggesting new way of achieving ISU's organizational goals, better. The author realizes that there are some controversial elements in the report, however most of these have been tested at the local level at ISU NHH, and have been found to be successful. After describing the current picture of ISU through a SWOT analysis, we will then proceed with how to tackle some of the crucial issues. At the end, there will be policy recommendations based on the previous analysis. Afterwards, there is some food for thought for the branches on how to implement these recommendations.

ISU as an organization has specific needs that require a specific organizational structure. First and foremost, it is a volunteer organization. In addition, it has a fluid management, people seldom staying in it for more than a year. Also, most of these people leave the country after their term, which makes knowledge transfer between the senior and the new people very difficult.

Another issue is enabling good and inspiring leaders to emerge from local ISU branches. The branch leaders have a very important role in shaping their organization at the local level. In the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson;

'An institution is the lengthened shadow of one man'

Lastly, we must clearly define what the purpose of ISU is. This is essential, because our purpose dictates our mission, and our mission will confer us our direction.

We place these issues under three headings:

RECOMMENDATIONS

Knowledge & Competence Management:

Building up competence and knowledge within such a fluid organization is difficult - people who learn, leave before they can apply their knowledge to a substantial degree. How can we improve the organization to make it more able to learn, to store knowledge and to build up competencies? How can we create the necessary competencies in the members?

ADVICE ON IMPLEMENTATION

Organizational Context:

The leaders have an important role in shaping their branches and defining what their branch stands for.

How can we become better leaders? What are the levers of influence a leader can use to bring about change?

Organizational Purpose:

In order to arrive at the desired destination, we firstly must know where we are going. Why does ISU exist, what are the driving ideas behind it, where does it operate, what are values of fundamental importance to us? In answering these questions, we will be able to better define ourselves and the purpose of our organization.

Now, we shall start with the SWOT Analysis for ISU and go on with the other issues.

Exercise: SWOT Analysis

In order to define the issues of discussion in a more structured way, we must first define the strengths and the weaknesses of the organization, as well as the opportunities and the threats that lie before it. See fig. 1.

Strengths

Diversity of the group, from many different nationalities, is certainly an asset. This will bring in differing viewpoints, and as long as it is in line with the organizational purpose, this is very beneficial to ISU. Also, all the members are university educated, and coming from different academic backgrounds will allow them to tackle the issues in different ways. The organization has a great geographical spread of its members, which will allow them to bring in ideas from many different contexts. All members have access to email as a means of communication.

Weaknesses

ISU suffers from a lack of continuity. Most competence, organizational or technical, is gained through experience. Having leaders spending only one semester in office means that this competence will leak away from the organization when the leader leaves. Within such a fluid structure, a lot of crucial organizational competence and knowledge may be lost. Another weakness is that some leaders have little organizational experience, due to their background. Lack of organizational experience can possibly be disastrous if not remedied. This connects of course with ineffective leadership, leaders failing to bring about change due to a lack of effective use of influence and levers of leadership. If ISU wants to be effective in the local level, this issue has to be addressed and solved. All these result in branches that perform below average, which is the symptom of failures in leadership and lack of organizational experience.

Two other issues are that the branches are isolated from the main student body, the student unions at schools, and therefore lack support of the local student government, and being very diverse culturally also has its downsides, such as cultural miscommunication. Both of these can be crucial to the success of the branch, especially support from the local student government. In the experience of ISU NHH, one can go a long way by having the full support of the student government.

Opportunities

In order to remedy the weaknesses mentioned, there are several opportunities the organization may pursue. Firstly, there is substantial room for incentive development. How can ISU motivate its members on the local level to perform better? What kind of incentives should the branch offer and use during recruitment to the board?

Secondly, there is the possibility of having organizational development seminars. These can be on a variety of topics, such as leadership, intercultural communication, and such. In order to remedy the lack of organizational knowledge and experience, this can be a good place to start.

Another opportunity is the creation of an online knowledge base, to deal with the issue of losing valuable organizational knowledge. Clear procedures for transferring of knowledge and creation of competencies in new members must be in place. Creation of White Books, where each branch writes one report of their experiences for the benefit of their successors, is an example of this. Thereafter, these White Books can be placed on the knowledge base for the use of all.

In addition, a formal mentoring program must be in place for the new branch leaders. This comes in two forms, one: tenure as a VP in the branch, two: mentoring by a more senior leader of another branch. Lastly, a formal leadership development program must be created including all of the above for members staying for one year or longer. This program will create more effective local leadership as well as sustain a flow of good leaders for ISU national in the future.

Threats

Some of the threats towards ISU at the moment are that the members with valuable competencies and knowledge may leave the country after their studies, causing a loss to the organization. In the absence of no or little records of past experiences, this could mean that the branch starts from scratch. Another threat is that the new members may be unaware of what ISU actually does and what its organizational purpose is. Therefore, it is important to define these clearly and embed them into the daily work.

ISU SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- Diversity, lots of good ideas
- Email access, information channels
- University education
- Different academic backgrounds
- Geographical spread

Opportunities

- Room for incentive development
- Organizational development seminars
- Online knowledge base
- Malleable organization – open to change
- Creation of White Books
- Mentor programs
- Leadership development

Weaknesses

- Lack of continuity
- Little organizational management XP
- Ineffective leaders
- Subpar performing branches
- Weak financial position
- Branches isolated from main student body

Threats

- Members leave the country after studies
- No or little record of past XP
- New members not knowing what ISU stands for

Fig. 1

Knowledge and Competence Management

How an organization manages and retains the knowledge and competence of its members is critical to its success. It is no different for ISU. The new branch leaders bring a set of individual competencies, which lead to team competence in the branch level and in turn lead to an organizational competence, on the national level. This is the only way an organization can gain permanent competencies, it can not be imposed from top-down, but from bottom-up.



Now, let us look at how these competencies are classified:

		ORGANIZATION SPECIFICITY			
		Low		High	
		BRANCH SPECIFICITY			
		Low	High	Low	High
T A S K S P E C I F I C I T Y	Low	Meta Competencies Ex: literacy, analytical skills, creativity, languages, cultural competence, negotiation skills	Intra-organizational competencies Ex: familiarity with the organization, its history, structure, services, networks, alliances	Intra-organizational branch competencies Ex: knowledge of the branch culture, the school, communication channels, informal networks, politics	
	High	Standard technical competencies Ex: computing, budgeting, accounting, professional task-oriented skills	Technical organization competencies Ex: operating individual organization's IT, budgeting, accounting	Branch unique technical competencies Ex: all technical skills related to the branch, updating the website, using the printer	

Meta Competencies: competencies that can be applied to a wide range of activities, they are non-task specific and non-organization specific.

Intra organizational competencies: competencies that are only useful within the organization (organization specific) and are non-technical in nature.

Intra organizational branch competencies: competencies that are only useful within a specific branch, and are non-technical in nature.

Standard technical competencies: competencies that are technical in nature, but not specific to any organization.

Technical organization competencies: competencies that are technical in nature, but can only be applied within the confines of the organization.

Branch unique technical competencies: competencies that are technical in nature, but can only be applied within the confines of the branch.

Let us move on by discussing ISU within each competence class.

How ISU can build generally applicable-competencies:

Competencies to be developed:

- Creativity
- Learning and transfer of knowledge
- Management of change and transition
- Managing workforce diversity
- Communication in various cultural settings
- Developing strategic skills and idea implementation

Suggestions on how to approach:

- Creativity
 - Semester kick-off strategy session at the branches
 - Vision formation: Where do we want to see ISU X at the end of the semester?
 - Brainstorming: How can we achieve our vision? What are the projects that need to be implemented?
 - Project assignment: How can we divide and assign the projects to be implemented to achieve our vision?
- Learning and transfer of knowledge
 - White Books / 'You in the ISU' Manuals
 - Each branch will write a comprehensive instruction manual on how to run their branch, for the benefit of their successors, to be delivered at the end of the incumbent president's term. It is the responsibility of the president that each member writes about their own area of responsibility. ISU NHH is currently in the process of implementing this.
 - Online Knowledge Base
 - An online knowledge base must be created for the benefit of the national board, the national assembly and the local branches. This knowledge base will organize all organizational knowledge – constitutions, case information, organization structure, white books and advisory reports. A permanent online knowledge base will allow ISU to retain a higher degree of knowledge in explicit terms.
- Management of change and transition

- Apprenticeship period for Presidents before becoming president
 - All branch presidents must have spent one term as the vice president of the branch in question, so that they are competent to perform at the time of the beginning of their term in office. In effect, members staying only for one semester are ineligible to become president. The electorate must be informed that they are electing the vice president for the current semester and the president for the next one. ISU NHH is currently using this system successfully.
- Effective recruitment and election to the board
 - The incumbent board must do its utmost to identify people who are qualified to be on the board and actively recruit them to run.
- Associate memberships
 - Associate memberships to the board for Norwegian students or short-term members would enable ISU to make use of greater amounts of resources. These positions would be project-dedicated, where each associate is assigned a specific project to work on without interfering with the work of board members. ISU NHH has tried this and it has been very successful.
- Managing workforce diversity
 - Limitations must be implemented on how many people from one country can be on the board, no one country should have more than 2 members represented on the board. Incumbent board must recruit candidates accordingly to promote diversity.
 - Inclusion of Norwegian students in the boards of the ISU branches are essential to long-term success of the branch. ISU NHH currently has a Norwegian board member and this has been very successful.
 - Norwegian students have better access to the school networks.
 - Having a Norwegian student on the board will greatly enhance ISU's capability to understand and respond to its environment, due to language competencies.
 - Norwegian students will be able to stay on the board for more than one term, allowing the board to act as storage for tacit knowledge.
- Communication in various cultural settings
 - A nation-wide intercultural communication seminar might be a good way of starting to discuss and identify cultural issues that distort communications within the organization. This should be coupled with a national assembly. ISU NHH board members all take a course in intercultural communication and this has been of immense use.
- Developing strategic skills and idea implementation
 - Semester projects
 - Each board member must have one specific project assigned to him/her for the semester with clear objectives and goals. The president is responsible for assignment of these projects through discussions with the individual member. This will allow clear channels of implementation and greater autonomy for the members. Currently ISU NHH is working based on projects, each member has their own project towards which they will work in addition to their daily work. Some of the projects have already succeeded.
 - Team-wide pooling of 'resources'

- The president must act as a pool of resources for the whole branch, whether these are formal – informal networks, knowledge or else, president must acquire these resources and use them to support the activities of the members.
- Assignment of associate members to specific projects will enhance the branch's ability to project its strategic capabilities.

How ISU can build intra-organizational competencies

Competencies to be developed:

•Long-term member (LTM) leader development program

Suggestions on how to approach:

- Long-term member (LTM) leader development program
 - Building intra-organizational competencies required members to spend time in the organization
 - LTMs are defined as members who will stay at least one year in the organization. They are the future leaders of ISU.
 - Field trips to other branches for LTMs.
 - This will allow LTMs to learn about the ways and means of other branches, allow them to make personal contacts, create a more cohesive top leadership in ISU.
 - Presidents of a branch must have at least done two field trips during their term as vice president, unless their branch is hosting the National Assembly.
 - ISU Leadership Forum for the leaders of each branch, to discuss strategic issues, once or twice a year. This should also include seminars on leadership, intercultural communication, organizational issues and such.
 - ISU Knowledge Base should be started
 - LTMs will benefit from this knowledge base the most.
 - Oslo Session
 - Vice presidents, at the end of their term, must hold one session with the leadership of ISU National. In this session, the branch VP must outline his/her plans for the branch as president, discuss expectations from national and present a cohesive plan on how to achieve the goals of the branch. This can be in person or over the phone.
 - Centers of excellence / Spreading of best practice
 - Centers of excellence / best practice branches amongst the local branches should be identified, and declared as the center of excellence for the year. This will create motivation amongst the branches to succeed, as well as showing a role model to other branches and spreading 'best practice'. Best practice is mostly the systems and methods that have been exceedingly successful in the local branch and are possible to duplicate elsewhere.

How ISU can build intra-organizational branch competencies

Competencies to be developed:

- Transfer of tacit knowledge within the branch

Suggestions on how to approach:

- Transfer of tacit knowledge within the branch
 - Experience matters
 - Experience is concentrated on senior members of the board
 - Presidents should be in the board in for one year.
 - One year exchange and full time students must be actively encouraged to be on the board.
 - Job rotation
 - Vice president position should be used as a training ground, where the member will learn about:
 - Channels of financing
 - Contacts, networks
 - Specifics of events
 - External relationships of the branch
 - Mentoring programs
 - Outgoing-incoming members have an induction day where the outgoing member discusses the crucial aspects of the work, as well as introducing the incoming member to important contacts and such.
 - Outgoing members should be encouraged to keep in touch with the incoming through the internet or other means.
 - On-the-job coaching
 - VP-President structure will allow this to take place.
 - President, during his/her term in office, will have a good overview of all activities of the branch which he will then use to coach the other members.
 - Introduction programs for the new members
 - President has one on one sessions with each member, outlining the duties, projects, responsibilities of the new members. Discusses semester project.
 - Handing and discussion of White Books.

Technical Competencies

Here are the basic technical competencies board members must have to be effective. During the elections, candidates must stress on these competencies during their speeches. Some of these competencies may be develop during their term, then they must stress on intention and capacity to develop these competencies.

President

- Networking
- Management
- Negotiation
- Planning

Vice President/Treasurer

- Budgeting
- Accounting
- Good written skills
- All competencies that are required of the president or the capacity to develop them

Social Chair

- Event organization
- People management
- Idea generation
- Resources management (human & capital)

Academic Chair

- Norwegian language skills (preferred)
- Knowledge about the school bureaucracy
- Understanding of academic programs

Communications / IT Chair

- IT skills
- Communication skills, oral & written

Policy Recommendations

Here are the policy recommendations this report suggests be adopted, divided in two time frames, short-term and medium-term. There are clear benchmarks on when these measures should be adopted and which measures should be adopted in tandem. These recommendations must be adopted as directives, meaning that the goal and the spirit of the measure must be stated and the means to achieve it should be left to the local branches. The progress should be monitored by the National Board. This is simply the summary, therefore please refer to the body of the report for details on each article.

Short-term recommendations (ready for Fall 2007):

•Branch based changes:

- Semester kick-off session should be implemented (p6)
- Producing of White Books and relevant documentation (p6)
- Apprenticeship structure for Presidents (p7)
- Effective recruitment and election to the board (p7)
- Limits on how many people from one country can be on the board (2) (p7)
- Allowing Norwegians students to be a part of the local branch board (p7)
- Assignment of semester-long projects to each team member (p7)
- Recognition of the importance of President's long term commitment (p9)
- One year exchange and full time students must be encouraged to be on the board (p9)
- Mentoring programs must be implemented, induction day (p9)
- Introduction program for new recruits, where the president has one on one meetings with each new member (p9)
- Handing over the White Books and discussion (p9)

•Organization-wide changes:

- ISU Leadership Forum must be implemented (p8)
- The new organizational structure must be adopted to begin the work on the knowledge base (p13)

Medium-term recommendations (ready for Spring-Fall 2008)

•Branch based changes:

- Associate memberships for dedicated projects (p7)
- On the job coaching must be the norm for the new president (p9)

•Organization-wide changes

- Starting an online knowledge base (p6)
- Starting the LTM leader development program, following the ISU Leadership Forum (p8)
- Field Trips to other branches should be made mandatory for VPs (p8)
- Oslo Sessions must begin (p8)
- Centers of Excellence must be implemented (p8)
- Technical competency requirements must be in place for all positions (p9)

Advice on Implementation

Here is some food for thought on how you can implement the prescribed measures.

Competency Creation

Key issues:

- Knowledge is transferred through interaction of individuals. More interaction between:
 - Board members of a local branch
 - Leaders of local branches
- Knowledge is created through interaction of tacit and explicit types of knowledge. More interaction between tacit and explicit types of knowledge.

Tacit knowledge: This is the type of knowledge that is internal to the members, stored in their minds, and is difficult to transfer.

Explicit knowledge: This type of knowledge is easily transferable, through writing or speech, however must be internalized to be useful.

There are four types of competence creation, outlined below.

Creation	Tacit Knowledge	Explicit Knowledge
Tacit Knowledge	Socialization	Externalization
Explicit Knowledge	Internalization	Combination

Socialization:

- Brainstorming camps.
- Observing.
- Time is an important element.
- Usually, task non-specific / organization specific skills are gained this way.

Externalization

- Articulation of tacit knowledge, such as writing a White Book
- Analogies while explaining, or use of examples
- Documentation showing how it is done

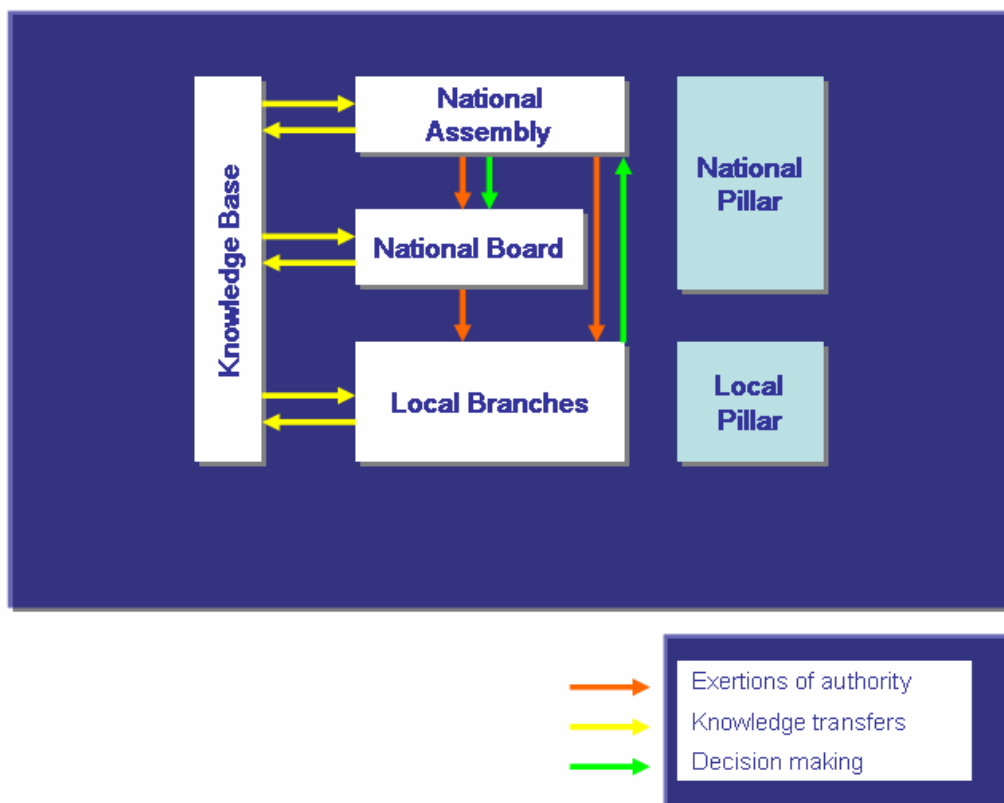
Combination

- Transforming explicit knowledge into explicit knowledge
- Building knowledge bases, where knowledge, when pooled together, creates a whole greater than the sum of its parts.

Internalization

- Learning-by-doing.
- Mostly for technical, non-organizational competencies.

As a result of all the items proposed earlier in the report, the ISU organizational structure will become as such:



Organizational Context

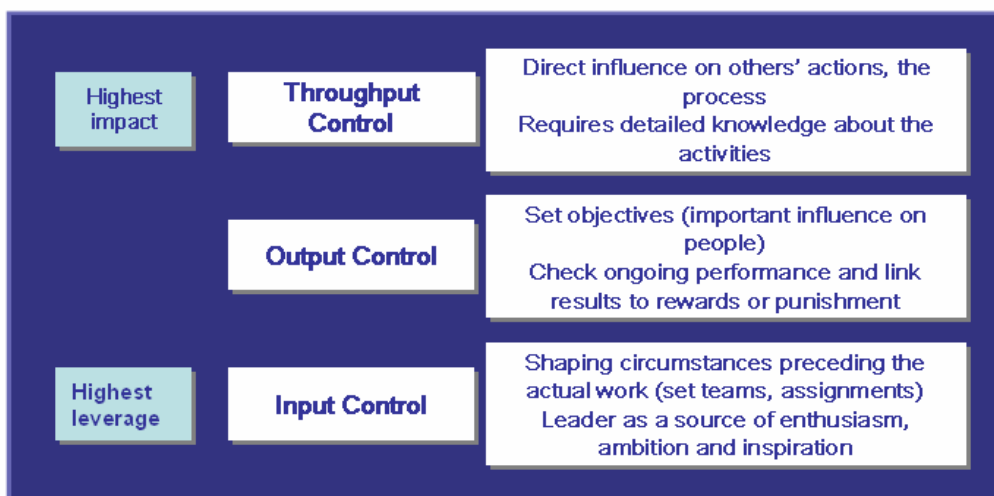
‘We shape our environments, then our environments shape us’
Winston Churchill

In order to create an environment where the team members can thrive, there needs to be initiative on the part of the leader to create and implement change. Therefore, let us now look at what leadership methods are and how ISU can make use of these.

•Sources of leadership influence

- Legitimate power: power that stems from the position of leadership itself, authority to spend money, assign work and demand information. The limits of the leader’s legitimate power must be outlined in the organizational charters.
- Coercive power: power that comes from the authority of the leader to punish, giving a poor performance review, withholding a bonus or dismissal. This clearly has little application in the case of ISU branches, since leader does not hold a great amount of leverage.
- Reward power: power to reward outstanding performance, giving praise, wage raises and promotions. Since ISU is a volunteer organization, wage raise is out of question. However, exploring ‘perks’ for members might be interesting. For instance, ISU NHH, as a part of NHH student union, offers welfare as well as perks such as free entrance to school events, to its board members.
- Expert power: power that is created through the leader’s superior skill or knowledge, this ensures compliance in other members. As a part of the new VP-President structure, the leader will be able to hold considerable amount of expert power.
- Referent power: power that stems from likeableness, forcefulness, persuasiveness, visionary qualities and images of success of the leader. This very connected to charisma and how the leader establishes authority at the beginning. The leadership development program will feature workshops on how this can be achieved.

•Levers of leadership influence



Methods of leadership

•Communication

- Leader brings about desired behaviour by convincing participants to *focus their attention* on the ideas and actions that are important
- Most important mechanism of leadership
- Goal is to influence the allocation of attention of organization's members

•Role Model

- A form of communication
- Actions of the leader represent what he/she considers important
- Very subtle but influential way of leading

•Reward System

- Incentives for high performance
- Supplements the leader's efforts to capture the attention focus of participants
- Unlikely to succeed by itself

Strategy as order from chaos

'Nothing in progression can rest on its original plan. We may as well think of rocking a grown man in the cradle of an infant'

Edmund Burke

Leaders follow these steps as they handle and pursue their strategic agendas:

•Detecting and selecting small disturbances

- Leader identifies the issues that will make the greatest impact on the outcome
- Relies on individual initiative
- It is usually based on the pursuit of an aspiration, a challenge
-

•Amplifying the issues, building political support

- Push for organizational attention, the leader gets his organization to focus on the issue
- Getting the support of special interest groups, within the organization and in the external environment

•Breaking symmetries

- Changing the old models, proposing new ways of doing things

•Critical points and unpredictable outcomes

- Time is required to reach consensus and then achieve commitment
- At the critical point, external/internal pressures will define the outcome, whether it is a success or a failure

•Changing the frame of reference

- Once the critical point has passed, the new model will be embedded in the organizational structure, culture and memory as a frame of reference
- In the periods following this new establishment, the frame of reference must continually be challenged, the system must be dismantled and re-built in constant intervals to stay relevant to the current environment and challenges

Exercise: Organizational Purpose

Organizational purpose is what defines an organization. ISU must clearly define itself within this model to fully understand and explicitly communicate to outside parties what it stands for. This is an exercise which should be used in the leadership forum.



Project Template // ISU Norway

Project Name:

Target:

Start Date:

Finish Date:

Project Planning:

Idea Summary:

Summarise the project idea in less than 5 sentences.

Goal Setting:

What is the ultimate goal of this project?

Plan:

How do you implement your idea to achieve your goal?

Obstacles:

What are the possible obstacles to the success of your plan?

Contingencies:

How will you overcome these possible obstacles?

Required Resources Planning:

Person:

What are the human resources you need to achieve the goal?

Materials:

What are the material resources you need to achieve the goal?

Budget Expenses:

What are the budget expenses that need to be incurred to achieve the goal?
