



Scope and WBS

WBS ...is a list of deliverables and includes 100% of the scope

Ask yourself— what has to happen to deliver the desired outcome?



Rowallan Software Services

Rowallan Software Services Ltd was established in 1994 in response to a need for realistic and practicable advice for busy IT departments and, in particular, development teams.

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'There are three friends in this world: courage, sense and insight.' Let me explain why I think this African proverb is helpful as you start to start to think about the scope and organisation of your project work.

Before you start to make a project plan, make a Work Breakdown Structure (WBS). The WBS is a list of composite parts of the entire deliverable product and so it seems obvious that you shouldn't start this unless you have an overall scope for the whole project. Once you have the overall scope, use it to represent the whole product and total effort that will be required to make it.

Think of the product as consisting of other products described at a more detailed level. The initial breakdown of a project or product is into an order of sub-elements often referred to as 'Level 2' components—which together make up the whole. It is a good idea to assign to each Level 2 component the percentage of the whole that it represents.

Courage 20%

Most projects decompose naturally into their subordinate components; so expansion and amplification into products is comprehensible. At other times decisions as to how things can be broken down are based on a judgement. To do this you need to consider your reasons for grouping outcomes in a particular way and support that via collaboration and the courage of your convictions.

Each subordinate, discrete component or sub-product will become a work package later on, so include internal and external components. You might find it helpful to think of a work package as a mini project.

Sense 50%

Continue in this manner until you have broken down the whole into manageable component products and have adhered to the 100% rule.

When you can't break products down any further, you are left with the task of breaking them down into descriptions of activities. Mostly it doesn't help to break down a product into only one activity; items that can't be broken down any further can be described as actions. Using verbs as part of the action descriptions helps me: 'Create Report', 'Agree Specification' and so on because these can be moved easily to a project plan.

Your final list of items will consist of both summary products and detailed actions or tasks. WBS are either written as an indented list or as a hierarchical diagram: both of these show the relationship between the summary product and the detailed activity. Whichever method you use, those items which are not broken down any further can eventually be moved to your Gantt chart to become the project activities and summary tasks can be used as milestones.

WBS and Agile

Agile projects are organised around bundles of functionality or user products. This sits comfortably with the decomposition of a whole product into composite parts. Whilst agile methods do not mandate WBS, the elaboration of scope is an essential part of this method, and to be recommended.

Insight 30%

Although WBS is about scope and not about the plan, it should be possible to determine the work required for each component.

You may need to do some further research to be able to complete this. Or better still, discuss the estimations with the members of the team who will be working on the project. This offers an opportunity to build consensus around what needs to be done, tests underlying assumptions and helps to foster a view shared by managed and manager alike as to how the project work should be controlled.