

The Initiation Spiral

An iterative approach to assembly of
project baseline documents

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Hobart: Sep-08



Purpose/coverage

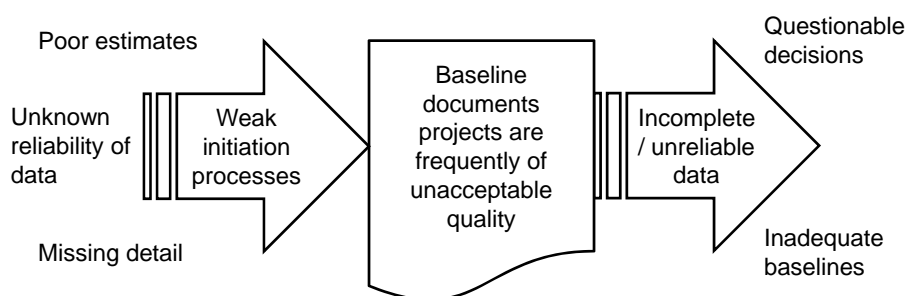
- Purpose: to introduce an iterative technique for preparing a project's baseline documents.
- Coverage:
 - Project baseline documents:
 - Business case.
 - Project plan.
 - Problems with the conventional linear approach to initiation.
 - A systematic technique that allows for iteration.



Referencing details

- The Initiation Spiral has emerged from a research program being undertaken by John Smyrk, Visiting Fellow, School of Management, Marketing & International Business, ANU College of Business & Economics, the Australian National University.
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The problem



The context for this discussion

The two business environments



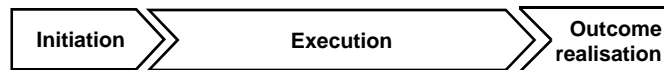
Business owner:
for on-going
operational
outcomes

Accountabilities

Project owner:
for tabling
baseline
documents

Project manager: for project outputs

Project
owner: for
project target
outcomes



Some root causes

- Critical role of project baseline documents not understood.
- Initiation is seen as a ritual that:
 - Adds no value to the project.
 - Eats into the available time.
- Lack of appropriate skills.
- Naive use of templates.

Baseline documents: roles

- Business case:
 - Acceptance implies funding in principle.
- Project plan:
 - Approval allows a start on substantive work.

Linear thinking

- Take the template.
- Start at the top left of the first page.
- Grind your way through, one heading at a time.
- Everything must be filled out.
- If you don't know—Guess!
- Stop when you get the bottom right of the last page.

Iteration: the key to quality baseline documents

- Each element of both baseline documents case is connected to everything else:
 - Example stakeholder engagement can impact scope.
- Each element has to be revisited as more is learnt about the project.
- Most methodologies suggest that the initiation process is linear.

Templates: a peculiar problem

- Templates are necessary in all methodologies.
- Issues:
 - They are difficult to scale.
 - Their structure is guided by their eventual use.
 - Supporting guides are often descriptions of the template—rather than the enabling process.
 - Templates are designed for the reader, guides are designed for the writer.

Directions for improvement

- Initiation should allow the business case and later, the project plan, to be developed iteratively.
- An iterative approach should be guided by a systematic framework.
- Acknowledgement that the quality of the baseline documents directly impacts project success.

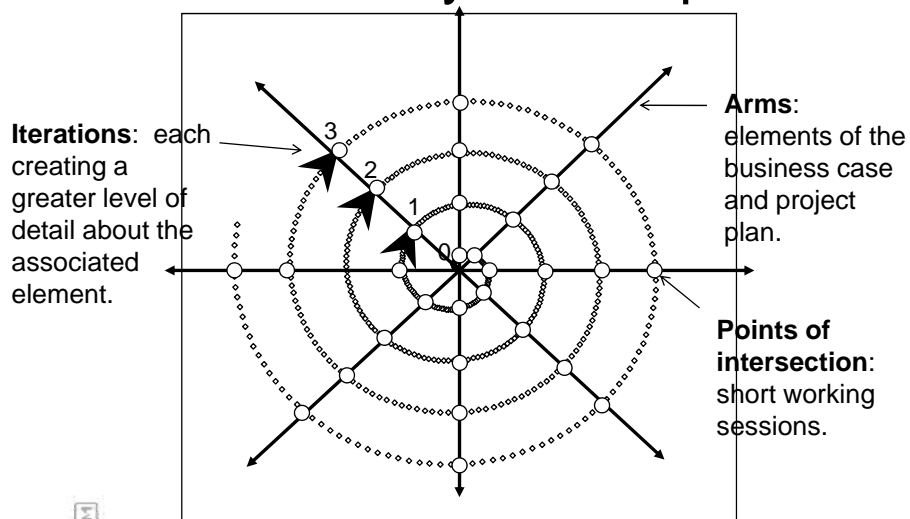
The underlying principles

- Critical elements of both baseline documents:
 - Are interdependent.
 - Require thorough treatment.
 - Must be attacked iteratively.
- Baseline documents case should be developed over a large number of small working sessions, not over a small number of big working sessions.
- Implication: more time is needed for Initiation.

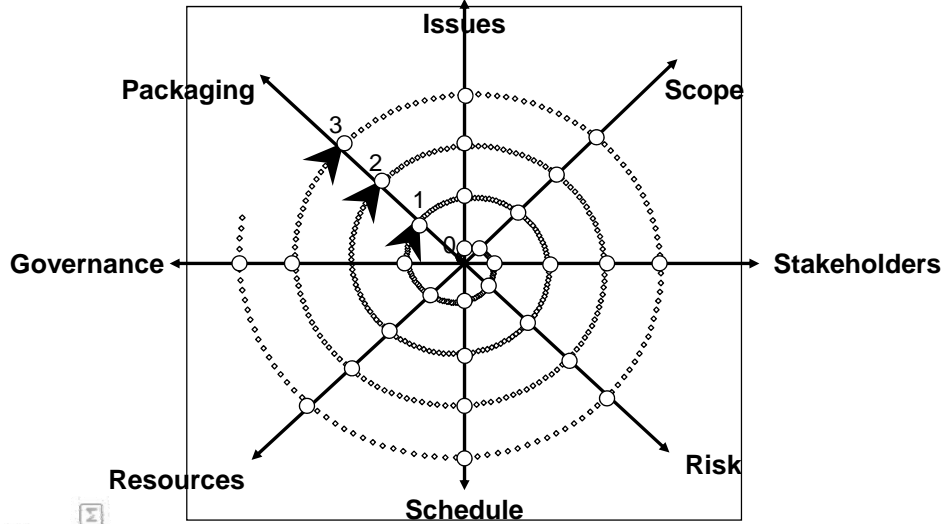
The components of the spiral

- Arms: related to elements of the business case and project plan.
- The spiral: provides a guiding framework.
- Iterations: Repeated cuts of each arm.
- Points of intersection: represent short (<60min) working sessions.

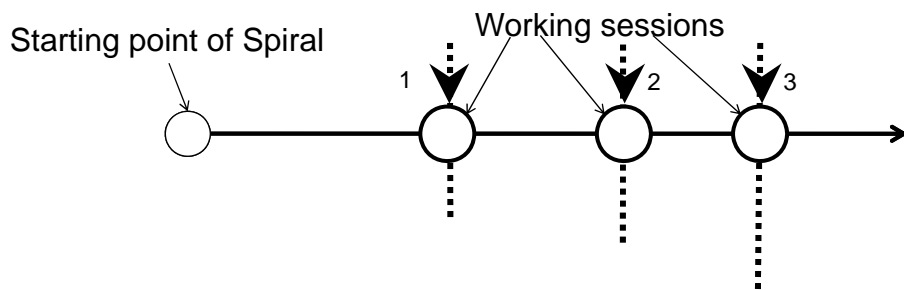
The anatomy of the spiral



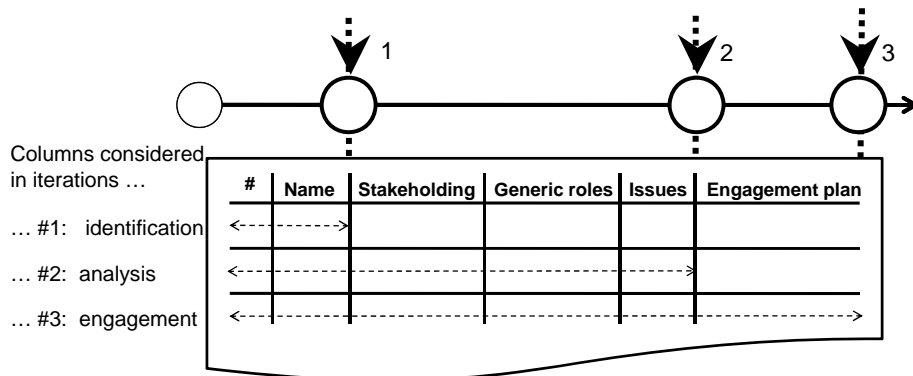
The arms



The points of intersection



Example: the stakeholder register



Registers become self scaling.

The spiral appears to be self scaling

- The need for another iteration is decided on the packaging arm.
- On very small projects the number of iterations will be (very) small.
- The Registers on small projects will have few columns.

Questions/answers & discussion

A table-based exercise

- What issues are raised by this approach?
- How might the most important of these issues be addressed?