

The Royal Wedding – What a Project!

Project Management for Weddings and a Tribute to my Wife the Project Manager

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Introduction

On Friday 29 April 2011, Prince William of the British Royal Family, son of Prince Charles and the late Lady Diana, grandson of Queen Elizabeth II, married Catherine Middleton in Westminster Abbey Cathedral in London. It was a spectacular wedding, with all the pomp and circumstance of his father's famous wedding to Lady Di over thirty years ago. The wedding was attended by 1,900 invited guests, including royalty, political leaders from around the world, celebrities, personal friends and family members. While several hundred thousand people lined the streets of London in celebration, and in Hyde Park and Trafalgar Square to watch the proceedings on big screens, an estimated 2 billion worldwide watched via satellite and television coverage. [1]

Since the official engagement was announced in November 2010, following their vacation together in Kenya the month before, [2] many in the project management community recognized the forthcoming royal wedding as a project of tremendous personal, royal and national significance. In the months leading up to the wedding, as various aspects of the occasion emerged and as anticipation and excitement grew, it became clear that this was a large and complicated project, one that required much planning and control. And according to Royal staff and those who have been previously involved in royal events, who were interviewed by various media, nothing was to be left to chance.

And the wedding was picture perfect! It was spectacular! It was a great success!

Wedding planning has become a well established business in many countries. But do wedding planners use modern project management techniques and principles? Since weddings tend to be such large and important events in most lives, I thought it might be interesting to address these questions in an editorial. That was especially true after watching the royal wedding with my wife and discussing our own wedding eleven years ago (and our wedding anniversary next week.). In addition, my daughter Camille may be getting married soon, so I thought I should study up!

The Royal Wedding – Some PM Considerations

First, I want to commend the British Royal Family for such a successful project. While I am sure most of the arrangements for the marriage of Prince William and Kate Middleton will remain secret, there was clearly some effective project management employed.



Photos: Prince William and Catherine Middleton at the altar with Catherine's father, during wedding ceremony and leaving Westminster Abbey as husband and wife – the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge. Courtesy Reuters/Darren Staples

Consider these aspects of the Royal Wedding:

- Intense media coverage worldwide, with billions of people tuned in to watch the proceedings and wedding on television – media relations and coordination was highly visible, complex and sophisticated.
- Significant security requirements, as the Royal Family, dignitaries and guests were gathered for this very public event – thousands of members of the metropolitan police and British military helped secure the route from Buckingham Palace to Westminster Abbey and various other sections of downtown London.
- The Ceremony – the wedding of the future King of England, watched by billions, had to be planned and orchestrated perfectly, in accordance with Royal traditions, needs of the Royal couple and to the satisfaction of the Queen.

- The Location – the selection and preparation of Westminster Abbey, one of the most famous and important churches in the United Kingdom, which also had to be highly secured while maintaining a beautiful and festive atmosphere.
- The Dress – one of the most important decisions and best kept secrets of the wedding, involved the bride's dress, including both the designer and the design, expected to become a global fashion icon immediately after the wedding.
- The Wedding Party – members of the royal family and Middleton family, both those actively participating in the wedding and those attending, had to also be prepared, coached, orchestrated and secured.
- The Guests – the requirements and protocols, invitation list, invitations, seating, politics, personal relations and ramifications – on the royal couple, the royal family and on Britain.
- The Receptions – before and after, locations, food, guests, decorations, invitations, entertainment, security, logistics, on-site coordination, etc.
- The Cost – estimated to cost a total of around \$65 million, much of the security cost had to be borne by the public. While the impression was clearly given that cost was no barrier, the wedding occurred while the British economy is still recovering from the global recession and many remain out of work – the PR associated with the cost was significant.
- The Risks – due to the size and importance of this event, it was immediately seen as a test for the 2012 Summer Olympics scheduled for London next year. Risk management was therefore a very obvious consideration for everyone involved.
- Stakeholders – not only the royal couple, the royal family, wedding party, guests and dignitaries, but the general public has been highly engaged in the lives of Princes William and Harry; the Royal Family's relationship with the British public had to be carefully considered, along with relations with the British government.

Considering these and many other factors, I could see no evidence of any lapse or any big problems. From all appearances, the wedding was a spectacular success! Congratulations and good health to Prince William and his beautiful bride.



Weddings as Projects

In 1987 I taught an ‘Introduction to Project Management’ class at the Eastern Idaho Vocational Technical Institute in Idaho Falls. Each of the 15 students was given a class project - to select a personal project, prepare a project plan for that project, and present that project plan to the class. One of the students selected his upcoming wedding as his class project. I will never forget his class presentation, as it was very funny. When presenting his project plan, he explained that he had been shocked when estimating the cost of everything when it amounted to more than \$100,000. It was quite entertaining for the class – but, of course, not so funny to him.

For most people, a wedding, either personal or for a child or another family member, is a very important event. It is often one of the most important events in one’s life. Unfortunately, weddings can also be difficult, expensive and very stressful for some people and some families.

In the USA, by tradition, weddings have often been the responsibility of the bride and the bride’s family. Therefore, many men do not take enough interest in wedding details, nor do many men seem too experienced with planning weddings. In addition, weddings are by nature intended to be romantic and somewhat mysterious, with various elements kept secret until “the big day.” For these and other reasons, it seems to me that planning and managing weddings have often been left to the bride (and her mother or close friends) alone, for which they may be unprepared. For one thing, most people are involved in only one or very few weddings during their lives, so they have little personal experience with many of the details. In addition, many brides and grooms are quite young, without the experience or knowledge needed to get everything right.

In any case, weddings clearly meet the following common definitions of a project:

- A temporary endeavor, having a defined beginning and end, undertaken to meet unique goals and objectives, usually to bring about beneficial change or added value. [3]

- Planned set of interrelated tasks to be executed over a fixed period and within certain cost and other limitations. [4]
- A temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product or service. [5]

Useful Project Management Principles for Weddings

I do not want to offer new definitions or discussions of project management in general, for example, for those less familiar with professional project management. There are many sources, written and online, available to learn more about project management. (A good idea for brides, grooms, and wedding planners by the way!). Rather I want to here just suggest some basic project management concepts that could prove highly useful for planning and managing a wedding, including:

- **Work Breakdown Structure** – a breakdown of the most important objectives, elements, events, tasks and activities involved
- **Activity Checklist** – this can follow from the WBS, when there is clear definition of everything included in the project
- **Critical Path Network** – arrangement of activities in logical order, that is, what comes first, second, etc.? What must be completed first, what comes next, etc.
- **Project Schedule** – the schedule is critical for weddings; what needs to be done six months before the wedding, six weeks, six days, the day of, the day after, etc.?
- **Cost Estimate & Budget** – Every wedding project manager, whether bride, mother-in-law or wedding planner, will need to know what everything is going to cost and will there be enough money to pay for it all.
- **Risk Management Plan** – are there any risks with the wedding, for example, related to venue, weather, dress, wedding party, important guests, cake, food, entertainment, etc.? Are security or other precautions needed?
- **Stakeholder Plan** – Are all of the stakeholders accounted for and considered? These include family and friends, for both bride and groom, but might also include co-workers, employees, neighbors, extended family, political contacts and others.
- **Communications Plan** – one of the most critical aspects of most projects, for weddings this might include four sets of communication issues: those associated

with the project team (bride, groom, close associates, parents, in-laws), the wedding party (those involved in the actual ceremony), guests, and the public (from simple announcements to media coverage.) Will there be a wedding website, for example?

- **Project Administration, Integration & Control** – as with any project, someone must worry about the planning, integration and control of all of the activities associated with ensuring that the wedding occurs as planned, with all parties as happy as Prince William and Catherine Middleton were in London.

In my opinion, the application of these and perhaps a few other project management concepts could reduce the stress and ensure the success for more weddings.

A Possible Wedding Work Breakdown Structure

Now something of possible use! Below is a possible WBS for a Wedding Project, at least through level 2. For each of the elements, a scope of work, set of deliverables or end results, requirements and activity list should be developed.

WBS for Wedding Project

- 1. Project Planning, Management & Administration**
 - 1.1. Planning (incl. wedding planners)
 - 1.2. Legal Matters (Birth Certificates, License, passports, visas, permits, fees,)
 - 1.3. Cultural, Religious & Tribal Matters
 - 1.4. Accounting (System, Banking, Finance)
 - 1.5. Communications (Guest List, Invitations, etc.)
 - 1.6. Media Relations
 - 1.7. Risk Management
- 2. Engagement**
 - 2.1. Engagement & Wedding Rings
 - 2.2. Engagement Event or Party
 - 2.3. Notifications of Engagement
 - 2.4. Registrations (Bridal registries)
- 3. Bridal Preparations**
 - 3.1. Bride (Dresses, hair & makeup, bouquet, flowers, etc.)
 - 3.2. Bridal Party (Bridesmaids, Flower Girls, attendants - attire, gifts, instructions)
 - 3.3. Parents (Family) of the Bride (invitations, attire, instructions, gifts)
- 4. Groom Preparations**
 - 4.1. Groom (Attire for wedding & receptions, gifts)
 - 4.2. Groom's Party (Best Man, Ushers, attendants – attire, gifts, instructions, etc.)
 - 4.3. Parents & Family of the Groom (invitations, attire, instructions, gifts)
- 5. Pre-Wedding Events**
 - 5.1. Bridal/Wedding Showers
 - 5.2. Bridal Portrait (Photography) Session
 - 5.3. Pre-wedding Dinners
 - 5.4. Bridesmaid Luncheon
 - 5.5. Wedding Rehearsal
- 6. Wedding Ceremony**
 - 6.1. Wedding Site (include decorator, if hired, floral arrangements)
 - 6.2. Wedding Accessories (candles, ring pillow, rice or birdseed,
 - 6.3. Transportation to & from Wedding
 - 6.4. Guest Book, Registration & Ushers
 - 6.5. Master of Ceremonies (if different from Officiant)
 - 6.6. Officiant, Priest, Minister or other Religious Leader
 - 6.7. Wedding Ceremony (exchanging for vows)
 - 6.8. Photography & Videography
- 7. Wedding Reception**
 - 7.1. Reception Site (Selection & Preparation)
 - 7.2. Wedding cake & related items
 - 7.3. Food & Beverages (including catering)
 - 7.4. Reception Accessories (toasting glasses, garter, etc.)
 - 7.5. Entertainment
 - 7.6. Photography
- 8. Post-Wedding Day Events**

A honeymoon might also be included, although it might be more convenient to consider that as a separate project. In any case, the honeymoon will require a set of deliverables and activities as well. For example, related to the following:

9. Honeymoon

- 9.1. Destination Selection & Reservations
- 9.2. Passports & Visas (if needed)
- 9.3. Transportation to Destination (air, ship, auto)
- 9.4. Luggage, cameras, special equipment or items for destination
- 9.5. Clothing and/or special attire (both bride and groom)
- 9.6. Financing, Money, Travelers Checks, Foreign Exchange
- 9.7. Local Transportation to Airport

As with any project, each of the elements of the WBS must be defined so there is a clear understanding of what is required, what actions are needed to prepare or complete each item, in which order those actions need to occur, and who will be responsible (or who will do what).

Other PM Concepts

In addition to a WBS, the other project management concepts mentioned above could easily be applied to weddings – activity list, critical path plan, project schedule, cost estimate, budget, risk management plan, stakeholder plan, communications plan, project management plan.

As with managing any project, the way to start is to create a document and write things down. Create an activity list for each element of the WBS. Identify which activities must be done first and which ones follow, then create an activity schedule. Estimate the costs for everything, add them up and determine what can be afforded – based on a real budget (how much money is available). Identify the highest risks, and determine how those risks can be reduced or mitigated. Identify all stakeholders and create a stakeholder communications plan. These do not need to be fancy, but they do need to be written so they can be used for “managing the project”.

As with most projects, a list of activities or checklist for each person involved can be very helpful. In a professional setting, someone would develop and maintain a project schedule that contains all activities, with status, to ensure that every activity is assigned to a responsible person and gets done on time. This is the role of the project manager – usually the bride or the wedding planner.

Wedding Services Available online

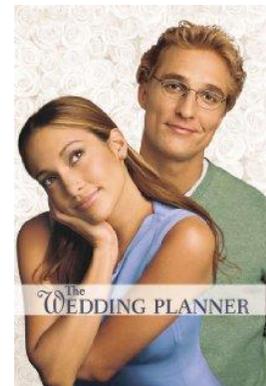
Weddings are common throughout the world, there are many examples and much information available about all aspects of weddings and marriage, and more couples are now sharing the planning and responsibilities of the weddings themselves. This seemed to be the example with the Royal Wedding in England on 29 April.

Wedding planners are available to help prospective brides and grooms to help identify, plan and manage the various details of most weddings. When I checked online, I found several wedding support websites available with ideas, checklists, suggestions and other resources, especially for do-it-yourself wedding projects. [6, 7, 8, 9] There are also a number of websites available with wedding planning information and resources. [10, 11, 12, 13]

According to Wikipedia, a Wedding Planner is a professional who assists with planning and organization of weddings. Professional wedding planners exist in several countries and communities, with extensive certification courses available to those who wish to pursue the career. Some wedding planners charge either a fraction (perhaps 5-10%) of total the wedding cost, (which can range between \$20,000 to \$2 million in relatively affluent communities in USA) or a flat fee. in USA the fees typically range between \$1500 to \$5000 depending on the services provided. However, wedding industry statistics, including ranges and averages for wedding planner fees, are generated and promoted by commercial interests and are considered unreliable by unbiased sources. [14]

Generally there are wedding planners available near most large cities; just conduct a web search and see what comes up. For example, one website compares wedding planners in the Dallas area in the USA. [15]

For even more information, visit the wedding channel.com. [16] If you want to enjoy yourself while thinking about weddings as projects, consider watching the movie, *The Wedding Planner*, starring **Jennifer Lopez** and **Mathew McConaughey**. [17] (But beware, the wedding planner steals the groom!)



Qualification

This article has been written from the perspective of an American, so it does not reflect weddings in many other cultures. Clearly weddings in many parts of the world may not include all of the same elements, may include more or different needs and activities, may be more or less elaborate, and may be more or less costly.

There are also few religious aspects of the wedding covered in this article. As religion is often an important element of many marriages, various actions, events, accoutrements and considerations related to the religion(s) of the bride, groom and families must be incorporated. These, however, can easily be included in project plans and managed like everything else.

I also want to apologize if I offend anyone with this article, especially the Royal couple. Their wedding in London on 29 April was long anticipated and spectacular, and a very successful project. It was briefly described in that context only, and only briefly described at that. If you the reader did not see the wedding of Prince William and Catherine Middleton, I highly recommend that you find a video of that day – the four hours we spent watching were special and very well worth the time.

My Wife the Project Manager

I have often told my wife Carla that she is a natural project manager – a natural leader with good people skills, great attention to details, action and results oriented, and smart. When we were married in 2000, she was the project manager.

Like Prince William and Kate, we also waited many years to marry, getting to know one another and living together for several years as well. Even though I had been married previously, and this was the first one for Carla, she knew far more about weddings than I did. I felt pretty useless, actually, so I just did what she told me to do. It turned out great, primarily because she was so good.

For example, Carla

- ❖ Found a perfect venue for the wedding just minutes from home – the historic former country home of the highest decorated US soldier from World War II, Audie Murphy, who later went on to a successful film career. The home had been converted to a restaurant that specialized in weddings, so it already had the right décor and full food and beverage catering services available, all at a reasonable price.
- ❖ Found nearby hotels for out-of-town family and guests who could not fit into our guest bedrooms, within five minutes and reasonably priced.
- ❖ Found the most beautiful wedding dress in Dallas, at a boutique wedding attire shop aptly named “David’s Bridal”
- ❖ Agreed that her best friend (and Matron of Honor) would provide the wedding cake – which was delicious!
- ❖ Planned everything perfectly.

She also kept her dress secret - did I mention that her maiden name was Middleton?

Here’s what we looked like 11 years ago.



David & Carla Pells – May 7, 2000

According to the Archbishop of Canterbury during the wedding of Will and Kate in London on Friday: *“Isn’t every wedding a royal wedding for the bride and groom?”*

My bride was also a project manager. Last week, she said to me, “You don’t even know what it cost?” I replied, “Less than a hundred thousand and more than ten.” “No,” she answered.

“Wow,’ I thought. “She deserves a reward!”

Oh, I almost forgot... It’s our wedding anniversary on Saturday!

Thank you for reading **PM World Today**, and

Good luck with your projects!

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