

MANAGEMENT, PLANNING and GOVERNANCE
Andy Lawrence

(1) General agreements

Our general approach is that we are **deliverables focused**, i.e. we are flexible about exactly what we do when as long as we produce agreed deliverables. We work within the context of an overall **Project Plan**, which sets out the contracted deliverables and expected milestones, as well as the governance structure. Within this top-level plan, we use a **six-month planning cycle**. Each "Stage" produces detailed workplans; however these are for internal use, and do not alter the agreed contracted deliverables. I assume that we do not intend to change our basic philosophy, so all the above points remain.

VOTECH is working quite well, but it is still worth looking at the possible weaknesses of current arrangements, and how to improve them.

(2) Current arrangements

Management : following decisions at the Board meeting of June 2005, we agreed to pursue a devolved but co-ordinated management style. During the planning process the partners agree a broad plan for each DS work area during the coming six month Stage, including an agreement on which partner is responsible for which elements of the plan. The work is then managed by each partner independently. During the cycle, the Project Manager, Technical Lead, and DS leaders track overall progress and help to co-ordinate the work of partners, but they do not have the power to direct the work of staff.

Planning. The original intention was that the workplan would be debated and approved by a body of twelve people called the "Technical Advisory Panel (TAP)" containing the senior management team (Project Manager, Technical Manager, Project Scientist), a representative of the Consortium Board, representatives of each partner, and the nominated DS leaders. However what has actually emerged is a much larger six monthly planning meeting with an essentially open attendance, known as the "DS Review and Planning (DSRP)" meeting. The workplan bubbles upwards from extensive technical debate at these meetings. The DS leaders then knock the plan into shape, and in due course the TAP consider and formally approve a fairly complete plan.

Governance. Formal governance - for example, on financial and political matters - rests with the Consortium Board. The intention was for the Board to meet annually but we have not achieved this. We have however continued "Board business" issue by issue through email etc. For technical governance - i.e. some kind of overall guidance, and top level technical decisions - it was expected that the TAP plus the Project Manager and Technical Manager would provide this. However, our decision on devolved management means that there is essentially no technical governance.

(3) Weakness of current arrangements

The devolved management style seems to have worked successfully, encouraging a fascinating variety of work, but achieving enough co-ordination to get real European added value. However, there is a feeling that increased co-ordination - especially technical co-ordination in software exchange and so on - would be desirable, if we can evolve towards this gently.

Formal governance is just about coping, but clearly the Board is not meeting often enough, and probably not taking quite enough responsibility for pushing at the contracted deliverables, agreeing who is responsible for what at this level and so on. The absence of "technical governance" is ok, as long as we achieve the degree of technical co-ordination mentioned above.

The current planning process is very interesting. Essentially project staff ignored the formal process we agreed to produce planning, and invented a more democratic process, which the TAP is then expected

to "rubber stamp". This has the very strong advantages that the six-monthly Stage plans are technically robust, and that the staff who will do the work are automatically on-side, with a warm and impressive community feeling. However the disadvantage is that the project staff have no interest in the official project plan, seeing this as "politics", and the constant tendency is to re-invent the project every six months. It is still understood that the TAP carries formal responsibility; but this is impossible to do unless the DS leads work hard digesting the DSRP debates and producing a plan for the TAP to consider. This is done, but is often completed late enough that it has little impact on the actual work, and increases the feeling that the TAP is an empty "rubber stamping" body. Finally, having invented an extra layer in planning, it has proved very hard to schedule all of DSRP, TAP, and Board meetings, and to get commitment from the key staff to take them all seriously.

The final weakness with current arrangements is the relationship with the broader sense of the VOTC as opposed to the VOTECH project, remains unclear. Christophe Arviset from ESA is an honorary TAP member, but the TAP is evolving towards rubber stampdom. We have not formally constituted a VOTC Board, and it is not clear when ESA-VO (or other projects ?) can join in VOTECH discussions.

(4) Proposed changes

(i) We should schedule Board meetings every six months; once by telecon and once as a physical meeting. We should track deliverable progress.

(ii) Separate TAP meetings are almost pointless and just one meeting too many. We should abandon these. Instead ,

EITHER

every DSRP meeting must close with a formal TAP session and complete and agree the plan

OR

the TAP and Board should be combined to make an "enhanced Board"

My preference is for the latter, and we are setting a preference here. A little reflection (but not too long !) is good after each TAP debate. We can have reserved sections when non-board TAP members leave if necessary.

(iii) We should likewise merge meetings of the "VOTC Board" and "VOTECH Consortium Board". Essentially this means inviting Kessler and/or Arviset to attend the above enhanced Board, and also :
(a) have reserved sections of VOTECH business when necessary, and (b) add specific items of VOTC business - such as discussing future FP7 proposals, which need not be limited to the current VOTECH partnership.