**Project Need and Concept Worksheet**

Intermediate Version

*“A means to capture first information about a new project”*

Latest Worksheet Version and a Basic version at [www.manageprojectsbetter.com](http://www.manageprojectsbetter.com)

Project or Effort Name \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Prepared By** | Name: | Tel: | Email: | Date: |
| **Revised By** | Name: | Tel: | Email: | Date: |

**What is This Worksheet -** This worksheet provides a means for any organization to capture and communicate the first information generated about a potential project for purposes of discussion and a decision to pursue the project or not. Information in the worksheet includes the need for the project and the initial ideas about the project’s concept and is intended to be used on any size or type of project.

This worksheet is a “first look” at a potential project and precedes a detailed business case, where that is needed, and precedes a project definition (or project charter) that itself, precedes the project plan.

**Why Use This Worksheet –** Efforts fail and are successful for the same reasons. Communications, clear project need, understood root causes, roles, impacts, the right alternative solution and other factors can make or break any project. This worksheet supports attainment of these critical project success factors.

**How to Use This Worksheet –** Use this worksheet to capture information about a new idea for a project. Completion of the worksheet in a team environment usually provides the best results.

**Worksheet Sections**

**What is the Current Situation?**

1. Current State, “As Is” - State the Problem to be Solved or the Need to be Met
2. State the Background, Strategic Interests, the Urgency, Impacts of No Action and any Current Work Status
3. State Root Causes of the Problem or the Root Drivers of the Needed Improvement

**What Is the Desired Future Condition?**

1. State Specific Desired Specific Benefits or the Desired Outcomes Related to this Change

**What Are the Alternative Solutions?**

1. Identify the Alternatives or Options to Attain the Desired Benefits and Resolve the Root Causes
2. Reduce the Set of Alternatives if Too Many Exist

**Compare Alternatives and Form A Recommendation**

1. Collect Alternative Comparison Information and Prepare Alternative Comparison Table
2. Compare Alternatives
3. Form a Bottom Line Recommendation and Generate Rationale
4. State a Priority for this Project Relative to the Organization’s Strategic Interests
5. State the Probability that a Subsequent Business Case Analysis Would Support this Project
6. Additional Notes
7. Next Steps

**Worksheet**

**Project Need and Concept**

Intermediate Version

**What is the Current Situation?**

***The Current State, the “As Is”, the Situation Needing a Solution or a Needed Improvement***

1. **Define the “Current State”** – State the Problem or the Needed Improvement or the New Idea to be Evaluated

**Background** – To make a change, the current state and the future state must be defined so that the “change” that takes you from the “current” to the “future” can be defined. This step identifies the current state.

Examples

* **Problem Example** – Let’s say that the problem is random system failures for a system your organization and customers use on a daily basis and the effects are that you are losing business to competitors. The current state is a failing system that needs resolution.
* **Improvement Example** – Let’s say that the needed improvement is related to the same system above, your system is running acceptably but you want to improve the system functions to enhance your customer’s experience. The current state is a level of customer satisfaction and your want to increase it.
* **New Idea Example** – Let’s say that an idea has surfaced to out-source certain work or initiate a strategic alliance with a new potential business partner or to expand your business into a new market area. These are not problems or necessarily improvements but do constitute a new idea that is often best supported with a business case evaluation. The current state is a business model and business performance without the example changes being implemented.

***Instructions*** *– Do Two Things*

* *Under the “SUMMARY CURRENT STATE”, complete the one statement best aligned with this situation.*
* *Under the “DETAIL CURRENT STATE” check all items below that directly relate to the needed change, i.e. “what needs to change” to meet your need in the statement.For those items you “check” add a brief statement on what that change needs to be.*

*As you complete this step, be aware of the following:*

* *You* ***can’t “Boil the Ocean”*** *– You cannot solve all of your organization’s issues or needs in one effort,* ***pick the specific things below that are at the heart the real problem or of the needed improvement or new idea*** *you stated above. Less is often best but make sure all important components are included.*
* *Beware that many items below are related and can be causes of each other,* ***but check all that clearly and directly apply*** *to ensure a complete picture is captured.*
* *Add factors not listed that need change.*

**SUMMARY CURRENT STATE**

**Complete one of the following Statements:**

* The Problem Needing a Solution is ………………………………., or
* The Situation Needing Improvement is ……………………………, or
* The New Need to Be Evaluated is ……………………………

**DETAIL CURRENT STATE – Things Needing Change**

*Check those topics below that directly describe the needed change, add a note on what that change needs to be. Check the most important drivers of the needed change.*

**Customer Satisfaction Changes**

State What Needs to Change: ………………

**Cost of Doing Business Changes**

State What Needs to Change: ………………

**Product or Service Quality Changes**

State What Needs to Change: ………………

**Product or Service Schedule Changes**

State What Needs to Change: ………………

**Changes Related to Business Partners**

State What Needs to Change: ………………

**Changes Related to Competitors**

State What Needs to Change: ………………

**Changes Related to Technologies**

State What Needs to Change: ………………

**Changes Related to the Marketplace**

State What Needs to Change: ………………

**Changes Related to the Economy**

State What Needs to Change: ………………

**Changes Related to Suppliers**

State What Needs to Change: ………………

**Personnel Skill Changes**

State What Needs to Change: ………………

**Personnel Quantity Changes**

State What Needs to Change: ………………

**Other Personnel Changes**

State What Needs to Change: ………………

**Non-Personnel Resource Changes (facilities, infrastructure, etc.)**

State What Needs to Change: ………………

**Financial Changes**

State What Needs to Change: ………………

**Internal Process Changes**

State What Needs to Change: ………………

**System or Tool Changes**

State What Needs to Change: ………………

**Organization Structure or Role Changes**

State What Needs to Change: ………………

**Changes Related to Management Methods**

State What Needs to Change: ………………

**Changes Related to Our Work with Government Regulatory Agencies**

State What Needs to Change: ………………

**Changes Related to Legal Issues or Needs**

State What Needs to Change: ………………

**(other) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

State What Needs to Change: ………………

**(other) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

State What Needs to Change: ………………

**(other) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

State What Needs to Change: ………………

**(other) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

State What Needs to Change: ………………

***Note:*** *If you have selected more than 5 or so items above, consider reducing that number by selecting only those that are at the heart of what change is needed. If too many items are “checked,” you might be defining a work scope too large to handle successfully or you maybe obscuring more important changes with too many less important changes. If more than 5 or so items are checked and all are at the core of your needs, keep them but be aware that a significant effort to analyze the needed change and to implement those changes may be required.*

1. **State the Background, Strategic Interests, the Urgency, the Impacts of No Action and any Current Work Status**

***Instructions*** *– Complete the following topics in a manner that would provide an individual unfamiliar with the respective situation a sound understanding of the nature of this business case.*

**Background** - The background of this situation is ….xxx….

**Related Organization Strategic Interests** – State how this issue or improvement or new idea is aligned with the strategic interests of the organization.

* Mission Alignment – xx
* Vision Alignment – xx
* Strategic Plan Alignment – xx
* Current Priorities Alignment - xx

**Urgency**

Two urgency factors are important. The needed schedule for completing this business case and the needed schedule for implementing the changes addressed by this business case. State the urgency of these two needs.

* If completion of this business case is delayed beyond ….(date)….the following impacts will possibly result:
  + xx
  + xx
* If the project or effort for which this business case is being prepared is delayed beyond …..(date)…… the following impacts will possibly result
  + Xx
  + xx

**Impacts of No Action** – If no action is taken on this topic, the most likely outcomes are:

* Impacts on Customers - xx
* Impacts on Organization - xx
* Impacts on Employees - xx

**Current Work Status** – For work related to this effort, complete the following:

**No Work Started**

**Some Work Completed**

State Work Completed ………………

**Some Work In-Process**

State Work In-Process ………………

1. **State Root Causes of the Problem or the Root Drivers of the Needed Improvement or New Idea**

**Background** - To make effective changes, the root causes of a problem and the root drivers of a needed improvement or new idea must be known. This is important so that subsequent change actions address the core of a topic and not the symptoms. In this part of the business case, the “Root Causes” of the problem or the “Root Drivers” of the needed improvement or new idea are identified.

Examples

* **Problem Example** – Let’s say that the problem is slow system responses for a system your organization needs. The **Root Causes** of this problem might be inadequate server capacities, inadequate communication line rates, inefficient software or a poor user interface design, or combinations of these, or all of these.
* **Improvement Example** – Let’s say that the needed improvement is related to services your organization provides to our customers and you want to increase the quality of those services. The **Root Drivers** of this topic could be employee work skills, employee skills in working with customers, having all employees provide all services vs. specializing, setting customer expectations on the nature of our services, or combinations of these or all of these.
* **New Idea Example** – Let’s say that an idea has surfaced to out-source certain work, initiate a strategic alliance with a new potential business partner or expand into a new market area. These are not problems and are not necessarily improvements but do constitute a new idea that needs a business evaluation. **Root Drivers** for these types of business cases often include many topics unique to the given situation with quality, cost, schedule, market-share and finance factors being common drivers along with the strategic interests of the given organization.

***INSTRUCTIONS*** *- From Step 1, “Current State,” copy the topics “Checked” and insert here. Then add information about what is known about the root causes or root drivers.*

**(Copied “Checked” Topic #1 from Section 1)**

(Copied - “State What Needs to Change: ………………” )

Check One Statement Below and Complete

This topic is the root cause or root driver, or

This topic has the following root causes or root drivers:

* xx
* xx

**(Copied “Checked” Topic #2 from Section 1)**

(Copied - “State What Needs to Change: ………………” )

Check One Statement Below and Complete

This topic is the root cause or root driver, or

This topic has the following root causes or root drivers:

* xx
* xx

………………………..

**(Copied “Checked” Topic #n from Section 1)**

(Copied - “State What Needs to Change: ………………” )

Check One Statement Below and Complete

This topic is the root cause or root driver, or

This topic has the following root causes or root drivers:

* xx
* xx

**What Is the Desired Future Condition?**

**The Future State, the “To Be” or the Needed Destination**

1. **State Specific Desired Specific Benefits or the Desired Outcomes Related to this Change**

For this business case, what specifically are the desired outcomes, results or benefits?

**Note:** This is not the solution and not the means to attain the desired solution, outcome or result. This is the specific desired end states or conditions that will exist after the selected solution or change is implemented.

Examples

* If a problem or improvement business case has an identified “Schedule Benefit,” then “check” that item and in the “Desired Benefits” column, identify what time reduction goal is desired and for what type of work.
* If an improvement in customer satisfaction is intended, then that item is “checked” and the desired benefits maybe identified as “a 40% reduction in customer returns” and “a 20% reduction in customer complaints.”

***Instructions*** *– Using the table below,* ***select only the most important categories*** *of desired benefits that are at the core of this business case and then define what specific and realistic benefit or outcome is desired. If too many “Desired Benefits” are identified, then the scope of work may not be achievable and some more important benefits maybe obscured by lessor important ones.*

*As desired benefits are identified, include a relative “Importance or Priority” rating for each desired benefit relative to the primary purpose or intent of the change related to this business case.*

**DESIRED BENEFITS TABLE**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| X |  | **TYPE** | **DESIRED BENEFITS or OUTCOMES** | **IMPORTANCE** |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  | 1 | **Cost or Financial Benefits** | * xx * xx | H / M / L  H / M / L |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  | 2 | **Schedule Benefits** | * xx * xx | H / M / L  H / M / L |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  | 3 | **Quality, Performance, Function Benefits** | * xx * xx | H / M / L  H / M / L |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  | 4 | **Benefits to Customers** | * xx * xx | H / M / L  H / M / L |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  | 5 | **Benefits to Employees** | * xx * xx | H / M / L  H / M / L |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  | 6 | **Benefits to Organization** | * xx * xx | H / M / L  H / M / L |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  | 7 | **(Other Benefit)** | * xx * xx | H / M / L  H / M / L |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  | 8 | **(Other Benefit)** | * xx * xx | H / M / L  H / M / L |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  | 9 | **(Other Benefit)** | * xx * xx | H / M / L  H / M / L |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  | 10 | **(Other Benefit)** | * xx * xx | H / M / L  H / M / L |

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**What Are the Alternatives?**

**What are the Different Paths or Ways to get to the Desired Future Condition?**

1. **Identify the Alternatives or Options to Attain the Desired Benefits and Resolve the Root Causes**

This step identifies alternative or optional ways of addressing the “root causes” or “root drivers” and attaining the “desired benefits” all stated in earlier steps.

Comparisons of what alternatives you identify will be accomplished in a later step.

Example

Let’s say that the problem is slow system responses for a system your organization needs and that the root cause has been determined to be both inadequate server capacity and inefficient user interface software. Your alternatives might be:

* + Increase server capacity to the point that the inefficient software issue is much less of an issue (expensive, but quick)
  + Redesign the software (some expense and time consuming)
  + Do both of the above
  + Outsource the work associated with this system (might be more expensive, you lose control of changing the software, …)
  + Do nothing at this time

***INSTRUCTIONS*** *- Review the “Root Causes/Root Drivers” and the “Desired Benefits” you have identified in earlier steps and work to identify alternative ways to address these root causes/drivers and to cause the benefits to exist. Team brainstorming is often a good approach. Do not eliminate any options or alternatives at this time unless they are clearly unfeasible in the view of the team. Poor alternatives will be eliminated in subsequent steps.*

Capture your alternatives in the table below. Most business cases need 2 or 3 alternatives at a minimum and capture as many feasible alternatives as the team identifies.

**ALTERNATIVES TABLE**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Alternative** | **A Few Notes Further Defining Each Alternative** |
|  |  |  |
| 1 | **(insert statement describing alternative #1)** | * xx * xx * xx |
|  |  |  |
| 2 | **(insert statement describing alternative #2)** | * xx * xx * xx |
|  |  |  |
|  | **……………………….** |  |
|  |  |  |
| n | **(insert statement describing alternative #n)** | * xx * xx * xx |
|  |  |  |

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**Reduce the Set of Alternatives**

*Optional*

1. **Reduce the Set of Alternatives if Too Many Exist**

If you have only several alternatives, skip this step and proceed to the next step.

Note: If you have identified more than 3 to 5 alternatives, it is usually a sound practice to filter the current set of alternatives to identify the best candidates for more in-depth comparison. To accomplish this, a simple table capturing an estimate of the difficulty in implementing each alternative and the associated payback of that alternative can be useful.

**Instructions**

* Review the “Alternatives Filtering Table” below.
* Where many alternatives exist, assign each of your alternative solutions from the prior step to one of the categories in the “Alternatives Filtering Table” below using your teams’ estimates of both the difficulty in implementing a given alternative and the estimated payback for that same alternative. This is not a detailed financial analysis or a detailed implementation planning effort, this is a “gut feel” on what the payback of a given effort is and how much work would be required to implement each alternative.
* Then, select those alternatives that are “EASY to Do and HIGH Payback” for subsequent comparison steps. If 3 to 5 alternatives result, proceed to the next step.
* If only 1 or 2 alternatives exist in the “EASY to Do and HIGH Payback” category, consider which alternatives in the “Hard to Do and HIGH Payback” or the “Easy to Do and LOW Payback” categories are the best additional alternatives to be included in your pending alternatives comparison. Those alternatives that are “HARD to Do and LOW Payback” probably offer little value to your efforts and should be discarded unless the team feels their allocation to this category was accomplished in error or some other value in retaining these alternatives exist.
* Review your results from this step with appropriate stakeholders to support the allocations meeting with a consensus view.

**Alternatives Filtering Table**

Use the following table to reduce the number of alternatives from “many” (like > 5) to a “few top candidates”(like or 4) that will be included in a subsequent more detailed comparison.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **EASY** To Do and **HIGH** Payback   * Alternative xx * Alternative xx * Alternative xx | **HARD** to Do and **HIGH** Payback   * Alternative xx * Alternative xx * Alternative xx |
| **EASY** to Do and **LOW** Payback   * Alternative xx * Alternative xx * Alternative xx | **HARD** to Do and **LOW** Payback   * Alternative xx * Alternative xx * Alternative xx |

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**Compare Alternatives and Form a Recommendation**

1. **Collect Alternative Comparison Information and Prepare Alternative Comparison Table**

At this point, it is best to have 3 to 5 alternatives. More can be compared, but it makes the comparison more difficult.

**Instructions**

* Determine the team that will accomplish this step.
* Review the “Alternatives Comparison Table” in this Step and add or delete alternative columns in the table as needed for all alternatives to be compared.
* Enter the current set of alternatives to be compared.
* Review the “REFERENCE - Comparison Criteria Descriptions” sections which follow the comparison table.
* Take one comparison criteria at a time, make some notes for each alternative for that given criteria and then summarize those notes in the table.
* Repeat this for all criteria in the “REFERENCE - Comparison Criteria Descriptions”
* Add additional criteria as needed to form a complete comparison and include notes for each added criteria for each alternative.
* When the table information entry is complete, review with the team and then forward to other appropriate stakeholders for their input to support information accuracy and completeness.
* Also review the “Key Information Related to this Business Case” portion of the table and enter what information is pertinent for each alternative for those topics.

**Alternatives Comparison Table**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | | **Comparison Criteria** | **Alternative #1** | **Alternative #2** | **Alternative #n** | **Importance** |
|  | |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | | State the Alignment with the Organization’s Strategic Information | * xx * xx * xx | * xx * xx * xx | * xx * xx * xx | (HIGH or Not) |
|  | |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | | Financial Analysis - Investment and Payback | * xx * xx * xx | * xx * xx * xx | * xx * xx * xx |  |
|  | |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | | MEETS these Desired Benefits  (Reference the “DESIRED BENEFITS” Table Completed Earlier) | * xx * xx * xx | * xx * xx * xx | * xx * xx * xx |  |
|  | |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | | DOES NOT MEET these Desired Benefits  (Reference the “DESIRED BENEFITS” Table Completed Earlier) | * xx * xx * xx | * xx * xx * xx | * xx * xx * xx |  |
|  | |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | | State the Risks or Concerns | * xx * xx * xx | * xx * xx * xx | * xx * xx * xx |  |
|  | |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | | State the “Most Likely” Impacts on Customers | * xx * xx * xx | * xx * xx * xx | * xx * xx * xx |  |
|  | |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | | State the “Most Likely” Impacts on the Organization | * xx * xx * xx | * xx * xx * xx | * xx * xx * xx |  |
|  | |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | | State the “Most Likely” Impacts on Employees | * xx * xx * xx | * xx * xx * xx | * xx * xx * xx |  |
|  | |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | | State the Estimated Probability of Success and Key Assumptions | * xx * xx * xx | * xx * xx * xx | * xx * xx * xx |  |
|  |  | |  |  |  |  |
|  | State the Feasibility in Terms of Technology, Resources, Politics, etc. | | * xx * xx * xx | * xx * xx * xx | * xx * xx * xx |  |
|  | |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | | Identify Top Level Estimates of Needed Resources (Not a Detailed Estimate) | * Cost Range: * Schedule Est * Personnel Needed | * Cost Range: * Schedule Est * Personnel Needed | * Cost Range: * Schedule Est * Personnel Needed |  |
|  | |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | | (Insert Additional Criteria As Needed) | * xx * xx * xx | * xx * xx * xx | * xx * xx * xx |  |
|  | |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | |  |  |  |  |  |

1. **Compare Alternatives**

This step is the review and analysis of the contents of the “Alternatives Comparison Table.”

***Instructions*** *– As the comparison table is completed, do the following:*

* *Have the team review and validate the completeness and accuracy of the table contents and complete any final information gathering efforts.*
* *Determine the team that will review the table contents to form an initial comparison and draft recommendation.*
* *Determine a method of comparing the information in the table (see one example below).*
* *In a team environment, review each area of the table and capture the “good and bad” of each alternative, making notes in the table to capture thoughts from your discussions such as “coloring” important entries.*
* *When the initial “coloring” is complete, highlight the characteristics in the table that are the most important. (“HIGH” in the table example below)*

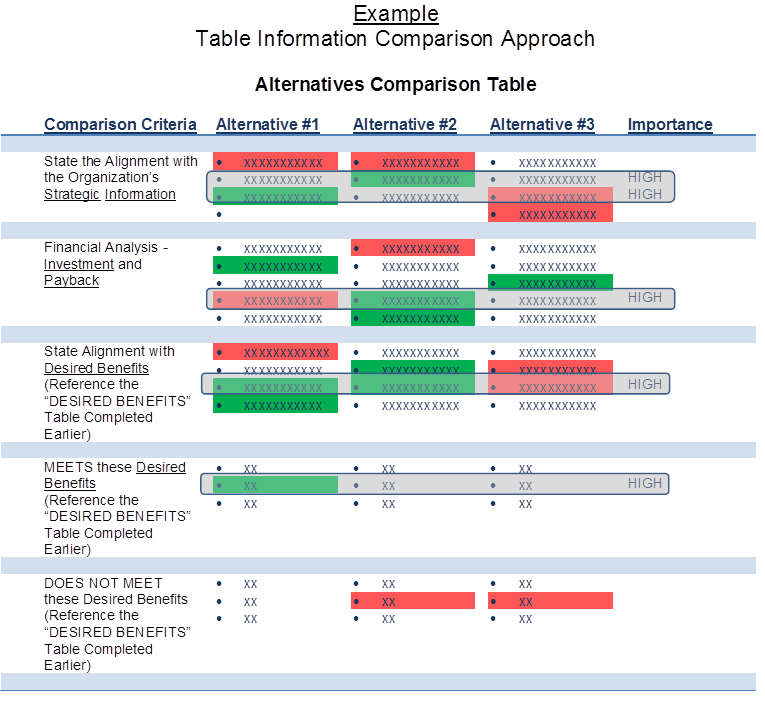
**Example Table Information Comparison Approach** – There are many ways the information in a comparison table can be formatted to enhance visibility of key information that will drive your best alternative selection. One approach is to color the information relative to that information being supportive or not supportive of your needed benefits.

In the basic example below, clearly advantageous information is background colored in “Green” and clearly disadvantageous information is background colored in “Red.” Non-colored information would be neither of these categories but that information is still pertinent to the comparison as that “non-shaded” information may be used later if multiple alternatives are close in their overall value.

Note that additional coloring approaches can be used such as Red-Fails to Meet Needs, Yellow-Meets Needs Minimally, Green-Fully Meets Needs and Blue-Exceeds Required Needs

As the individual alternatives receive a colored score, the most important score can be highlighted as shown in the example.

Weighted or Scored Approaches – Some teams may consider a “weighted” or “scoring” comparison approach where individual alternatives are given a numeric “value” for each criteria. Criteria may have assigned “weights” denoting the relative importance of that criteria when compared to other criteria. A numeric “score” can be identified for each alternative and criteria pair that can be the product of the “value” and the “weighting” factor. A total score is identified for each alternative by summing all of the “scores” from each criteria for that alternative. This approach can have value, but in the opinion of the author of this worksheet, such approaches are prone to error as the definition of the weighting factors (sometimes chosen with limited forethought) can significantly sway the final results. The quote “tell me what answer you want and I can adjust the weighting factors to get that answer” is something to keep in mind.

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1. **Form a Bottom Line Recommendation and Generate Rationale**

This step is the selection of the best alternative and the generation of rationale for that decision.

Note that your recommendation might be any of the following.

* One of the stated alternatives
* One of the stated alternatives that is modified
* A combination of 2 or more alternatives
* None of the alternatives
* Several alternatives that are implemented in a phased or sequenced approach

***Instructions*** *– As the information in the comparison table is analyzed, do the following.*

* *Make an initial recommendation on which alternative is selected.*
* *Ask the team “what is wrong with our selection?”*
* *Generate the rationale for your recommendation.*
* *Review you decision and finalize your draft recommendation and rationale.*

Complete the following:

**Recommendation** - The bottom line recommendation is ……………………

The rationale for this decision is

* xx
* xx
* xx

This recommendation is based on the following conditions or assumptions being true.

* Condition 1 ……………………
* Condition 2 ……………………
* Condition 3 ……………………

1. **State a Priority for this Project Relative to the Organization’s Strategic Interests**

Low Priority  Medium Priority  High Priority  A “Must Do”

Already Directed by Management

Comments or Notes:

1. **State the Probability that a Subsequent Business Case Analysis Would Support this Project**

Low Probability  Moderate Probability  High Probability

Business Case Already Exists and a summary follows……………..

Comments or Notes:

1. **Additional Notes**

* xxx
* xxx
* xxx

1. **Next Steps** – Information Distribution, Reviews, Approvals, Studies, Assignments, Requirements Generation, Further Information Gathering, ….

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Next Step | Responsibility | Due Date |
| 1 |  |  |  |
| 2 |  |  |  |
| 3 |  |  |  |
| 4 |  |  |  |

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END OF

**Project Need and Concept Worksheet**

**Advanced Version**

Latest Worksheet Version and a Basic Worksheet at [www.manageprojectsbetter.com](http://www.manageprojectsbetter.com)

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