

project planning and management series

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Project Planning and Management Series consists of a set of manuals and associated modules presenting practical approaches, tools and techniques for project planning and management. (See list on back cover). A product of the Government of Jamaica/USAID National Planning Project (1976-1980), the series was developed by the Project Development Resource Team (PDRT) of PAMCO for use in "action-training" workshops and reflects extensive experience in training and project development. All present PDRT members are contributing authors and have worked together in writing, revising and publishing the series. Special credits are due to Dr. Merlyn Kettering for design and development of the series; Dr. Bruce Brooks for writing final versions of many modules; Mrs. Marjorie Humphreys for assuming primary editing and production responsibility and for organizing draft papers into more useful materials; Mr. Lascelles Dixon, head of PDRT since 1979, for designing the cover and improving many of the illustrations; and Mrs. Christine Hinds and Miss Linette Johnson for typing the drafts and final manuscripts. Any comments on the series and its usefulness are welcome.

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MODULE 37

WRITING (AND DESIGNING) PROJECT REPORTS
*Merlyn Kettering*A. *PREREQUISITES:* None

References:

- Manual I - Planning for Project Implementation
- Manual M - Project Management
- Module 8 - Bar Charting for Project Control/Scheduling
- Module 10 - Milestones Description Charts
- Module 11 - Resource Planning & Budgeting
- Module 36 - Project Documents for Planning & Implementation
- Module 41 - Design of a Project Management Control System
- Module 42 - Evaluating and Forecasting Project Progress and Performance
- Module 46 - Withdrawal of and Accounting for Loan Funds in the Financing of Projects

B. *DISCUSSION:*

Reports are the links between different action and decision points on a project. They are intended to convey useful data and analytical information between project components, personnel and managerial levels. Some project reports can be quite standardized while special formats may need to be designed for other reports. In designing a report format, the following considerations are helpful:

- (i) Who writes the report? What information does that person have access to and is that person able to report?
- (ii) Who receives the report and what information does that person specifically need?
- (iii) What are the specific purposes and uses of the report?
- (iv) What terms of reference can be specifically clarified and defined for the report?

- (v) How can the report be expedited in terms of content and preparation effort to facilitate usefulness and timeliness for decision-making?
- (vi) How is this report related to other reports within the project reporting system(s)?
- (vii) Does the reporting format enable the user to exercise some flexibility in the format to reflect actual experience?

Reporting formats should be planned in advance and explained in detail to relevant project personnel. There should be some flexibility for data presentation and summary so the report can be adapted to actual circumstances as necessary. But, general guidelines should be carefully defined and maintained. Reporting formats need to be conveniently organized and standardized to avoid confusion when presented for analysis and decision-making.

In later sections of this module there are detailed discussions of:

- the formula for designing the content of a project report
(Section H)
- types of reports on a project
(Section I)
- the Project Information Chain from the activity to the executive level
(Section J)
- Activity Progress Reports
(Section K)
- Monthly Project Progress Reports
(Section L)
- Project Executive Summary Reports
(Section M)
- Critical Project Reports
(Section N)
- Structures for Project Reports
(Section O)
- Checklist for Project Report Format and Content
(Section P)

C. *PURPOSE:*

The purpose of project reports is to provide appropriate information to assist management in comparing performance against plans so that current or potential problems can be identified and analyzed. Reports keep managers continually informed of the overall health and status of the project activities, so that corrective action may be taken when necessary.

D. *USES:*

Project management assumes some measure of control. Project control requires a reporting system so actual performance can be compared to plans. Good project management must be based upon good information. Project reports are the key link between project work and management decisions.

Reports are used to document satisfactory completion of project activities and to identify significant deviations from plans. Problems should not be hid from management. As problems arise with respect to schedules, costs, manpower, technical guidelines and performance, they should be identified as early as possible for analysis. Project reports are intended to reveal problems to appropriate management levels so it is possible to assess the significance of the problems or opportunities, to assist in corrective decision-making for resolving or minimizing the adverse impacts of difficulties, and to monitor the implementation of corrective action.

E. *DEFINITIONS:*

Reports are those documents used for collecting, collating, analyzing and communicating information on actual project performance. Every project has a variety of reports for different levels and for various purposes. A good project management system ensures that the reports provide timely, accurate and adequate information for decision-making.

F. *LIMITATIONS:*

Project reports are limited, in that they tend to focus on a pre-determined set of data for information which may not reflect the specific performances on a particular activity or project. Standardized formats may inhibit the reporting of the special information which often makes possible a real understanding of the management of a project.

The attitude of many persons toward reporting often causes them to hide information and problems rather than to readily admit or even anticipate performance difficulties. For this reason, reports should be supplemented

by on-the-spot observations and informally obtained data. Informal information, e.g., obtained by conversation, should be carefully verified before there is a heavy dependence upon it for decision-making.

Another key limitation of reports is that they tend to emphasize problems rather than opportunities. Because of the uncertain nature of most development projects, the identification of possibilities for positive change or opportunities can be as critical to achieving the ultimate objectives of the project as identifying deviations from the original or revisions of project plans.

ADVANTAGES:

The advantages of a set of formalized reports are based upon the usefulness of a regularized flow of information required for decision-making at respective project managerial levels. If used properly, reports can greatly improve the foundations for project control, co-ordination and direction. Problems can be anticipated by forecasts based upon performance reports. In addition, reports focus the attention of the reporting persons upon actual indicators of progress, thus permitting an objective measurement of performance. This is key to good management at all levels.

Project reports provide a history of the project which can become the basis for project evaluations and for identifying problems encountered and lessons learned so that future project designs can avoid the same mistakes and errors of judgement. In this way, they are not only useful for the management of the specific project, but can be used to improve project development and management in future endeavours.

Project reports can be designed and scheduled to ensure that required management information reaches appropriate management levels on a timely basis. This is particularly important with respect to certain executive levels which meet regularly but infrequently. They ensure that the information is available, and furthermore that the information is documented in such a manner that it can be investigated and validated as questions and issues arise.

G. ASSUMPTIONS:

The major assumptions, of course, deal with the appropriateness of the reporting formats to ensure comprehensive and accurate information on a timely basis and on the integrity of the reports and the analysis so the information is useful for decisive management.

H. FORMULA FOR PROJECT REPORT CONTENT:

Project control assumes a plan against which actual performance can be compared. Exercising project control assumes a reporting system to support management decision-making. A reporting system is based upon the collection and collation of data for analysis through project reports. The basic formula for writing a project report is:

- (a) data of intended accomplishment from plans
compared with
- (b) data of actual accomplishments
to identify
- (c) significant deviations from the plans
as a basis for
- (d) problem and opportunity analysis
to identify
- (e) corrective action, alternatives and implications.

This basic formula can be applied in at least six basic categories of project analysis:

- (1) Work Progress
- (2) Costs
- (3) Schedules
- (4) Resources
- (5) Technical Performance
- (6) Organizational Performance

This means that each project report should have, in summary, a comparison of performance against plans, problems and issues analyzed, and recommendations for future courses of action. A matrix of project reporting information is shown in Figure 1.

I. TYPES OF REPORTS

At a minimum, project reports are generated at three management levels, as seen Figure 2 --project executive, project manager and activity managers.

FIGURE 1: FORMULA FOR PROJECT REPORT CONTENT

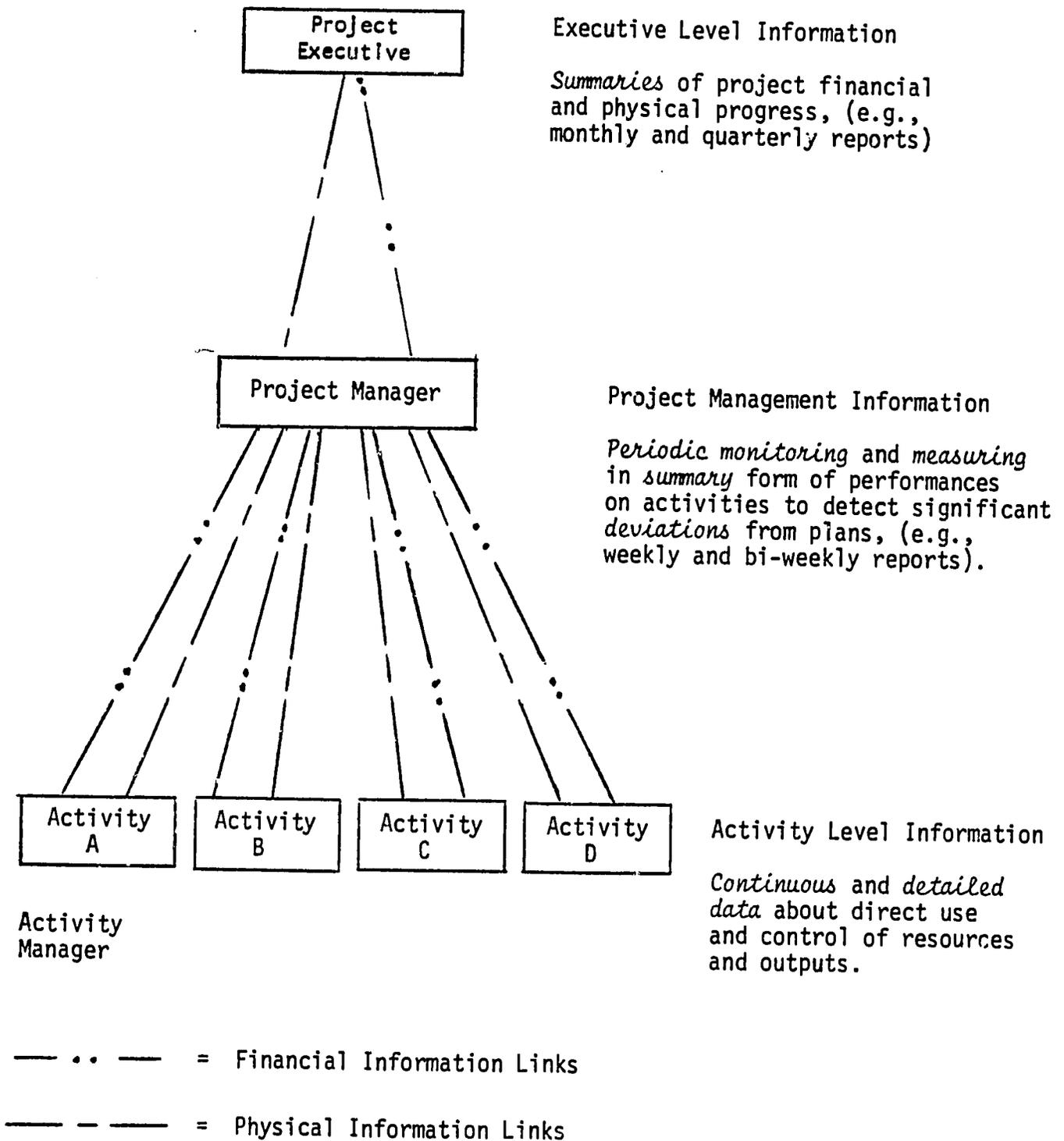
Categories of Analysis	Compare		Identify	Analyse	Recommend
	(a) Planned	(b) Actual	(c) Deviations from plan	(d) Issues, causes and problems (or opportunities)	(e) Alternative actions and their implications
1. Work					
2. Costs					
3. Schedules					
4. Resources					
5. Technical Performance					
6. Organization Performance					

37.6

DO NOT DUPLICATE WITHOUT PERMISSION

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FIGURE 2: PROJECT INFORMATION PYRAMID



DO NOT DUPLICATE WITHOUT PERMISSION

Many different types of reports will be generated throughout the project reporting system.

These include:

- Management Summary Report
- Project Status Report
- Project Schedule Report.
- Financial Plan and Status Report
- Organization Status Report
- Cost Categories Report
- Milestone Status Report
- Cost and Time Forecast.
- Critical Activity Status Report .

The specific content and tools relevant to preparing these reports are elsewhere in these series, such as the other relevant modules listed in Section A.

J. THE PROJECT INFORMATION CHAIN:

The three general levels of project management illustrated in Figure 2, permit the flow of information from the project activity or site level to the highest levels of management. This flow can be very complex as there may be a number of agencies involved in monitoring and decision-making at the highest levels of the project executive, each of which has a specific interest. This is illustrated in Figure 3, which shows the flow of project reporting information upward from the project site to the highest levels of the Bank of Jamaica and the Cabinet.

The validity of the information at the highest levels of the Information Chain is entirely dependent upon the reliability and timeliness of the reporting at the lower levels of project management, i.e., from the site or activity managers to the project manager.

Although reports to all the various points within the Information Chain may contain common information, such as cost and time performance, there are also specialized information requirements which must be reported in specialized formats.

The Monthly Reporting Chain begins with project information flows from the level of the site or activity manager through Bi-weekly and Monthly

Reports. Other participating agencies (utilities or community development, for example) also prepare Monthly Reports. These reports go to the project manager for management and co-ordination purposes.

Above the level of the project manager, there is a hierarchy of executives who will be monitoring project progress and who have specific responsibilities in executive decision-making. There will be a flow of both Monthly Reports (solid lines) and Quarterly Reports (dashed lines). (See Figure 3). Monthly Reports go to the Central Planning Unit of the Agency and then to the Board of Directors. Another flow of Monthly Reports specifically on Cost and Physical Performance goes to the Project Analysis & Monitoring Company Limited (PAMCO) which forwards summary information on Foreign Exchange Use to the Ministry of Finance & Planning and the Bank of Jamaica. Quarterly Reports flow from the project manager to the co-ordinator who prepares summaries of all projects in that Agency or Ministry for other executive agencies, such as PAMCO which is an agency of the Ministry of Finance & Planning. PAMCO is then responsible for preparing Quarterly Reports for submission to Economic Council, which are amended and forwarded to Cabinet.

The flow of information in Figure 3 is illustrative and does not include some agencies which may also be involved in the monitoring of government projects. It is intended to represent the progressive summarization and specialization of project information in reports which move from the activity level through the project executives to the Board of Directors, the Bank of Jamaica and the Cabinet. The next sections will review the content of several of these reports beginning at the activity or site level.

K. ACTIVITY PROGRESS REPORTS:

The project manager must devise standardized reporting formats for the activity managers to bring appropriate data to him for analyzing the overall progress of the project and for permitting the co-ordination of critical linkages between project components and activities. The project manager is basically attempting to maintain control of the project scope, costs, schedules, progress and performance. Activity Reports will be required on a weekly, bi-weekly or monthly basis in order to be processed for Project Progress Reports.

Normal data requirements in Activity Reports include:

- (i) Progress to date --completed tasks and tasks-in-progress.
- (ii) Estimates of remaining work with time to complete tasks and any task re-scheduling as necessary.

- (iii) Activity completion estimates and plans.
- (iv) Critical tasks or activities impacting activity progress.
- (v) Costs of completed tasks.
- (vi) Costs of tasks-in-progress and estimates of cost-for-completion.
- (vii) Total cost estimates for the activity.
- (viii) Comparisons of actual to planned time for tasks completed.
- (ix) Estimates and plans of time for completion of activity.
- (x) Technical performance measurement and indicators for meeting output specifications.
- (xi) Problems, issues and/or opportunities arising from the above data on progress, costs, schedules, resources and technical performance, and
- (xii) Alternative corrective actions and implications for planning.

It will be noted that an important aspect of reporting deals with both accomplishments completed and accomplishments-in-progress with estimates of requirements-to-completion. This is the critical link to plan revision.

L. MONTHLY PROJECT PROGRESS REPORTS:

Throughout the hierarchy of project management there is a flow of Monthly Project Reports. (See Figure 3). These will vary in format, but a suggested outline for monthly reports at the level of the project manager and co-ordinator could be as follows:¹

1. *Summary status* -- brief paragraph highlighting current status of the project.
2. *Red flag items* -- previous and new red flag items, corrective actions taken, with prediction on resolution and further action required.
3. *Project manpower plan* -- showing key or limited resources.

¹ Russel D. Archibald, *Managing High Technology Programmes and Projects*, John Wiley & Sons, New York, 1976 p. 231.

4. *Major achievements and future schedule* -- describing actual accomplishments during current reporting period and significant changes in future schedule.
5. *Current and future problem areas* -- stating major problems, actions required, and possible impact on the project.
6. *Project cost performance* -- commenting on current project cost situation with reference to current cost performance reports.
7. *Exhibits* -- (A) Summary Master Schedule (where required), (B) Detailed Project Schedule(s), (C) Project Cost Performance Report.

M. PROJECT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY REPORTS:

At the highest levels of the information chain, summary information should highlight salient features of progress and serious problems. At this level, there is concern with an overview of the performance on a number of projects. Too much detail is confusing. The executive agencies usually perform a monitoring function requiring general cost and physical performance information. As an example, the PAMCO Monthly Report (shown in Figure 4) focuses upon Cost and Physical Progress. At this point, the agency's interest can be generally summarized as:

- (i) keeping an up-dated inventory of major projects with key data on each for the information and evaluation of high-level management officials;
- (ii) identifying the functioning of the project organizational structures that are in place; and
- (iii) identifying projects with great potential for problems, risks and exposure so management's attention can be focused on these.²

For all executive reports it is critical to identify the specific purposes of the reports so that the appropriate information is adequately summarized for the interests of the particular executive group.

N. CRITICAL PROJECT REPORTS:

Often, it is necessary to do a special review of a project because of specific problems which have arisen or as a result of a request for a special evaluation. Some major project reviews may not be scheduled in advance, but are organized in response to specific situations which arise.

² *Ibid.*, p.231

FIGURE 4: MONTHLY FINANCIAL REPORT

Loan No.

for

Externally Funded Projects

Month of _____ 19__

- 1) Name of Project.....
- Executing Agency
- Project cost
- of which: Locally funded

J\$

- 4) (i) Amount provided in Government of Jamaica's Budget
- (ii) Expenditure during current financial year
- (iii) Total project expenditure to date
- (iv) Total amount reimbursable on project by external agency
- (v) Total actually reimbursed
- (vi) Total claims submitted but outstanding
- (vii) Total claims not yet submitted

.....
Name

.....
Signature of Project Coordinator/Manager

.....
Date

Other types of critical project reports may include regularly scheduled reviews, such as annual evaluations which are required by certain lending agencies. In general, these Critical Project Reports have the purpose of assuring appropriate executives that the project is progressing as scheduled. Information which should be included in such reviews or reports could include:

- (i) Project identification data,
- (ii) Summary status, problem areas, points for attention,
- (iii) Summary master schedules,
- (iv) General performance schedules,
- (v) Cumulative costs and Milestone Status Charts,
- (vi) Cost-performance charts,
- (vii) Action assignment summaries, and
- (viii) Project organizational and manpower status.³

0. STRUCTURING A PROJECT REPORT:

The formats for most project reports may be standardized as in the case of Monthly Reports or Formal Annual Evaluations. In other instances, it may be necessary to devise a reporting format to meet the needs of the reporting situations; e.g., for Critical Project Reviews. In such instances, the following structural order could be adapted.⁴

- | | |
|-----------------|------------------------|
| a) Title page | e) Main body of report |
| b) Contents | f) Conclusions |
| c) Abstract | g) Recommendations |
| d) Introduction | h) Appendices |

3 *Ibid.*, p. 233

4 The following section is taken from "The Written Report," photocopy, source unknown pp. 2-4.

- a) *Title page* - The contents of this page should consist of:
 - (i) Subject/Title
 - (ii) Author
 - (iii) Date
 - (iv) File/Reference number
- b) *Contents* - shows the main headings of the report together with the paragraph or page numbers where they are located. Headings should be differentiated from sub-headings by the use of distinctive types or sizes of print or by indentation.
- c) *Abstract* - this gives the substance of the report in a condensed form. It serves the dual purpose of focusing the attention of the persons to whom the report is addressed and of enabling other interested parties to grasp the essentials of it without having to read it through completely.
- d) *Introduction* - sets the scene of the report. It gives the terms of reference and a clear statement of the problems dealt with in it. It may also give the scope and limitations of the investigation, sources of information, etc.
- e) *Main body of report* - contains the facts of the matter together with a discussion of them. In the case of a complex report, the facts may have to be considered under a series of sub-headings. After the facts have been stated and discussed, possible courses of action should be explored in depth and their advantages and disadvantages assessed objectively. It may be possible to relegate to appendices those details which would otherwise encumber this section of the report unnecessarily.
- f) *Conclusions* - based on the facts and alternative courses of action which appear in the previous section of the report. Sometimes conclusions are stated at the end of each section or sub-heading of the main body of the report; in these instances, those conclusions are repeated within this section. Like the main body of the report, conclusions should be clear, concise, intelligible and in a logical order.
- g) *Recommendations* - these stem from the two previous sections and state the action required in the light of the facts, alternative courses of action and conclusions stated in the earlier sections of the report. A reader who wishes merely to read the introduction, conclusions and recommendations could refer to the main body of the

15

report for the evidence. Recommendations should always be given a reference number.

- h) *Appendices* - certain information which would otherwise encumber the main body of the report unnecessarily, should be included in appendices. Charts, diagrams, statistical data, etc., should be dealt with in this way unless their presence in the appropriate part of the report is essential to a proper understanding of it. Each appendix should be given a title and a reference letter or number.

Points on Style and Layout

In writing the report the following points of style should be observed:

- (a) The language should be precise, free from ambiguities and should avoid technical jargon if this is at all possible.
- (b) Short words should be used in preference to long ones and all unnecessary words should be omitted provided the meaning can be adequately conveyed.
- (c) In order to sustain interest, the length of sentences should be varied but excessively long or complex sentences should not normally be used.
- (d) It is better to write in the active rather than the passive voice.
- (e) The use of long paragraphs should be avoided.

For ease of reference, topics and even paragraphs can be numbered. There are many alternative ways of referencing within a report. Two common ways of doing this are known as the alpha-numerical system and the decimal system.

Under the alpha-numerical system, paragraphs are designated by arabic numerals, primary sub-divisions by small case letters and secondary sub-divisions by small Roman numerals. The letters should be indented and the roman numerals further indented.

Paragraphs would appear thus:

1.
 - (a)
 - (b)
 - (i)
 - (ii)
 - (iii)
 - (c)
- 2.

The decimal method employs numbers only. One stop denotes a primary sub-section and two stops a secondary sub-section. Thus paragraph 5 might be broken down in this manner:

5
5.1
5.2
5.2.1
5.2.2
5.2.3
5.3

The chosen method should be applied consistently.

P. CHECK LIST FOR PROJECT REPORT FORMAT AND CONTENT:

Structure and Layout

- (a) Title page is complete and well laid out.
- (b) Report layout is clear and easy to follow.
- (c) All essential parts of the structure are present.
- (d) Main parts of the structure are in the correct sequence.
- (e) Headings and sub-headings are suitably prominent.
- (f) Paragraph number references are correct.

Content

- (a) Abstract is a fair statement of the essentials and is intelligible without reference to the rest of the report.
- (b) Introduction states clearly:
 - (i) subject and purpose of the report
 - (ii) date of the investigation
 - (iii) scope of the report
 - (vi) by whom and for whom the information has been compiled.
- (c) Main part of report contains all the necessary facts.

- (d) Individual parts of the main body of the report are in their correct order.
- (e) Problem(s) are clearly stated.
- (f) Main issue is not obscured by detail.
- (g) Sources of facts are clear.
- (h) Conclusions follow logically from the facts and their interpretation.
- (i) All feasible solutions are included.
- (j) Statements are clear and unambiguous.
- (k) Terms used are consistent (e.g., abbreviations, symbols, etc.).
- (l) Facts, figures and calculations are correct.
- (m) Appendices are clear and easily understood.
- (n) Recommendations follow logically from the facts and conclusions.

Style

- (a) Report is objective, positive and constructive.
- (b) Report is business-like and conveys a good impression.
- (c) Language is precise, free from ambiguities and technical jargon.
- (d) The style and method of analysis is suited to the subject matter and the reader.
- (e) The basic messages and main topics emerge progressively.
- (f) If a senior official needs to approve the report, such approval should be obtained before the report is finally typed.

Project Planning and Management Series.

MANUAL - I Planning for Project Implementation
MANUAL - P Project Planning
MANUAL - M Project Management
MANUAL - PF Pioneer Farm Implementation Planning

MODULES

1. Defining Project Objectives (Objective Trees)
2. The Logical Framework
3. Work Breakdown Structure
4. Activity Description Sheets
5. Project Organization
6. Linear Responsibility Charts
7. Project Scheduling - Bar Charts
8. Bar Charting for Project Control/Scheduling
9. Project Scheduling - Network Analysis
10. Milestones Description Charts
11. Resource Planning & Budgeting
12. The Role of PAMCO
13. Project Technology Analysis
14. Demand Analysis
15. Market Strategy Analysis
16. Project Area Analysis
17. Project Costs & Benefits
18. Project Profile
19. Financial Analysis
20. Cash Flow Analysis
21. Discounting
22. Net Present Worth Analysis
23. Cost-Benefit Analysis
24. Benefit-Cost Ratio Analysis
25. Internal Rate of Return
26. Social Analysis of a Project
27. Economic Analysis of Projects (including Border Pricing)
28. Financial Statements & Ratios
29. Project Selection & Ratios Analysis
30. Brainstorming
31. Decision-making System for Projects
32. Project Institutional Environmental Analysis
33. Ecological Analysis for Projects
34. Introduction to Contracts, Jamaican Contract Documents & Tendering Procedures
35. Selection & Use of Consultants
36. Project Documents for Planning & Implementation
37. Report Writing for Projects
38. Project Files
39. Formats for Pre-Feasibility & Feasibility Studies
40. Motivation of Employees and Personnel Evaluation
41. Design of a Project Management Control System
42. Evaluating & Forecasting Project Progress & Performance
43. Project Termination
44. Introduction to Lending Agencies
45. Organizing and Conducting Conference Meetings
46. Withdrawal of and Accounting for Loan Funds in the Financing of Projects