# Chartering a timely path - from door to door

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**ABSTRACT**

This is the second in a series of cases about Front Door Foods (FDF), a privately-owned company specializing in digital food ordering and delivering restaurant-prepared meals. In this installment, FDF is having trouble meeting its commitment to deliver orders to customers within a 30-minute window, as internal audits found that the average delivery time exceeds 42 minutes. Not surprisingly, this has led to declining customer satisfaction and increased negative online reviews. FDF has identified several factors contributing to delayed deliveries, including: slower-than-optimal food preparation at participating restaurants, technology-related problems, population growth outpacing driver capacity, driver training and retention, and delivery routing. Due to the issues identified, FDF would now like to start a project to address the issue of delayed deliveries.

The case provides the students with FDF's plan to develop a project charter that includes a business case, a problem statement, and a goal statement, each with quantifiable metrics and a completion date. In addition, students will understand the importance of selecting a project champion and a small, focused team of subject matter experts to work on the project. Inspired by the prolific use of food delivery services, this case study provides a relatable and accessible backdrop for students to apply management and project management principles, encouraging in-depth examination and dialogue in the classroom or discussion board.

Keywords: project charter, project management, project sponsor, project initiation, project team, case study

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**Case series statement**

This is the second in a series of cases dealing with FDF. Please see "Disappointment at your door: the case of an underperforming food delivery service," published in the Journal of Business Cases and Applications vol 39, 2023, for complete background information.

**BRIEF HISTORY**

In existence since 2015, Front Door Foods (FDF) is a privately-owned American company specializing in restaurant-prepared, on-line-food-ordering and home-delivery business. The company is based in Nashville, TN. This centralized location is ideal for controlled geographic expansion through franchising, which FDF has been doing since 2019. Having grown quickly, FDF currently has 78 locations in large and medium-sized cities across ten states. The gross revenue in 2022 was $351 million (US).

**MOTTO**

"Our front door to your front door in 30 minutes or less."

**BUSINESS MODEL**

The FDF business model consists of receiving food orders from customers through the FDF application platform and then communicating directly with any of their more than 21,000 partner restaurants across the southeastern United States. Once the food order is received by FDF, the pertinent restaurant is contacted electronically to place orders for the FDF patron. FDF promises to deliver the meal within 30 minutes of pickup from the restaurant. All orders coming into FDF are assigned a seven-digit numerical tracking number. After the order is placed with the restaurant, the location's customer service member texts the FDF customer, informing them of the approximate time for home or office delivery based on the restaurant's capacity and road conditions (traffic, weather, etc.). The FDF system also generates a text message to the driver with addresses for the pickup restaurant and the delivery destination. This text serves as a timestamp of when the order was placed at the restaurant. Much like a commercial mail or package driver, when the food is picked up from the restaurant, the driver chooses "pick-up" on their FDF smartphone application, timestamping when FDF is in custody of the ordered meal. The driver then chooses "delivered" once the meal is brought to the desired location. This timestamp concludes the service to the FDF patron. Additionally, a five-item customer satisfaction survey is sent immediately to the patron after the driver chooses "delivered" on their FDF app.

**WHO ARE THE PLAYERS?**

Here are the six characters involved in this case:

1. Grace – Grace is the Chief Operating Officer for FDF. She has a background in logistics and supply chain management and is responsible for managing the day-to-day operations of the company, relations with restaurants, and new and existing location operational

readiness. Grace is also responsible for developing and implementing new operational strategies to streamline the company's processes and improve overall efficiency to maximize customer satisfaction. She has been with FDF for eight months.

2.  Bruce – Bruce is the Chief Technology Officer for FDF. Bruce has a degree in computer science and has logged years of experience in software development. He oversees the development and implementation of the company's technology systems. Bruce works closely with the marketing and operations teams to ensure that the company's website, ordering platform, and mobile app are user-friendly and offer customers a seamless ordering experience. He has been with FDF for six years.

3.  Richard – Richard is the Chief Financial Officer for FDF. With years of experience in finance and accounting, he is responsible for managing the company's finances and developing financial strategies to ensure the company's long-term financial stability. Richard is skilled at analyzing financial data and using it to make informed decisions about pricing, product offerings, and other key business decisions. He works closely with the other executives to ensure that the company's financial goals align with its overall strategic objectives. He has been with FDF for six years.

4.  Elizabeth – Elizabeth is the Data Analytics Manager for FDF. Her role is to uncover operational and consumer trends through data capture at the organizational, divisional, state, and city levels. She reports to Grace and has been with FDF for four years.

5.  Kevin – Kevin is the Operations Improvement Manager. His role is to look for opportunities to improve customer experience as well as reduce operational expenses and improve quality. His focus is on restaurant clients as well as end-use customers. He reports to Grace and has been with FDF for five years.

6.  Dr. Thomas Foster – Dr. Foster is a faculty member in the school of business at Stratham College in upstate New York. Grace was in several of Dr. Foster's classes, including supply chain management, operations management, and project management. Initially reconnected through LinkedIn, Grace has exchanged emails with Dr. Foster on an infrequent basis as she was asked to be a member of the college's industry advisory board.

## THE PROBLEM

FDF is struggling with service delivery time. FDF's motto of "Our front door to your front door in 30 minutes or less" is well known, and customers expect food to arrive within that 30-minute window. Internal data analytics suggest average delivery time is now exceeding 42 minutes. A breakdown of the data reveals delivery times differ by region – some areas perform well and are below the goal of 30 minutes while others nearly 50 minutes. As a result, customer satisfaction surveys have started trending down from the "4.6 stars" high on Google. Yelp is also now presenting a higher proportion of negative comments as compared to positive.

## BRAINSTORMING

FDF had previously chosen to utilize the tenets of project management (Shick et al., 2023) to address its operational delivery problem. FDF's motto of "...30 minutes or less..." was not being achieved, and complaints were beginning to become more noticeable and trending on social media. Grace, as the Chief Operating Officer, was selected as the project

sponsor/champion considering the delay in delivery times was affecting the company's image and potentially impacting its user base at the restaurant and consumer level.

Grace began her own data collection by brainstorming with several FDF employees at the corporate office about their views on the situation and potential remedies. She called a meeting, and several attended in person, with a few attending virtually.

Kevin, the Operations Improvement Manager, indicated that the issue could lie outside FDF's control and center on their drivers' inability to receive food in a timely manner from the restaurants. He said, "If they don't have it, they can't deliver it." Some nodded in agreement. He also suggested that the smartphone app might not be as efficient as believed.

Bruce, the Chief Technology Officer, said that could be the case, but he doubted it as they monitor updates from the provider and try to remind drivers of the need to update their app. He said that if the group wanted to investigate the technology aspect further, it would require identifying the key activities involved, including all upstream and downstream technology-related pieces, determining their sequencing, and identifying dependencies and potential bottlenecks across the processes. This option sounded like more time investment than many wanted to commit.

Elizabeth, the Data Analytics Manager, offered another possible factor. Population increases in certain geographical locations may have increased demand for existing FDF services and outpaced certain vendors' capacity to deliver in a timely manner. She then offered data from a random collection of 250 deliveries from several states from last quarter (September-December, as indicated in Figure 1 (Appendix)). She stated that the mean was about 42 minutes, but the upper end of the range was almost 57 minutes – nearly 100% above the target delivery time. The group seemed to moan a bit at her data revelation.

Richard, the Chief Financial Officer, put on his "HR Hat" for a moment and speculated that the drivers (many of whom are new to FDF) were not adequately trained on FDF processes and were perhaps consuming too much time in the actual delivery process. He added, "And to make matters worse, our driver turnover is 35% – which means if we trained every driver, before long one-third of them would be gone with a new group to train." Lastly, one of the drivers whom Grace invited to the call simply said, "All I know is I'm driving all over town trying to make deliveries. It's not like the mailman or a milk truck driver on a route. There doesn't seem to be any logic sometimes. I'm racking up a lot of miles on my car."

Grace wrote on the whiteboard all the ideas as they were mentioned. She captured:

1. Restaurants are not preparing food in a timely manner
2. Technology-related issues causing delays in delivery
3. Population growth outpacing delivery driver capacity
4. Delivery driver education and high turnover
5. Process of making deliveries – delivery driver routing problem

As she adjourned the meeting, Grace offered, "Thanks, everyone. We certainly seemed to have a diverse set of opinions or ideas on this. I'll have to get back to you all." Driving home that evening, she remembered Dr. Thomas Foster – a former professor of hers. She needed to speak with him about a committee issue at the college anyway and thought she could run this problem by him as well, considering his project management knowledge and expertise in supply chain and operations.

**THE PROJECT CHARTER**

Grace called Dr. Foster that evening and described the problem and the results of her brainstorming efforts. He said, "You should begin your project with a project charter." "Will you please refresh my memory on the project charter?" said Grace. Dr. Foster said that a charter is an efficient and effective tool to launch a potential project because it gets the most important details in writing up front, preferably in a simple one-page document. It also has a "clarifying effect" and can often drain the emotion from around an issue so decision-makers can think critically and logically.

Dr. Foster explained a charter typically contains a short business case explaining the project's necessity from a high-level perspective. The business case explains why a project should be initiated. He also explained the importance of problem and goal statements, as they succinctly define what success looks like. He added, "It's best if the problem and goal statement have qualified metrics in them, and goals have a date for completion. You also need to have a metric that drives the project – your problem must be measurable. You don't want to go very far down the road of planning a project, and certainly not executing one, and not know what you are measuring against. And it helps if you have a baseline of that same metric over a historical period to compare against. It's like a high school wrestler trying to 'cut weight'…they know the weight class they want to wrestle in and their current weight…so they work to reduce their weight to wrestle in the desired class. Also, be sure to keep the problem and solution simple – avoid making it overly complicated or trying to solve the problem within the goal statement. Leave the ideas for solution generation to the team. Give them ownership. A rule of thumb is to simply state what the problem is, what the goal is, and the end date the team wants it resolved. Let the team do it." Grace asked, "So what about management's ideas?" Dr. Foster replied, "Let the team sort them out or possibly come up with new ones and avoid making premature assumptions. Let them surprise you."

Grace was busy taking notes during their conversation. He then added, "Once you have your business case, problem and goal statement, primary metric and baseline, you need to determine who the project sponsor will be and include them in the charter. They are important for pushing through the political roadblocks the project faces." Grace offered, "Well, that will be me." "Excellent!", exclaimed Dr. Foster, "your charter should also suggest 3-5 people for the project team that can add value to the effort – subject matter experts vested in the process and project's outcome. I would caution you to keep your project teams as small as it makes sense because a team that is too big can become unwieldy. You can always ask someone to join you for a specific meeting if needs be."

Finally, Dr. Foster asked, "Who do you envision as your project manager?" Grace replied, "I have several people in mind that I think could run this project, but since we're early in the process, that hasn't been finalized." Dr. Foster replied, "I'm glad you're thinking about that now. You should probably be considering someone who can serve as a process owner as well." Grace asked, "What do you mean by 'process owner'?" Dr. Foster explained, "The process owner is someone you can hand off the project to after it is complete...like a post-project monitor. They monitor it and report any deviations from the goal as set by the team." Grace responded, "Yes, I have the idea person – she's Elizabeth the data analytics manager." "Sounds very promising," Dr. Foster said.

As he said his goodbyes, Dr. Foster noted, "There are a few more items that probably should be included in your project charter, but they're fairly self-explanatory. I'll send you a blank project charter that your team could use to get started and see what you come up with."

**DR. FOSTER FOLLOW UP EMAIL**

Hi Grace:

Given the pressing nature of your problem and the direct impact on customer satisfaction and brand reputation, I recommend a condensed approach with a shorter project duration of four months. Your project scope should also be narrowed to reflect the urgency and focus of this project. Make sure the scope points to achieving substantive, sustainable improvements in service delivery time. Here's a strawman timeline for your project:

Recommended Time Frame: Four months

- Data Analysis and Problem Diagnostics (Three weeks)
- Solution Ideation and Planning (Three weeks)
- Pilot Testing in the Regions with the Longest Delivery Times (Five weeks)
- Broad Roll-out and Continuous Monitoring (Five weeks)

Also, as promised, I have attached a sample Project Charter template (as indicated in Table 1 (Appendix)). Keep in mind that charters can be somewhat different, and various organizations may use slightly different types of charters. You can alter the template to best suit FDF's purpose. Remember, getting your sponsor and key stakeholders to sign the charter is very important. It not only gives your project team authorization to proceed, releases organizational resources to utilize, and it also ensures everyone is in agreement with the project's goals and scope.

If you have any other questions, don't hesitate to reach out to me.

Best,
Dr. Foster

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What is the business case for this project?
2. What are the problem and goal statements for the project? Assuming today's date, when should the project be concluded?
3. What is the metric for this project, and for what timeframe is this metric's baseline period?
4. Who should be the sponsor for this project? Who should be the project manager? Who should be the process owner?
5. Based on the list of those participating in Grace's brainstorming session, who should be on the project team?
6. Based on your answers above, please construct a sample charter using the attached template provided by Dr. Foster.

**TEACHING NOTES**

**Introduction**

The project charter is a document developed at the initiation of a project and provides guidance for the potential project against the organization's strategies and goals (Brown, 2005). It also acts as a formal agreement between the organizational leadership and the project team (Kloppenborg et al., 2023). While usually drafted by the designated project manager, this document may be developed by the project sponsor or project manager – and should include input from key stakeholders (if identified). It provides a foundational understanding and authorization for the project manager to form a project team and apply resources to achieve the identified project outcomes (Project Management Institute, 2021).

The charter is used for project initiation and provides a high-level overview, tentative schedule, project resources, assumptions, constraints, dependencies, impacts and risks, and deliverables. The charter should be of sufficient length to meet the intent of the document, whether it is one page or four pages. It should be written in a manner that is easily understood and unambiguous, highlighting the importance of scoping the problem and objectives. Because the charter contains the essence of the potential project, it is a very useful document for quickly getting new project team members up to speed on why the project exists and what it intends to accomplish (McKeever, 2006).

Given that a project charter is a formal agreement between the project manager and the project sponsor, any updates to the document must be mutually agreed upon. In other words, a single party cannot unilaterally change the document. Further project details are identified as a greater understanding of the project requirements comes into view. It may be updated over the course of the project when deemed necessary by both parties.

**Student Outcomes and Proposed Use**

This is the second case study in a series of cases about Front Door Foods (FDF). As stated in the first case study by Shick, Johnson, Creasy, and Fan (2023) about FDF, "the goal of this series of cases is to help the student think about the application of project management principles to graspable, real-world scenarios."

The case recognizes that FDF is surging 12 minutes beyond its 30-minute guarantee on average – and customers are taking note in the form of negative online reviews. To counter this negative trend, students are guided on the journey of a brainstorming session led by Grace, Chief Operating Officer, and the need to initiate a project, starting with a project charter (as indicated in Table 1 (Appendix)).

Given the rich and complex scenario faced by FDF, students have the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge by meeting the desired student academic learning outcomes:

1. Explain and analyze the details, including root causes, within this case that are impacting customer satisfaction and FDF's reputation.
2. Understand and develop the component parts of a project charter, including the business case, problem statement, goal statement, high-level scope, key stakeholders, and relevant metrics (as indicated in Table 1 (Appendix)).

**Course and Audience**

This case is appropriate for use with management and project management students in both upper-level undergraduate and graduate programs of study. Student analysis of the case can be presented as written answers to discussion questions in a face-to-face (F2F) or virtual setting. The instructor may choose to lead a F2F or virtual class discussion using the discussion questions. Students may also be assigned the discussion questions either individually or in a group setting to work on during an F2F class period or as a homework assignment. Students in management courses may use the case to move into other management discussions or assignments such as budgeting, finance, or strategic planning. Project management students may use this case to springboard into other discussions or assignments pertaining to project initiation, stakeholder analysis, and communication or risk matrices.

Student interest and applicability should be high in this case, as FDF is modeled after popular food delivery services that are highly utilized by students. The concepts and problems surrounding FDF are approachable, relatable, and should make discussing the case with students easy and straightforward.

**Sample Answers to Discussion Questions**

1. What is the business case for this project?
   FDF's internal analytics show average delivery times exceeding the FDF 30-minute "guarantee" in some service areas. The analysis also reveals these delivery variances are not universal in all service areas. Some locations are meeting or even exceeding the 30-minute guarantee, while others are breaking it by close to an hour. Customer satisfaction is suffering and affecting public ratings and reviews on sites like Google and Yelp.

2. What are the problem and goal statements for the project? Assuming today's date, when should the project be concluded?
   Sample problem statement: Delivery times exceed the promised standard of 30 minutes in some locations.
   Sample goal statement: Reduce delivery times to at or below 30 minutes for all FDF locations within 150 days of project launch. The ideal FDF project for addressing this problem would be planned, executed, and closed out within three to four months from the charter signature.

3. What is the metric for this project, and for what timeframe is this metric's baseline period?
   The project metric will be Delivery Time. The baseline period is September-December, based on Elizabeth's data, as indicated in Figure 1 (Appendix).

4. Who should be the sponsor for this project? Who should be the project manager? Who should be the process owner?
   As COO of FDF, Grace would be the ideal project sponsor. The project manager has not been decided on at this point in the process. The process owner should be Elizabeth, the data analytics manager because she can monitor data after the project is complete to see how project remediations have affected delivery times.

5. Based on the list of those participating in Grace's brainstorming session, who should be on the team?

Ideal team members would be Elizabeth (data analytics), Kevin (operations improvement), Bruce (information technology), two to three delivery drivers from geographically dispersed locations (remote team members?), and potentially Dr. Foster (outside consultant).

6. Based on your answers above, please construct a sample charter using the attached template provided by Dr. Foster.
   Please distribute the sample charter sent to Grace from Dr. Foster for their use. You will find the teaching notes charter example below. It contains descriptives and selects answers from the case.

**Project Charter Explanation and Select Suggested Answers**

As indicated in Table 2 (Appendix).

## REFERENCES

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**APPENDIX**

Figure 1
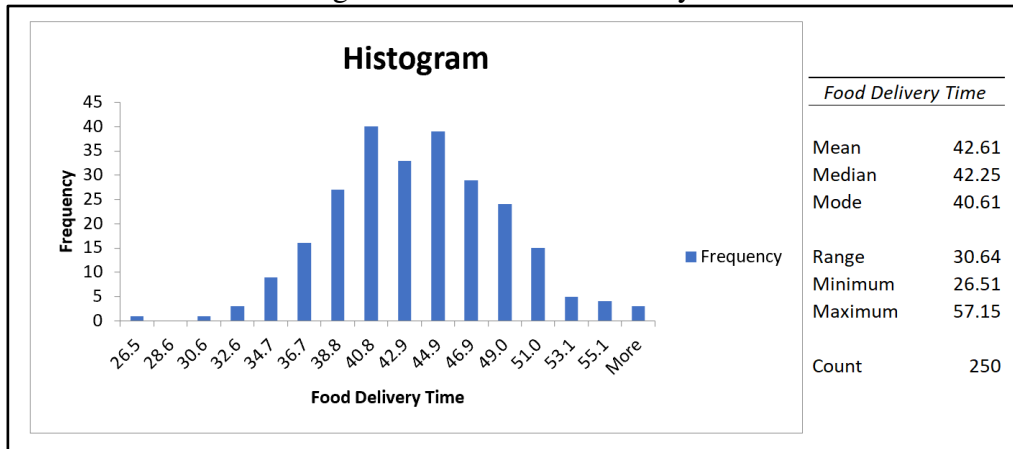Histogram of FDF Food Delivery Time



| Food Delivery Time | |
|---|---|
| Mean | 42.61 |
| Median | 42.25 |
| Mode | 40.61 |
| | |
| Range | 30.64 |
| Minimum | 26.51 |
| Maximum | 57.15 |
| | |
| Count | 250 |

Table 1
Sample Project Charter

| * Charters can be somewhat different based on project needs – asterisk items are not necessarily required. | |
|---|---|
| Project Name | |
| Charter Author and Creation Date | |
| Key Stakeholders | |
| Project Manager | |
| Business Case | |
| Problem Statement | |
| Goal Statement | |
| High Level Scope | |
| Tentative Schedule | |
| Project Team | |
| High Level Cost Estimate | |
| High Level Risks | |
| *Assumptions, Constraints, Dependencies, and Impacts | |
| Assumptions | |
| Constraints | |
| Dependencies | |
| *Deliverables, Expected Outcomes | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Key Deliverables | |
| Project Communication | |
| Reviews and Approvals | |
| *Review History | |
| Signatures | |

Table 2
Project Charter Explanation and Select Suggested Answers

Teachers, please note: Charters can be somewhat different based on project needs – asterisk items are not necessarily required. This should be reinforced with students.

| Sample Charter | |
|---|---|
| Project Name | A short, descriptive project name.<br>(e.g.: FDF Delivery Improvement Project) |
| Charter Author and Creation Date | Who developed the charter and the date the document was created (or date of latest revision).<br>(Author is likely Grace; date is variable or current date) |
| Key Stakeholders | If known at time of charter construction, include name, title, and organization information for both the Project Sponsor (the individual who champions the project, assists in resource allocation, and offers high-level guidance) and the Customer (the person who initiated the project and will be providing the necessary funding), if known and appropriate.<br>(COO/Project Sponsor, CFO, CTO, Data Analytics Manager, Operations Improvement Manager, Delivery Drivers) |
| Project Manager | Name with title and organization if known at this point.<br>(Not known at this time) |
| Business Case | An overview of the project's context and background. Explains the business requirement that initiated the project and details the key business factors that led to the emergence of the problem or opportunity.<br>(FDF's internal analytics show average delivery times exceeding the FDF 30-minute "guarantee" in some service areas. Analysis also reveals these delivery variances are not universal in all service areas. Some locations are meeting or even exceeding the 30-minute guarantee, while others are breaking it by close to an hour. Customer satisfaction is suffering and affecting public ratings and reviews on sites like Google and Yelp.) |
| Problem Statement | A succinct description, including the metric of interest, should describe what the project is trying to resolve<br>(FDF delivery times exceed the promised standard of 30 minutes in some locations.) |
| Goal Statement | A description of what the problem the finished project will resolve including a metric of interest and project end date.<br>(Reduce delivery times to or below 30 minutes for all FDF locations within 150 days of project launch. The ideal FDF project for addressing this problem would be planned, executed, and closed out within three to four months from charter signature.) |
| High Level Scope | Detail the project's parameters, including its limitations. A good scope statement should set the boundaries of what is included in the project and what is not. Set expectations. |

| | (The project team will focus on food delivery time and avoid distractions as customer retention, driver retention, market expansion, etc. Quantitative documentation is expected.) |
|---|---|
| Tentative Schedule | What is the estimated start date? Projected completion date? Anticipated Milestones? Remember to add any dates that could change the overall schedule, e.g.: financial calendars, seasonal conditions, etc.<br>(Estimated start date is variable. End date would be four months from project charter signature.) |
| Project Team | Who are likely team members? What is their current role and where are they coming from? What is their estimated percent of time allocated to the project?<br>(Ideal team members would be Elizabeth (data analytics), Kevin (operations improvement), Bruce (information technology), two-three delivery drivers from geographically dispersed locations (remote team members?), and potentially Dr. Foster (outside consultant). |
| High Level Cost Estimate | Best feasible budget estimate(s)<br>(Costs and potential project budget have not been identified or estimated at this point.) |
| High Level Risks | What are the major risks associated with this project?<br>(Allow students to brainstorm risk about the potential project.) |
| *Assumptions, Constraints, Dependencies, and Impacts | |
| Assumptions | What assumptions have been made about the project? Has risk been assessed against each of these assumptions (see risk section below)? |
| Constraints | Budgetary, quality, or other constraints that will impact the project or the performing project team or entity. |
| Dependencies | Does this project depend on any other projects or major resource? |
| *Deliverables, Expected Outcomes | |
| Key Deliverables | What are the deliverables necessary for achieving project objectives? Provide a concise overview of how the project will accomplish its goals. |
| Project Communication | By what method will project status be communicated, to whom, by whom, and how often? |
| Reviews and Approvals | |
| *Review History | Charter reviewers and approvers. |
| Signatures | Signatures of Sponsor, reviewer/approver(s), and Project Manager (if known) |