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# Bridge: A Thoughtful Workflow

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# BRIDGE: A THOUGHTFUL WORKFLOW

by

Bella Rainey

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Arts in Art and Design - Project Management

at

Lindenwood University

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Author's Name	Date	Author's Signature	Date
Isabella Rainey	4/2323	Isabella Rainey	4/23/2023
Committee Chair Nar	ne Date	Committee Chair Signature	Date
Kristy Tucciarone	4/25/2023	Kaisty Jucciarone	4/25/2023
Committee Chair Nar	ne Date	Committee Chair Signature	Date
Jason Lively	4/27/2023	fun fivel	4/27/2023
Committee Chair Nar	ne Date	Committee Chair Signature	Date
Andrew Smith	5/2/2023		- 5/2/2023

5/2/2023

Andrew Smith

5/2/2023

# BRIDGE: A THOUGHTFUL WORKFLOW

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Art and Design Department in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts at Lindenwood University

By

Bella Rainey Saint Charles, Missouri

May 2023

#### ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: Bridge: A Thoughtful Workflow

Bella Rainey, Master of Arts/Art and Design/Project Management, 2023 Thesis Directed by: Kristy Tucciarone, Advertising and Strategic Communications Program Chair

The creative workspace is filled with all walks of life – from right to left brains, different personality types, mental health setbacks, and differences in neurodivergencies. While the differences amongst employees can be a huge asset, it can also create a struggle to have productive and inclusive workflows – specifically in relation to project life cycles. These types of differences can create a gap in regards to healthy communication, which can lead to lesser productivity in the long run due to a disconnect with employees battling mental health setbacks. There are many tools out there already that focus on productivity, but there are none with the refined concept of bridging the more communication related gaps, hence where *Bridge:* A Thoughtful Workflow came to be. Bridge is a web-based application concept that will focus on productivity, efficiency, and project management strategies for organizations such as advertising/creative/marketing agencies, non-profits, and small businesses, with inclusivity and healthier communication at the forefront. The application will serve as a project management tool in the workplace, but more people-focused than what is currently on the market. The goal of Bridge is to offer a program that is backed by psychology research, not just business research, and give the user the landings that they need to succeed.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The line of communication between neurotypical and neurodiverse people in the workplace is discrepant to say the least, especially and specifically in regard to the technology they are expected to operate within. Existing productivity tools, such as <u>Asana</u>, <u>Notion</u>, and <u>ClickUp</u>, tend to be created by people who do not intend to use them on a day-to-day basis. Think: software engineers, executives, IT professionals. This is ultimately setting up the intended users for failure, as they are not being kept in mind – in this case the focus is on creative workspaces. Enter Bridge: A Thoughtful Workflow. The functional goal of this web-based application is to eliminate common roadblocks for users such as tricky set-up, lack of resources, and poor user interface development that does not set up the users for consistent and efficient success. This functional goal will then allow for the ultimate goal to take place: creating healthier workplace communication between all types of thinkers. While this is a project management tool, it is more people focused than what is currently available on the market.

This directed project began in fall 2021 and has an estimated completion of spring 2023. The project's final form will consist of a finalized web-based productivity tool backed by surveyed and studied research, that will be fully functional and usable within workplaces of up to 100 users. The project will also include a help desk page, which will have step-by-step videos meant to assist to fix any issues or answer any questions users may have, as well as a help email address inbox set up to also assist users. The purpose of this project is to create a product with longevity and the ability to evolve, adapt, and grow.

In order to actually bridge this gap between employees to administration, peer to peer, or even intern to manager, there has to be an additional effort to relieve some of the reported roadblocks among industry professionals. While conducting surveys with real industry professionals, there was a frequent discrepancy found between leaders + management and employees experiences when trying to implement a productivity focused technology. Whether it be the program is too time-consuming, too complicated, or has a poor user interface that does not consider differences such as neurodivergency – the list is too long. Fixing this problem is no easy task, but it is an important one that could make a large impact on the levels of burnout that more and more of the workforce is experiencing – especially post-pandemic. Following COVID-19, there is a new layer of dispositional causes of burnout that need to be addressed in the workplace as individual's worried about losing their valuable resources for an extended period of time (Raja, et al., 2022).

Because of this burnout behavior, there are elements to Bridge that will specifically make it different from the other products on the market, mentioned in the literature review section. To begin, the amount of customization will be highly thought out – as many users complained of either too little or too much customization, either making it very difficult to set up or difficult to use long term. Bridge will allow a basic set up phase, giving more experienced users or businesses the ability to grow into the product in a natural way. Next, Bridge will focus on creating a lesser communication gap in the workplace. To do this, it will focus on mental health tactics via a bot named Map. Map will pop into the user's workspace periodically to check in on the user and gather information about their workday. This will help lessen the awkward, anxiety inducing, scary gap that many entry and mid level employees experience when having conversations with managers and bosses. Map will ask questions like "Is there anything you think you cannot accomplish today?" followed by a drop down of the tasks assigned to the employee for that day. These tasks can both be added by the employee or the manager depending on the setup for that Bridge team. Map is meant to be a way to ease the overall atmosphere of the workplace environment and eliminate meetings, conversations, and situations that are technically avoidable and maybe unnecessary, in order to boost the culture of the organization which can be directly tied to the mental health and burnout rate of the group. This AI integration has zero intention of diagnosing someone with a specific mental health issue or neurodivergency, and instead just serves as an option for people who may need a tool like this to feel more included, heard, and seen in the workplace.

Bridge will also offer features such as templates for specific organizations, starting with one in this project, an advertising agency. This will allow the business or organization to setup their Bridge account with premade templates that will be customizable for their organization's needs, but overall is created to start them off with a strong foundation. For example, the "Creative Director" role will be assigned to the corresponding user, and will offer Bridge destinations such as "Creative Briefs." "Photography Files," and "Brainstorming" templates to get the user started. Overall, Bridge is meant to provide the solutions to problems before they even come up.

#### **CONTEXT/LITERATURE REVIEW**

This project encapsulates a handful of large concepts, so the best way to begin is to break down the necessary goals in order to get to the final product, and work with those goals in phases.

#### Goal 1: Psychological, neuro, and character differences in the workplace

Society has started to become more aware of mental health efforts, neurodivergency, and other psychological differences – but those concepts and experiences have not been embraced into day-to-day practices, including within the workplace. Neurodivergent refers to diversity in the human brain and cognition, for instance in sociability, learning, attention, mood, and other

mental functions – many of which are important factors in the workplace. Neurotypical is described as not displaying or characterized by autistic or other neurologically atypical patterns of thought or behavior. This project will be refining the focus and building Bridge around the following psychological differences: Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism spectrum disorder (ASD), general anxiety disorder (GAD), depression, and learning disabilities.

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a mental health condition that causes unusual levels of hyperactivity and impulsive behaviors. Those with ADHD may also have problems when it comes to focusing their attention on a singular task or sitting still for longer periods of time. Many people experience issues with inattention, as well as various changes in energy levels (Angel, 2021). This type of sporadic behavior can have a decently significant effect on their studies, work, and home life. ADHD is a diagnosis recognized by the American Psychiatric Association (APA). In the workplace, ADHD can be excused by managers and peers as lack of focus, inefficiency, and other derogatory-centered accusations, which many times, are not only uncontrollable from the responsible party, but also are elevated due to their working conditions not being accommodating to their disorder. Pharmacological treatment has been shown to reduce these alterations in brain activity in regard to attentional control, but some pharmacological therapy has been shown to lead to limited efficacy, and overall, not all individuals with ADHD can tolerate such treatment. Some trial efforts have been made to find out if it is possible to train attentional control patterns with the hope to enhance attention functions.

In a study from BioMed Central Ltd. (2022), they discovered positive effects from Goal Management Training (GMT). GMT is a group-based metacognitive remediation program aimed at reducing deficiencies of goal management, based on the attentional control theory of goal neglect. The theory describes how goal management fails when an individual is unable to maintain task focus towards future goals due to being unable to cope with the competing demands of other salient stimuli or ongoing activities (Jensen, 2022). The program is structured through the process of teaching participants a five-phase strategy to increase goal attaining and overall accomplishment. Important components include the intermittent stopping of ongoing behavior to orient towards relevant goals, and practicing mindfulness training meant to help develop the skills needed to maintain a focus on the present, as well as the active use of self-cueing to regulate alertness to maintain executive control. GMT is a strategy that will be considered in Goals 2-4.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is the term used to describe early-appearing social communication deficits and repetitive sensory-motor behaviors. ASD includes the word "spectrum" for a reason - as researchers are continuing to find out more about what constitutes ASD symptoms and behaviors, allowing more people to better understand themselves through diagnoses. Mostly, individuals with ASD tend to differ greatly from one another; the disorder is characterized by two core feature areas: social communication and restricted, repetitive sensory-motor behaviors. ASD results from early altered brain development and neural reorganization. However, because there are no reliable biomarkers, the diagnosis must be made on the basis of behavior (Lord, 2018).

Persistent anxiety and uncontrollable worry for at least six months is characterized as generalized anxiety disorder or GAD (Fricchione, 2004). People suffering from GAD are more than just "worriers," as the condition can be debilitating when it comes to making decisions, participating in social situations, or more tense/high-stress situations. Within the workplace, this can lead to frequent miscommunication and lower workplace satisfaction. Situations such as

receiving short emails with vague tones, being pulled into meetings with little to no explanation, or negative-only feedback can create reactionary employees for those who struggle with GAD (Cheng, 2018). Even those who may not be fully diagnosed with GAD may experience these types of obstacles, hence why this product is so important. With Bridge, the goal is that these types of (very common) situations can be avoided or lessened.

Major depressive disorder (MDD) is a mood disorder that causes a persistent feeling of sadness and loss of interest. It affects how one feels, thinks, and behaves and can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems (Mayo Clinic, n.d.). Similar to GAD, many of these symptoms can occur in people without a full diagnosis, which continues the emphasis on the importance of a tool like Bridge. Depression can lead to struggles with motivation, participation, and overall morale in the workplace. Signs of depression or MDD may not always be shown at work, but over time and without the proper support in place from the employer/organization, it will be harder to keep the struggle separate from work life.

Learning disabilities are due to genetic and/or neurobiological factors that alter brain functions in a way that affects cognitive processes in relation to learning. These processing problems can interfere with learning basic skills such as reading, writing, and math. They can also interfere with higher level skills such as organization, time planning, abstract reasoning, long or short-term memory and attention, and all things that are necessary in a typically efficient workplace. Some learning disabilities include but are not limited to Dyscalculia, Dysgraphia, and Dyslexia. Dyslexia, a learning disability that affects reading and related language-based processing skills, affects 5-8% of the workforce (Doyle, 2019). A Dyslexia diagnosis confers legal protections as employers must provide disability accommodations to assist work functioning and performance, such as coaching, but lacks theoretical framing and evaluations of impact in practice (Doyle, 2019).

All of these neurodivergencies are highly important to consider in this project, but there is an important subject to consider as the ultimate theme – mental health. All of these neurodivergencies affect the mental health of the person who has them, creating a discrepancy in the workplace by nature with people who have not experienced such mental illnesses or setbacks before. This is why Bridge is so focused on culture and communication building, as well as being people-focused, because that is what will bridge the gap between the two groups here: neurodivergent and neurotypical people.

## Goal 2 - Web development processes, usability, and market research/comparison

In this goal, research will be evaluated regarding user experience (UX) and user interface (UI), in order to eventually tie it in with the needs and findings of Goal 1. Plus, three market productivity style tools that have pros and cons in relation to Bridge's specific mission will be considered for the future developments of Bridge.

Usability is fairly new in the world of technology, especially in relative terms to many other tech-related, web-based processes. Usability is exactly what it sounds like: how the user will want to use the product. Usability can cover anything from the simplest of topics like what buttons a user would like to click, all the way to complex concepts rooted in psychology. User experience is very similar, in that it is the process of finding the best ways to increase the success of a user's experience while using the product. Usability and experience factors, especially when talking about a productivity tool, are vital to ensuring a user continues using the product. If a product is too complicated to navigate, not pleasing to look at, or drives the user away, then the product does not have a comprehensive UI or UX. As for the pre-existing productivity style tools that are already on the market, there are three currently dominating the market: Notion, ClickUp, and Asana. First, it is important to define what a productivity tool is and why people use them. Productivity tools are software (both web and non-based) designed to simplify tasks, streamline workflows, and include features that allow you to access documents quickly, create charts and graphs to visualize project planning and progress – in short, to collaborate with others. These tools all have a similar goal of creating a more productive workspace, but lack the people forward attitude, which makes them ultimately counterproductive.

Notion is a note-taking style software platform designed to help members of companies or organizations manage their knowledge for greater efficiency and productivity. It is one of the more customizable of the three here, but unfortunately, much of its demise comes along with that, as it can be difficult to set up and daunting for less tech-savvy individuals. Aside from the intimidation factor, Notion's clean slate aesthetic is appealing and approachable, especially for users with attention deficits. It does offer templates for an array of potential users and needs, including students, project managers, creatives, and even customer management systems.

<u>ClickUp</u> is an all-in-one productivity tool built for teams of all types across any industry. Users can plan, track, and collaborate on any project, build workflows, create marketing campaigns, manage development sprints, and more all in one platform. ClickUp has a more intuitive notification system for a work environment comparatively to Notion, but not one that is people-focused. Most of this application is very goal-oriented, with most of the task views having several buttons, links, requirements, and other functions, that can result in users becoming overwhelmed and overstimulated quickly. The set-up for ClickUp is easier than Notion for those who may not be as technically able, but there is a lack of training modules and resources to refer back on after the initial set up stages which is limiting for customization purposes. The aesthetic of ClickUp is very sterile and corporate as well, which is non-conducive to more creative and neurodivergent thinkers.

Asana is a web and mobile "work management" platform designed to help teams organize, track, and manage their work. This tool is more layered with a complicated user interface, making it last on the list of recommendations in the survey conducted in this project's research. For all intents and purposes, Asana is not a one stop shop, and if anything, adds extra steps to workflow. Extra steps in regard to overall efficiency, especially in a project sense, is unnecessary and only limiting those who may have differences or setbacks comparatively to managers or coworkers.

To wrap up Goal 2, the last part of the phase was to pull together the branding. To do this, it was vital to <u>utilize six different elements</u> of a brand including: voice, identity, promise, values, targeting, and positioning. This all tied together to create a brand kit, shown in Figure 1.

A brand's voice is what should be the direct communication between customer and brand – like if they were sitting down for a cup of coffee. Bridge's voice can be defined in a specific and clear manner: approachable, empathetic, and spirited. The brand is meant to be approachable because productivity can be a scary concept for those who struggle with time management and task orientation. It is empathetic due to the fragile nature of discussing neurodivergency and mental illnesses in the workplace. It is spirited in the regard that even though there may be roadblocks, there will always be a way to *bridge the gap* when using Bridge.

The brand identity for Bridge is meant to be the personality of the brand – which includes several components of its overall appearance, both visual and nonvisual. The brand identity is authentic, fresh, and people-oriented. The authenticity of the brand is at the forefront in order to

create a sense of trust with the users. It is fresh because it is offering something that no one has ever done before, breaking into an untapped sector of a large industry. It is people-oriented, meaning that the brand believes that if it is not focused on the people using the product first, then the desired outcomes of the people will never reach their fullest potential.

A brand promise is a value or experience a company's customers can expect to receive every single time they interact with that company. The more a company can deliver on that promise, the stronger the brand value in the mind of customers and employees. The brand promise for Bridge is "A thoughtful workflow." This is partially a play on words, because it seems redundant that workflow (the way an employee goes about their day) would need to be thoughtful, but that is exactly where Bridge is solving a problem – many workflows emphasize the wrong components of a successful work day, and ultimately, a satisfied employee. Bridge is promising that the workflow setup will eliminate the need for redundancy or inefficiency by being more thoughtful and human than the other products on the market.

Brand values can be defined as the foundational beliefs that a company stands for. They refer to the "ideals" guiding the brand's actions, such as environmental protection, diversity, solidarity, or transparency. The values of Bridge entail the following: inclusivity, productivity, and encouragement. All three of these values are only successful if they coexist with one another. Without inclusivity, productivity will never be at its highest potential. Without productivity, there is no encouraging factor to start a new task, continue working on a difficult project, or stay satisfied in the workplace. Without encouragement, there is a lack of inclusivity – making the values a cyclical model.

Targeting is a strategy that breaks down a more significant market into smaller segments and focuses on a smaller set of customers within that audience. It then defines those sets of customers based on a few unique characteristics and concentrates solely on satisfying them. Bridge's brand target is focused on working individuals who identify as or work alongside peers with roadblocks or setbacks such as neurodivergency or mental illness, specifically in a creative focused and project-based industry.

The unique selling proposition is what positions the brand and describes how a brand is different from its competitors and where, or how, it sits in customers' minds. The positioning of Bridge is probably the easiest of all the elements to describe because of its unique mission – being a people-first tool. The competitors of Bridge all sit on a different hill, with a set of values and a voice that is far more goal-oriented and far less people-oriented, which is the whole reason Bridge came to be in the first place. Without the competitors, Bridge would not have been dreamt to be.

#### Goal 3 - Project management strategies that can be translated into applications

Goal 3 involves creating project management strategies that can be translated into the web-based software. This goal is going to focus on taking progressive and purposeful project management strategies and finding ways to integrate them into the usability efforts from Goal 2. Sometimes the current state of business can make challenges more prevalent as stated in *A Comparative Study of Web-Based Technology Applications in Corporations*:

Due to the complexity of international trade and intense global competition, businesses today are facing challenges that were unthinkable a decade ago. To effectively respond to these challenges, companies continue to explore new ways to measure and extend value to their existing and new customer base. (Lollar et al., 2010, pp. 316-317)

Because business practices have changed so quickly in such a short amount of time, primarily due to the internet and technology, professionals must pick up the pace as well through key management strategies. Translating that strategy into the machine (the internet) is the key to success.

### Goal 4 - Implementing both psychological and web development strategies

For the project to come to fruition, research will lead to the eventual implementation of the psychological and web development strategies together in a way that will boost productivity, lessen burnout, and better communications between team members with differences. This goal phase is the meat and bones of the project and where it should come to life. This phase will be complete via the culmination of the research of the three steps above, leading to the creation of the platform itself. The creation of Bridge will take place primarily in Directed Project II of Spring 2023 after the foundation of goals 1-3 are complete. This section of the app on a SquareSpace site started in order to get a better idea of the concept without diving headfirst into a builder that costs a lot of money. The website can be found here. Then, user experience became a priority, implementing the branding to a visual and moving layout, and overall structure. The final product will not be built in SquareSpace, again this is purely for road-mapping and brainstorming purposes.

The first phase of Goal 4 that was completed during this semester was the survey process. After working alongside the IRB chair at Lindenwood University, the <u>survey</u> was finalized and approved to send to industry professionals. This finalizationa and approval entailed news organizations, advertising and marketing agencies, designers and freelancers, and a handful of other creative-driven roles. The survey was concise and was mostly focused on hearing about the productivity tool experiences of those who do struggle with mental illness and roadblocks versus those who did not report that experience. After 87 responses, it was found that 47 people stated they have been diagnosed with one of the mental illnesses listed. Of those 47, 26 people said they had used a productivity tool before. Of the 30 people who answered no or unsure to the initial question, 20 said they had used a productivity tool before. Overall, this gave a fairly balanced perspective of the needs and wants of different types of people who have varying day to day experiences, but all in a similar industry/field. The three biggest takeaways from those who have used a productivity tool were 1. Not enough tutorials or training before or after implementation of these tools, and overall feeling unprepared to utilize the tool. 2. Feeling overwhelmed by the user interface and experience. 3. Not everyone uses the same tool the same, so it is difficult to co-work within the space. Through these three takeaways, the direction of the beginning phases of the project are able to take the necessary development steps.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The primary research methodology used in the creation of Bridge is based in psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis is a very different approach to understanding critical theory and approaching works - whether that be film, physical art, advertising media, or other forms of multimedia. There are two basic perspectives to keep in mind in regards to psychoanalysis: interpretations of what was on the creator's mind while creating the work, and what effect does their work have on the audience. In practice, psychology uses psychoanalysis to treat mental disorders through forms of therapy. In definition - psychoanalysis involves the purpose to cure these disorders by investigating the interaction of conscious and unconscious elements in the mind. The whole goal of this is to reveal or uncover repressed conflicts and problems in order to deal with them in the conscious state of mind. A large focus in psychoanalysis is separating the conscious and subconscious mind. The subconscious is the part of the mind that the conscious is not aware of, but one can recall it. The unconscious mind is the part that the conscious mind cannot be aware of because the concepts are too traumatic or forbidden.

As a method, psychoanalysis is going to look at the unconscious as being reductive – as though the research would be looking at works and investigating them in a way that believes that the author was not aware of what they were doing, because it would then be a result of some type of illness or wrong-doing. This is not present in the conscious mind, but can be reduced to basic human drives and motivations. Sigmund Freud, the discoverer of the therapeutic method of psychoanalysis, discusses the model of the human mind - a very important foundation when discussing this methodology in practice. There are three parts: the id, the ego, and the superego. These represent, in order, the unconscious, the conscious, and the conscience. The initial usage of this methodology was through Freud's exploration of dream interpretations. He discovered how to unravel the concept of latent dreams, and ultimately spilled these discoveries into other concepts such as psychosexual analysis, and the Oedipus Complex. In Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, he comes to the realization that much of what is appearing in his dreams are events that have already occurred, or at least relate, to the dream.

"If I now consult my own experience with regard to the origin of the elements appearing in the dream-content, I must in the first place express the opinion that in every dream we may find some reference to the experiences of the preceding day. Whatever dream I turn to, whether my own or someone else's, this experience is always confirmed" (Freud, n.d., para. #5).

This level of psychoanalysis is the type of methodology that we can see in the form of artistic criticism and research - understanding how the subconscious interacts with the conscious, and how marketers and creators can capitalize off of those interactions.

In the specific case of this project itself, psychoanalysis felt like the only answer to turn to at times – especially while surveying and gathering people-focused research (hence, the goal of the project). With the goal and overall mission of Bridge being the direct benefit of a product to human beings, it is hard to deny the necessary methodology use of psychoanalysis that comes to play. Looking at the origin of this project – the why – it is even rooted in psychoanalysis and looking at what types of people-focused problems there are in the workplace. After coming to the conclusion that productivity tools were not being properly implemented, and then finding that the tools themselves were the root of the problem, that led to an even bigger discovery in relation to the eventual research methodology: the people who create these types of tools are not the people who usually need them. Once the research stage began, the focus was on the different types of mental illnesses that might have an effect on an employee in the workplace, continuing to lean into the methodology at hand. Eventually, a large part of the product/brand's identity became the fact that it is people-focused, rooted in the importance of taking care of the human mind, and how psychoanalysis has to be a part of managerial roles when implementing project management strategies.

#### TIMELINE

#### Semester progress:

The following steps were completed during the Fall 2022 semester (Directed Project I):

- Prospectus creation
  - Abstract
  - Introduction
  - Literature review
    - Gathering 25+ sources and annotating

- Linking the research methodology utilized
- Curating a month-by-month timeline for the course to update professor and committee members
- Branding
  - Conducting research on design theory for neurodivergent users
  - Designing a logo
  - Curating a brand kit (colors, fonts, logo variations)
  - Identifying the six brand elements

# - Survey

- Curate a survey
- Work with the IRB to adjust questions + receive approval
- Distribute the survey to 87 industry professionals across news organizations,

marketing + advertising, and strategic communications

- Analyze data to draw conclusions on product needs and wants
- Break down data in the Prospectus
- Oral defense
  - Edits to the prospectus
    - Abstract and introduction clean up
    - Refocusing in on the title
    - Literature goals sections
    - Refining research methodology
  - Dabbling with different development tools
  - Updating survey info

- Development: bridgeworkflow.squarespace.com
  - Map out some initial ideas in Figma's "Jam" template tool
  - Put together at least 3 functions in a SquareSpace site to get a feel for overall usability and user interface (i.e., landing page, user sign up, and home page)
  - Create one intro/ad like video to set an example of the brand tone + voice
  - Create a "Hello" email account for Bridge

Spring 2023 (Directed Project II):

- Create one tutorial video to set an example of what the Help Desk page will eventually look like (over winter break)
- Research different app builders to create a prototype version of Bridge.
- Select and study how to use Bubble IO
- Move the SquareSpace site entirely to Bubble's programming ability
- Finish 10 functions by March 1, 2023 (i.e. task lists, communicator tools, goals lists)
- Give the application to a test group of individuals by April 1, 2023
- Make edits based off the test group's experiences to make the site up to 15 functions
- Curate a final draft of the project report based off this prospectus
- Complete Directed Project II coursework that may accompany the finalization of the project

This plan is subject to change based on professor, committee chair, and committee members direction, as well as student direction in regards to unpredictable elements such as changes in the field, new technology, funding, and graduation date.

# Figure 1



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