How To Manage Multiple Projects At Once



While digital transformation has brought a wealth of benefits to modern commerce, it has also created a business climate that moves more quickly than ever before.

Senior management, team leaders and individuals are all expected to tackle more work in less time, with the same resources, in order to preserve or enhance their companies' competitive strength, performance, and profitability.

As a result, knowing how to manage multiple projects at once has become an essential skill at all levels of enterprise.

Multitasking is nothing new, of course, but the complexity of today's multi-project management has created a new business environment that requires teams and individuals to leverage digital tools powered by advanced technologies, as well as the right techniques to get the job done effectively and efficiently.

By taking the time to understand both the tools and the techniques, you can develop a multitasking methodology that empowers team members and leaders alike.

Knowing How to Manage Multiple Projects is Essential

Today's busy professionals begin their days with a to-do list that often spans multiple different projects, with multiple shared dependencies.

Team members often add one or more projects outside their official job duties to their task list, expanding the expectations placed upon them, their need to educate themselves on different parts of their businesses, and the number of deliverables they need to complete on any given day.

For team leaders, that task list also includes mastering time management and time tracking, prioritizing different workflows and projects, and allocating resources while delegating responsibilities to their team members as appropriate.

These leaders also have to manage expectations from project sponsors and other stakeholders and perform reporting on project progress—including benchmarks, budgets, and roadblocks—in real time.

This complex web of expectations and requirements means just about everyone in an organization, from individual team members and their project managers to the C-suite, needs to understand project management, resource management, and prioritization to contribute and collaborate effectively.

The development and implementation of proactive strategies for cross-functional collaboration (for individuals and teams) and cross-functional team leadership (for project managers, team leaders, and senior management)—is crucial.

In addition, these strategies must be supported by digital tools powered by emerging technologies such as machine learning, robotic process automation, and advanced data analytics, as well as education and training to provide the skills necessary to communicate and collaborate with everyone on the team as well as stakeholders outside the project(s) being managed.

By combining technology with technique, everyone in an organization can effectively streamline their workflows, track progress, practice responsible resource management, and produce the deliverables essential to supporting

company goals, whether they're working on a single project or a dozen.

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Best Practices in Multiple Project Management

A major factor in the shift toward multiple project management methodologies is the growing importance of both big data and digital transformation to the competitive success of organizations.

Digital technologies have raised the bar for potential performance and profitability.

But as capabilities increase, so, too, do expectations, and following a few best practices across all levels of an organization makes it easier to harness the former in order to meet the latter.

For Team Members

For individuals, working on multiple different projects via membership in one or more cross-functional teams creates a complex web of responsibilities.

Why? Because any single team member may serve a junior role on one team, and a more senior position, or even the role of project manager, on another.

Accordingly, it's important to develop a set of skills and practices you can adapt to any set of circumstances relying on cross-functional collaboration.

- **Prioritize and Organize.** Make sure you have a clear understanding of your role on every single project you're a part of. Take the time to learn the overall goals of the project, the expectations, responsibilities, and deliverables that come with your role, and what, if any, shared dependencies this project has with others of which you're a part. Get a clear view of the timelines involved, and which benchmarks are

particularly important or time-sensitive.

This will help you modify and streamline your task list based on remaining time, urgency, budget, etc. Pulling back to see the big picture helps minimize stress by giving you the perspective needed to avoid scheduling a time-consuming and detailed (but not time-sensitive) task on one project at the same time another project is hitting crunch time.

- **Practice laser-like focus.** While working across projects and platforms is reality for countless workers across the globe, it's important to remember multitasking can be a productivity drain if it's not done properly. Trying to accomplish two time-consuming and complex tasks, or even a simple task and a more complex one, simply doesn't work as well as dedicated your undivided attention to a specific task.

  So once you have the big picture, be prepared to identify the tasks that require the most attention, mental and physical resources, etc. and give it your all. Build your to-do list around a clear and concise set of deliverables, the actions required to produce them, and then get to work.

  Keep switching to a minimum, although you can add some flexibility if your day includes a period when you know you'll be interrupted for quick meetings or phone calls by making sure you're working on a task that doesn't require sustained concentration during those times.

  Your work environment can have a powerful impact on your focus, so take measures to avoid interruptions when concentration is absolutely required. Doing so will set expectations for others and avoid unnecessary conflicts or misunderstandings.

    - Change your phone and email messages to let coworkers and others know you're unavailable at certain times. Consider including a mobile phone number for emergencies.
    - If necessary and possible, find a quiet and secure location where you can physically isolate yourself for optimal concentration. If you work at home, make sure you're sequestered from both tempting distractions (TV, games, music) and family members alike.
- **Track your progress—and keep everyone in the loop.** In addition to providing a feeling of accomplishment, keeping track of your progress helps you monitor your performance, identify potential disruptions or delays before they become major headaches, and show your team leaders and other stakeholders that the project is moving forward. Making sure

you keep your colleagues and leaders informed with regular updates helps them update their own task lists, and make any adjustments necessary to ensure the project sticks to its budget, timeline, and deliverables.

- **Educate yourself.** Cross-functional collaboration is a fantastic opportunity for individual team members to learn more about other parts of the business outside their specific areas of expertise. However, because time constraints often create circumstances where each team member simply focuses on their respective areas of expertise rather than taking the time to provide a deeper understanding of those areas to others, you'll need to be proactive. Decide what you'd like to know more about, identify who can help you learn, and choose projects that help you reach your goals for learning and personal growth. Be clear about your desire to learn. Communicate with both the folks you hope to learn from and your team leaders so you can, with a little additional planning, work mentorship and learning into your time on a given project.
  Remember, too, that learning takes time, research, and reflection. Make sure you dedicate time to active reflection, and you'll absorb and retain more of what you learn.

For Project Managers

Leadership roles carry greater responsibility than those of the average team member. In addition to your own duties and deliverables, you need the project management skills necessary to develop a project plan, build a project team, and keep track of both individual and project progress—all without succumbing to fatigue, frustration, or the perils of micromanaging.

General project management skills aside, team leaders can improve the chances of project success by:

- Prioritizing collaboration and communication, along with education and training.
- Delegating effectively in order to keep projects on track or provide contingencies to insulate against disruptions and delays.
- Securing buy-in for the digital tools required to harness technologies such as artificial intelligence and process automation, as well as the tools themselves.

- Following best practices for remote team management—an especially important skill in the age of COVID-19 and other major business disruptors.
- Working closely with senior management to develop detailed project planning for both single projects, larger projects with shared dependencies, and the organization's overall approach to meeting its goals for performance and growth.

For Organizations

Senior management definitely takes a direct role in both portfolio management—the methodologies used to select and prioritize different projects—and multiple project management itself.

However, their greatest potential contribution to the success of the projects under their purview may be providing the technology and software tools their teams need to get the job done.

In addition to best-in-class project management software and project-specific tools, choosing and implementing a centralized software solution like PLANERGY provides direct support for all projects by laying the foundations for continuous improvement and digital transformation throughout the organization.

- Cloud-based, centralized data management consolidates information resources and provides role-appropriate, mobile-friendly access in real time. Comprehensive data collection and organization ensures complete, and transparent, data for analysis. Team members, project managers, and senior management can access, manipulate, and analyze data from user-friendly dashboards for easier, more accurate budgeting, reporting, and forecasts on single projects and across the organization.
- Process automation streamlines workflows, boosting accuracy, efficiency, and speed. It also eliminates human error and the need for direct human intervention on high-volume, time-consuming tasks. It also provides iterative improvement over time through self-directed machine learning.
- Integration with your existing software environment, along with tools such as templates and automatic data population, eliminates inaccuracies and data silos. Team members can access and share information, communicate and collaborate more effectively, using standardized data

types and a consistent suite of applications.

Prioritize, Organize, Streamline, and Share the Load

There's lots to be done, and not much time in which to do it.

Make sure your organization—and the team members who drive its success—have the skills and project management tools they need to tackle today's complex collaborative endeavors.

With a proactive and strategic approach, a commitment to communication and shared labor, and the right digital technologies, you'll be ready to make sure every new project is a successful one.

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