

Project management

What makes a project different from your day-to-day work is that it has a beginning and an end. To get from beginning to end, a project manager must follow a sequence of steps applicable to all tasks.

Some projects can be highly complex activities, involving numerous sub-tasks, intricate scheduling and detailed monitoring. They can range from planning a company conference to producing a video or building a factory.

Steps to effectively plan and manage a project are:

1. Establish your objectives

Define clearly, in concrete terms, the purpose of the project. Write down the project specifications or the criteria for a successful outcome and ensure that they are agreed to by all parties involved. These specifications define your objectives for the project.

2. Set a deadline

Some projects must be completed by a certain date. Your planning will hinge on this final deadline. If you have not been given a completion date, set one for yourself.

3. Identify the tasks to be done

List everything that needs to be done on the way to final completion. It could be a long list, but it must be a complete list. Ensure nothing is missing. If you are not sure of all the tasks, seek advice. If you do not have a complete breakdown of jobs, you will have difficulty organising the project's timeline, developing a budget and handing out assignments.

4. Organise the tasks in sequence

Arrange the tasks into their order of performance. What happens first? What comes next? Timing becomes a vital factor – projects can have a sequential line of development (do one job before moving onto the next), or a parallel line of development (several jobs can be taking place at once), or both. Understand the sequence clearly by creating a logic diagram – a Program Evaluation and Review Technique (PERT) chart, a critical path network, or a Work Breakdown Structural Document (WBSD).

5. Allocate a time for each task

Using your logic diagram, estimate how much time each task will take (estimate an optimistic time, a pessimistic time, and then take the average). Factor in a little extra time to cover delays or problems.

6. Create a schedule

Using this information, you can now place a target date for each task on to your logic diagram. It is sometimes wise to also set specific review dates to evaluate progress and to modify your course if necessary. Remember, if you have a definite completion date, it is often helpful to work backwards from that date, providing you with an indication of how much time compression must be applied to get the project finished in time.

The creation of a horizontal bar chart might also be useful at this stage. List the tasks sequentially down the side of the chart and appropriate calendar periods across the top. Create a bar of the calendar period that each task is expected to take.

7. Assign tasks

Delegate appropriate tasks to project members, not forgetting to allocate time to yourself for overall project management duties. Look for the full range of experience and expertise when putting your project team together. Ensure all team members are available at appropriate times, and are fully briefed as to their responsibilities and deadline dates.

The creation of a project team matrix might help you keep track of who's doing what, and to keep you from overloading some team members. This matrix lists the tasks vertically, team members along the top and responsibilities below each name.

8. Establish a budget

Project budgets are normally activity-oriented. Estimate all costs associated with each task and prepare a spreadsheet with tasks listed vertically and cost factors (expenses, labour, resources etc) listed horizontally, totalled at the right of each line.

9. Monitor the project to completion

Supervise the progress of the project, in particular:

- **Keep track of progress:** refer frequently to the project charts.
- **Communicate regularly:** keep on top of what's happening through status reports and formal and informal meetings with your team members.
- **Become a trouble-shooter:** identify trouble spots and emerging gaps between scheduled and actual performance.
- **Take corrective action:** when necessary, step in to develop alternative solutions, take remedial action, and follow-up to ensure your solution is effective.
- **Use your managerial skills:** utilise essential skills such as motivation, conflict resolution, team leadership, meeting facilitation, persuasion etc.
- **Evaluate the project:** on completion, hold debriefings to review problems and successes, and make recommendations for future projects.



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Further information

The following fact sheets provide further information on these issues:

- Business planning
- Set achievable goals