TACTICAL TIME MANAGEMENT
WITHIN A PROJECT ENVIRONMENT

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Introduction
Many organisations have been faced with months of cost-cutting and having to do more with less, placing further demands on an already stretched workforce. As the early shoots of growth start appearing, organisations may look to increasing their productivity, stretching workers even further.

Project-based businesses understand the importance of delivering projects on time and to budget as their profitability and even survival depend on this. A major factor in the successful delivery of projects is effective time management.

With the constraints of cost cutting and reduced workforces as well as the challenges of increasing productivity, an organisations approach to time management needs to be more tactical.

Tactical Time Management — What is this?
Tactical time management is about doing the right task, at the right time and in the most effective and efficient way.

It is about recouping some of your time back so you can focus on increasing your productivity, and improving the working environment. Instead of feeling pressured by time; procrastinating about what you haven’t done, you can feel confident in the choices you make and satisfied that what you are doing is right.

When dealing with project management, doing the right task at the right time comes down to the successful planning and scheduling of your project. Carrying out each task effectively relies on effective resource management. The efficient delivery of tasks is down to effective time management.

Multiple Project Time Management
Knowing what tasks have been completed and the percentage complete of in progress tasks is critical to understanding your current progress. Having early notification that additional resources are required to meet key milestones is important in ensuring projects are delivered on time.

What about the cost impact of additional resources? Whilst they may be required to meet the delivery date, how will this impact the budget? Project managers will need to be able to track all project costs, including expenses if they are to accurately track a projects progress.
Project managers will ask themselves ‘Is this project going to be delivered on time and within budget?’ The more projects you have the more data you need to collate, and even with a small resource pool, getting accurate and up to date progress data can take time.

**Multiple Resource Time Management**
Knowing who is doing what, when and where; what their skills and strengths are is important if the right person is to be allocated to each task. Simple if you only have two or three people to manage, but what happens when you have 10, 20 or more to manage?

Tracking an individual or team’s performance is necessary in ensuring they are delivering what was planned and to a satisfactory level. If you have resources with charge out rates then you will want to ensure they are being utilised most cost effectively.

Resource managers will ask themselves ‘Am I getting the most out of my resources?’ The larger the resource pool the more time is spent on tracking and monitoring individual performance, and less time ensuring your top performers are on your most critical of tasks.

People are the integral part of projects and project management. They both manage the project and perform the work and therefore projects succeed or fail through their involvement.¹

Taking a tactical approach to your time management ensures that from the start your project is on the right path to be delivered on time, within budget and delivers maximum benefits to your organisation.

One way of achieving this is through the use of an integrated web-based time and expense management system.

**Easing the administrative burden**
Web-based timesheets are an extremely low cost alternative to the traditional paper format. With access provided from anywhere at any time, recording and submitting progress becomes quick and simple.

Using pre-populated timesheets outlining the week’s tasks means the amount of time it takes to record progress is dramatically reduced as resources need only record the units of time completed.

Submitting timesheets over the web is instant and makes lost or delayed timesheets through the post a thing of the past. The administrative burden is also eased for managers, as they can simply log on, view all submitted timesheets and approve them, again from anywhere, at any time.

Centrally managed systems make searching for timesheet data quick and simple. Key search criteria can be used to quickly allocate the required timesheet for a particular individual, team, department, project or time period.

**Accurate time recording**
Project management typically deals with delivering projects to a set budget; preferably under budget. Service-based organisations may be working to promised ‘service level agreements’,
while Consultancies will be working with charge-out rates and so must remain competitive.

Being able to accurately record time in the increments that are best suited to the project you are delivering is extremely beneficial in improving your time management.

Systems that provide complete visibility of the work completed and the time remaining to completion, better equip managers in assessing whether a project will be delivered on time and to budget.

Through accurate time recording, organisations can rest assured that every minute of chargeable work is invoiced. On the flip side you can avoid over-charging customers, which risks harming the relationship or at worst, losing their custom all together.

**Improved communication**

Good communication is important for tactical time management. Removing manual processes speeds up the communication between managers and team members, allowing for faster decision making and responsiveness to any changes in the project’s schedule.

Web-based timesheets that include hyperlinks are great for providing quick access to the latest project information and any supporting documentation necessary for the successful completion of tasks. This is of particular benefit to those who work remotely.

Systems that allow for logging new tasks, overtime, additional non-project work and expenses via your timesheets will further enhance communications. Managers can then quickly assess the impact this may have on the project’s delivery date/budget and be more proactive in their approach.

**Performance monitoring**

Whilst it may look like team members are working to their full capacity, this doesn’t mean they are spending 100% of their time on project tasks. Meetings, administration and training are all commonplace in an organisation.

Being able to identify how much time employees are spending on project-related work, non-project work and non-work related activities, makes forward planning and forecasting of future projects far more accurate.

Performance data gathered through your web-based timesheets can be used to review individual performances and ensure that optimum staffing costs are maintained through effective resource planning.

The same data can be illustrated in a number of management reports highlighting key information on an organisation’s costs, revenue and profitability across people, projects, departments, cost centres and clients.

**Summary**

A recent study by Aberdeen Group² shows the top ‘project specific’ pressures for project-based organisations are:

- Keeping the number of projects manageable
- Utilising resources wisely

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The ability to manage project scheduling and balance resource workload are both critical factors to improving project profitability. To overcome these issues, those organisations that are categorised as best-in-class are utilising the following enterprise level management tools:

Source: Aberdeen Group, December 2010

Project performance is dependent upon getting the balance right, which is greatly supported through tactical time management and made effective through the use of enterprise level project management tools.

Tactical time management can deliver many benefits from improving your rate of successful project delivery, maintaining high competency levels, improving staff morale, reducing operational costs and increasing profits.

If you would like to discover more about Asta Development’s multi-user project and resource management solutions, including time and expense management systems then go to www.astadev.com

Sources

1 APM Body of Knowledge, 5th edition (section 7)

2 Executing the Project Plan: When Projects are your Business – Aberdeen Group 2010
Asta Powerproject—a powerful, seamless and flexible software solution for multiple projects. Includes software, consultancy, implementation, training and technical support.

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