5 THINGS YOU HATE ABOUT YOUR PROJECT MANAGEMENT TOOL

AtTask®

If you're a project leader, the secret is out: you could love your job more. According to Salary Explorer, project leaders rate their job satisfaction as a 2.69 out of 5[1]. That's barely above take it or leave it. Stress was listed as the number one contributor to this lackluster rating. And, although there are stress factors that you can't always control—like your workload—your project management tool should not be one of them.

Unfortunately, it often is.

As a project leader, your job depends on the ability to communicate up, down, and across the range of stakeholders. That information is used to build plans, set schedules and budgets, and track progress. Although most project leaders use some sort of project management tool in their work, many have developed a love-hate relationship with it.

While project management tools can be very powerful, they often fall short of helping you be truly efficient. You may even be doing duplicate entry in several tools in an attempt to meet your needs and those of your team members and stakeholders. If your organization allows (as many do) different groups to invest in different tools to manage their work—even within the same department—the problem only compounds. You keep trying different solutions to no avail and, over time, discarded project management tools pile up in the shelfware junkyard. Meanwhile, your frustration continues.

Read on to learn the five most common reasons why project leaders hate their project management tool and what can be done to fix it.

1 YOUR TEAM MEMBERS WON'T USE IT

More than 80% of surveyed companies use spreadsheets to manage their work.[2]

You bought a new project management tool. It makes great-looking Gantt charts, creates critical path schedules, and performs resource leveling. With all of these essential features, why can't you get your team to use it? Unfortunately, most project management tools are too complex for most users. Not everyone understands how project management works, and not all users or stakeholders are as tech savvy as the folks in IT or the PMO. So, if it takes more time to learn the tool than the time it saves, adoption rates will forever remain low.

Sadly, for that reason and more, very few think their project management tool is very effective. In fact, the average worker uses 13 different tools or methods to control and manage their work.[3] It's no surprise that when one tool is not seen as effective, team members create workarounds. Many end up managing their work in to-do lists, spreadsheets on their hard drive, or

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whiteboards over their desks. That leaves you with the additional work of tracking down the status of their tasks and entering the updates into your project management tool yourself. Worse yet, project data suffers when only one person is filtering and entering it, leaving your organization without the institutional knowledge to leverage down the road.

2 IT'S NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE TO TRACK PROJECT CONVERSATIONS

Effective communication is associated with a 17 percent increase in finishing projects within budget.[4]

Managing a project effectively requires collaboration from everyone involved. Whether it's a question on a task, clarifying a comment on a deliverable, or providing a status update, communication is a crucial part of project management. However, most project management tools are only meant to track status, workload, and timelines—they are not interactive. As a result, team members and business clients resort to collaborating the way that works best for them, such as: sending a strings of emails, leaving phone messages, setting up meetings, and even communicating through random hallway conversations.

It's practically impossible to have a productive conversation with information that is scattered, outdated, and inaccessible. You know all too painfully well how hard it is to dig through email threads trying to capture what was said—and, that's only if you were copied on it. Precious time is wasted in meetings while everyone waits for two people to resolve their issue. In fact, most managers spend up to 10 hours a week in meetings, and 90% say more than half that time is wasted.[5] You try to take notes and add them to the project plan. But, without an easy way to collaborate in the context of the work itself, you end up spending more time managing the work than doing the work.

3 THERE IS NO EASY WAY TO MANAGE AD HOC REQUESTS

The average IT organization spends 45 percent to 55 percent of their time on unplanned (and urgent) activities.[6]

It's a small request and won't take long, but how do you fit that in when your resources are already stretched thin? Maintenance, bug fixes, ad hoc requests, and other non-project work will always be there, but most of that work is managed outside of your regular project management tools. Even if you can manage the planned work, how will you determine which ad hoc requests the team can do and which you will have to say no to?

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The trouble with ad hoc requests is that they typically come at you from all directions: top down and bottom up, and even sideways. They range from nice-to-have, like website edits, to urgent and mandatory, such as security fixes. You are left to sort through them and decide what to do. What tends to get done first are the squeaky wheels or executive "favors," not necessarily the most strategic work.

The result is pure chaos. Even though you are scrambling to balance all of this work, requests still get lost or neglected, project tasks get superseded, and budgets get blown. Your customers' faith in you as a project leader quickly disappears.

4 THEY DON'T WORK THE WAY YOU DO

44% of project leaders surveyed must support a mix of Agile and Waterfall methodologies.[7]

The IT world has become a pretty complicated one. The speed of change is demanding, requiring even more flexibility in the way work gets done. Project management is no exception. As the project leader, you are now responsible for managing a mix of methodologies, global development teams, and remote workers. Most project management tools weren't built for that.

Additionally, with a variety of management methodologies being utilized—including Agile and Waterfall, sometimes even within the same project—it can be a major headache to keep it all straight. You may have invested in a new project management tool built specifically for each methodology. It can be hard enough to manage one project management tool, let alone different tools for different types of projects. And what happens when Agile work impacts a broader, and more traditional, project plan? Even if you're willing to work in a separate system for each methodology, it's going to require a lot of manual reports and spreadsheets to try and analyze data between the two.

5 IT'S EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO SEE THE RIGHT PICTURE

Workers spend an average of 2.5 hours per day (30% of the workday) searching for and gathering information.[8]

Your customer wants a report showing the status of all current requests. Your executive leadership wants a report showing progress on only the high-budget projects. So, off you go calling in yet another favor of your data analyst to extract data from your project tool and dump it into a spreadsheet so you can create the reports you need. That's if all the data you need is in

your project management software. For most, a good part of every workday can be spent searching for those updates. And, if you do get the data, once it's sent off, you're likely to be asked for a completely different report from another department.

It seems everyone has a need to see your data differently. Creating these custom reports could keep you busy for hours, taking precious time you don't have. To make things worse, it's not only people who need project data. It could be entities, like regulatory agencies or auditors—in which case, the accuracy and timeliness of your data is paramount. Or you may be required to provide data to other systems, and you have to get data dumps on a regular basis and send them off. Once again, you spend way too much time making up for the shortfalls in your project management tool.

SIMPLE CAN ACTUALLY
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QUICK FIXES TO SAVE THE RELATIONSHIP

Your relationship with your project management tool is in crisis and needs help now! The following tips will help reduce the friction and get your relationship started back down the right track.

FIX #1 — Whatever tool you use to manage your projects, including new requests, must be intuitive for both you and your users. Simple can actually be better, and adoption is the end goal. Try spreadsheets if that is what your team members are willing to use, but make sure they are accessible where they can be edited and versioned in real time.

FIX #2 — The key to a good relationship is communication. You need to keep conversations about the work connected to the work so that everyone is able to hear and participate—true collaboration. Consider using a central place to share, edit, discuss, and approve content.

FIX #3 — Establish a central intake process that allows you to assign priorities and provide visibility to all work, both project and non-project tasks. Track all work from a single location. That way, new requests can be considered against the current work in order to determine feasibility or assess the impact of a tradeoff.

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FIX #4 — When working with multiple methodologies, make sure everyone understands the terminology, benefits, and value of each methodology. It's also important to identify key data points, such as scope, schedule, and budget. Then, translate those data points into either methodology.

FIX #5 — Make sure you use a tool that allows you to access and manipulate your project data without being an SQL expert. Providing customized reports will help you justify and prioritize projects, and will save you hours in extracting data, reformatting it, and then importing it into the other systems.

ENTERPRISE WORK MANAGEMENT: FALL IN LOVE AGAIN

Members 1st Federal Credit Union chose an Enterprise Work Management solution that was easy to learn, allowing anyone on the team to use it without much training. Team adoption was outstanding, and the team members are now more than willing to submit requests and update project statuses. This newfound capability created greater accountability and awareness and cut down the time spent in meetings, resulting in a 29 percent increase in completed requests in a single year.

Until now, you may have been thinking there is no one tool that can do it all—no perfect match. Meet your new love: Enterprise Work Management. It's one system that manages the entire lifecycle of all types of work—both structured and unstructured—from initial request to delivery and measurement. Enterprise Work Management (EWM) provides a single place for managing all types of work requests, managing the resources doing the work, tracking the work progress, and providing visibility that can be easily customized to suit any audience.

Team members can view priorities, and even refer the tasks assigned to them to others, allowing them to make sure they are doing the right work. Seeing which tasks are most important and what everyone is working on, project leaders can easily move their team members where they will make the biggest impact. Plus, EWM is flexible enough to accommodate multiple methodologies, like Agile and Waterfall, allowing your team to use what works best.

With Enterprise Work Management, work becomes social. Communications are gathered and tracked with the rest of the project data, giving them real context. Then, with all project data in one place, team members and leaders can see performance and progress in real-time reports. With status meetings reduced, team members have more time to perform their work. Leaders have visibility into the entire end-to-end work lifecycle of not just every project, but all work; enabling them to justify every dollar spent.

The best part is, people will actually use it. Why? Because it's easy, relevant, and works the way they naturally work instead of adding another step in an already complicated process. You and Enterprise Work Management—a match made in heaven.

Meet AtTask

AtTask is a cloud-based Enterprise Work Management solution that helps IT departments, PMOs, and other enterprise teams conquer the problems associated with typical project management tools and fall in love with project management again. Using a combination of technology and expertise acquired from observing the customers we've served, AtTask provides a single system of truth that eliminates work chaos, provides global visibility, and increases productivity. It offers a complete, adoptable solution—powerful enough for technical users, intuitive enough for business stakeholders, and flexible enough to support Agile, Waterfall, or a mix of the two. It works in the same ways you do.

To learn more about AtTask Enterprise Work Management for IT project management, and how it can help you learn to like your role as a project leader again, please contact us at the following:

"AtTask is the master and source of our project data. It improves our ability to communicate accurately with our customers. When problems arise on a project, AtTask helps us deal with them earlier, which goes a long way toward creating customer satisfaction."

-**CHRIS YADON**
 VP of Operations
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