TriMetrix®HD Project Scheduling

Project Scheduling

The ability to understand the proper allocation of resources for the purpose of getting things done within a defined timeframe.

Why is this skill important?

Scheduling creates order out of chaos. Each day, we face hundreds of possible activities that demand our attention. Where do we start? How can we keep from being completely overwhelmed by the sheer weight of the tasks involved? If we didn't select the right activities to undertake, we'd be like the proverbial tree branch that sways in the wind, totally out of control.

A person who is good at Project Scheduling can allocate resources in an effective way so as to maximize their efficiency. This person can make the best use of time, not allowing resources to be wasted or sit idle. People who have good abilities in Project Scheduling are able to minimize dependence on one critical function of production, as well as the able to identify alternatives in work tasks and maximize the physical facilities available.

In contrast, people with poor Project Scheduling skills have difficulty in dealing with the complexity of satisfying multiple demands with a limited number of resources in a limited amount of time.

Some key principles associated with good Project Scheduling that will help you get the most out of your day include:

• Expect the unexpected.
• Cushion your schedule.
• Schedule your most vital activities when you are at your mental and physical peak.
• Concentrate on the early part of the day.
• Do high-priority things first.
• Don't hesitate to set aside large blocks of time for important activities.
• Schedule similar activities together.

As you can see, Project Scheduling requires that you classify and prioritize tasks that you must complete, creating deadlines for yourself when they aren't imposed on you by someone else. Unfortunately, most of us greet deadlines with about as much enthusiasm as we would greet an IRS audit! But deadlines can have a very useful purpose in our lives, because they help us schedule our time. They provide undeniable structure in our lives because they assist in defining what we need to do and when it should be done.

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Deadlines prod us into action in a way that few other time management techniques can. They have five main benefits:

1. Deadlines create a sense of urgency in a project.
2. They give importance to our work.
3. Deadlines tell us how much time we have to work on a job.
4. Meeting deadlines regularly earns us respect, recognition, and professional advancement.
5. They give us a sense of closure and achievement when reached.

Setting flexible, attainable deadlines is essential to Project Scheduling success. In the next few minutes, we'll talk more about how to make specific improvements to your deadline-setting abilities as well as other abilities related to Project Scheduling.

What are skills associated with Project Scheduling?

Someone who has mastered skills associated with Project Scheduling:

• Effectively allocates resources—their own and others'—to maximize efficiency.
• Is able to see the "big picture," and not just focus on one component of production or one step in project completion.
• Is able to manage multiple tasks through effective prioritization and project completion.
• Can identify productive alternatives in work tasks and select the best from among them.
• Is able to comply with external deadlines as well as develop his/her own deadlines for project completion.

How do you develop your own Project Scheduling skills?

• Develop a clear picture of what needs to be accomplished—whether on one projector or many. Define your project's parameters clearly.
• Break the project down into tasks and subtasks. You will be amazed at how much time you will SAVE by spending a little time up front to do this.
• Be flexible—add between 20% and 40% to the estimated time you think an activity will take.
• Pinpoint the time of day at which you are most effective, physically and mentally. Schedule your most essential tasks during those hours.
• Schedule either morning or afternoon hours heavily to increase your flexibility. Giving yourself large blocks of unscheduled time permits you to move activities when life becomes hectic.
• Do the highest priority things first.

• Allocate resources on a priority basis—if you need help setting priorities, talk in detail with your manager about your thoughts.

• Try to schedule enough time to complete important jobs in one sitting, if possible. It will allow you to concentrate on the task, and it is more efficient than spreading the job over four days.

• "Lump" similar activities together in your schedule—tasks that require similar tools, similar people, or similar skill sets, etc.

• Practice allocating resources—pay attention to how long tasks take. Do you typically complete certain tasks much faster than the time you allotted? Do some tasks always take longer?

• Have a peer review your plans before you finalize them. Sometimes another person will see something you have missed.

• If you are working with other people on a project for which you are responsible for scheduling, ask them for their feedback. Not only will your projections be more accurate, but people will buy into your project schedule.

• Recognize when a change in direction is required, and get input from other people on how to course correct. Be sure to update your project schedule accordingly.

• If you are working with a group or team, make sure to communicate progress frequently and reward good performance.

• If you are working with a group or team, make sure others feel comfortable reporting any delays or other changes in schedule before they become serious issues.

• Build unstructured time into your schedule—you may need it if you get behind in a project, and if you don't need it, you can use it to get ahead!

Project Scheduling

Activities

Activity 1: Separating the Mundane from the Monumental

How can you determine what work should be done immediately? Does it knock on your door and demand your prompt, individual attention? More likely, you are constantly juggling multiple tasks, all of which seem very important—either to you or to someone else.

First, list five things that are on your desk right now—make sure they are things that seem important and relatively urgent.

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____

Now, think carefully about the following questions, and see how they affect your thinking about the prioritization of the tasks you listed above. There are NO right or wrong answers!

1. How does each activity pertain to my goals?
2. Will this task increase my effectiveness, or will it maintain the status quo?
3. If I could only achieve two of my goals, which ones would they be?
4. What does "important" mean to me in the first place? Does it mean doing"first things first," or does it relate to something else?
5. Do I eagerly do the most challenging parts of a job first? Or, do I get warmed up by first tackling the easier parts, hoping my motivation will increase along the way?
6. Do "important things" bother me? Do I "choke" when the stakes are high?
7. Do I willingly do jobs that I am not familiar with? Or, does the unknown make me queasy?
8. Do I procrastinate when confronted with an important job? What does it take to get me moving?
9. How flexible am I? Do emergencies send me into a panic? How good am I at estimating how long jobs take?
10. Do I have the guts to stick by my own definition of importance?
11. Do I get uneasy when results aren't immediately obvious on a project?
12. How often do I change my mind? Is something important one minute and less so the next?

Activity 2: Priority Practice

Take the list of five important items you started in Activity 1 above. Add to it as many more current tasks as you can think of—things that you promised someone ,things you want to do to improve yourself, things that you've been assigned, etc

Then, classify each task as an A task, a B task, or a C task. A's are high priority, B's are medium, and C's are lower priority. A high-priority task—an A—must be done today. A medium priority item—a B—is less important, as it must be done, but little, if anything, will be lost by tackling the task later. A C task contributes least to the current level of success—they may be necessary or even essential at some point in the future, but today they're humdrum.

Fill in the table that follows—you may want to make copies of the blank table and use it again each day.

Task	Priority (A, B, or C)	Required Result

Activity 3: Peak Performance

Everyone has a 2-4 hour block of time during the day when they operate at peak efficiency. How can you determine when you are most efficient during the day? Pick a demanding project and work on it during two different two-hour blocks for a week. For example, work on it from 8-10 a.m. Monday, 10 a.m.-noon Tuesday, noon-2 p.m.Wednesday, 2-4 p.m. Thursday, and 4-6 p.m. Friday. Record your progress in each period, and at the end of the week, compare notes. In which time span were you most productive? What did you do or what skills did you have in your peak work time that you didn't have in the others?

Activity 4: Tasks and Subtasks

Think about an important project that is due at some point in the future—make sure your due date is at least two weeks away. Then, break that important project into key tasks that must be accomplished. Then, break the tasks down into subtasks!

Project Name _____

Task	Subtask
1	a b c
2	a b c
3	a b c
4	a b c
5	a b c
6	a b c