



Time Management and Stress

Related Case Studies (from Kerzner/<i>Project Management Case Studies</i>)	Related Workbook Exercises and Case Studies (from Kerzner/<i>Project Management Workbook to Accompany Project Management, 8th Edition</i>)	PMBOK® Reference Section for the PMP® Certification Exam
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Reluctant Workers*• Time Management Exercise	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Multiple Choice Exam	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Human Resource Management

6.0 INTRODUCTION

Managing projects within time, cost, and performance is easier said than done. The project management environment is extremely turbulent, and is composed of numerous meetings, report writing, conflict resolution, continuous planning and replanning, communications with the customer, and crisis management. Ideally, the effective project manager is a manager, not a doer, but in the “real world,” project managers often compromise their time by doing both.

Disciplined time management is one of the keys to effective project management. It is often said that if the project manager cannot control his own time, then he will control nothing else on the project.

*Case Study also appears at end of chapter.

6.1 UNDERSTANDING TIME MANAGEMENT¹

For most people, time is a resource that, when lost or misplaced, is gone forever. For a project manager, however, time is more of a constraint, and effective time management principles must be employed to make it a resource.

Most executives prefer to understaff projects, in the mistaken belief that the project manager will assume the additional workload. The project manager may already be heavily burdened with meetings, report preparation, internal and external communications, conflict resolution, and planning/replanning for crises. And yet, most project managers somehow manipulate their time to get the work done. Experienced personnel soon learn to delegate tasks and to employ effective time management principles. The following questions should help managers identify problem areas:

- Do you have trouble completing work within the allocated deadlines?
- How many interruptions are there each day?
- Do you have a procedure for handling interruptions?
- If you need a large block of uninterrupted time, is it available? With or without overtime?
- How do you handle drop-in visitors and phone calls?
- How is incoming mail handled?
- Do you have established procedures for routine work?
- Are you accomplishing more or less than you were three months ago? Six months ago?
- How difficult is it for you to say no?
- How do you approach detail work?
- Do you perform work that should be handled by your subordinates?
- Do you have sufficient time each day for personal interests?
- Do you still think about your job when away from the office?
- Do you make a list of things to do? If yes, is the list prioritized?
- Does your schedule have some degree of flexibility?

The project manager who can deal with these questions has a greater opportunity to convert time from a constraint to a resource.

6.2 TIME ROBBERS

The most challenging problem facing the project manager is his inability to say no. Consider the situation in which an employee comes into your office with a problem. The employee may be sincere when he says that he simply wants your advice but, more often

1. Sections 6.1, 6.2, and 6.3 are adapted from David Cleland and Harold Kerzner, *Engineering Team Management* (Melbourne, Florida: Krieger, 1986), Chapter 8.

than not, the employee wants to take the monkey off of his back and put it onto yours. The employee's problem is now *your* problem.

To handle such situations, first screen out the problems with which you do not wish to get involved. Second, if the situation does necessitate your involvement, then you must make sure that when the employee leaves your office, he realizes that the problem is still his, not yours. Third, if you find that the problem will require your continued attention, remind the employee that all future decisions will be joint decisions and that the problem will still be on the employee's shoulders. Once employees realize that they cannot put their problems on your shoulders, they learn how to make their own decisions.

There are numerous time robbers in the project management environment. These include:

- Incomplete work
- A job poorly done that must be done over
- Telephone calls, mail, and email
- Lack of adequate responsibility and commensurate authority
- Changes without direct notification/explanation
- Waiting for people
- Failure to delegate, or unwise delegation
- Poor retrieval systems
- Lack of information in a ready-to-use format
- Day-to-day administration
- Union grievances
- Having to explain "thinking" to superiors
- Too many levels of review
- Casual office conversations
- Misplaced information
- Shifting priorities
- Indecision at any level
- Procrastination
- Setting up appointments
- Too many meetings
- Monitoring delegated work
- Unclear roles/job descriptions
- Executive meddling
- Budget adherence requirements
- Poorly educated customers
- Not enough proven managers
- Vague goals and objectives
- Lack of a job description
- Too many people involved in minor decision-making
- Lack of technical knowledge
- Lack of authorization to make decisions
- Poor functional status reporting
- Work overload
- Unreasonable time constraints
- Too much travel
- Lack of adequate project management tools
- Departmental "buck passing"
- Company politics
- Going from crisis to crisis
- Conflicting directives
- Bureaucratic roadblocks ("ego")
- Empire-building line managers
- No communication between sales and engineering
- Excessive paperwork
- Lack of clerical/administrative support
- Dealing with unreliable subcontractors
- Personnel not willing to take risks
- Demand for short-term results
- Lack of long-range planning
- Learning new company systems
- Poor lead time on projects
- Documentation (reports/red tape)
- Large number of projects
- Desire for perfection

- Lack of project organization
- Constant pressure
- Constant interruptions
- Shifting of functional personnel
- Lack of employee discipline
- Lack of qualified manpower

6.3 TIME MANAGEMENT FORMS

There are two basic forms that project managers and project engineers can use for practicing better time management. The first form is the “to do” pad as shown in Figure 6–1. The project manager or secretary prepares the list of things to do. The project manager then decides which activities he must perform himself and assigns the appropriate priorities.

The activities with the highest priorities are then transferred to the “daily calendar log,” as shown in Figure 6–2. The project manager assigns these activities to the appropriate time blocks based on his own energy cycle. Unfilled time blocks are then used for unexpected crises or for lower-priority activities.

If there are more priority elements than time slots, the project manager may try to schedule well in advance. This is normally not a good practice, because it creates a backlog of high-priority activities. In addition, an activity that today is a “B” priority could easily become an “A” priority in a day or two. The moral here is do not postpone until tomorrow what you or your team can do today.

Date _____				
Activities	Priority	Started	In Process	Completed

FIGURE 6–1. “To-do” pad.

Date _____		
Time	Activity	Priority
8:00-9:00		
9:00-10:00		
10:00-11:00		
11:00-12:00		
12:00-1:00		
1:00-2:00		
2:00-3:00		
3:00-4:00		
4:00-5:00		

FIGURE 6-2. Daily calendar log.

6.4 EFFECTIVE TIME MANAGEMENT

There are several techniques that project managers can practice in order to make better use of their time²:

- Delegate.
- Follow the schedule.
- Decide fast.
- Decide who should attend.
- Learn to say no.
- Start now.
- Do the tough part first.
- Travel light.
- Work at travel stops.
- Avoid useless memos.
- Refuse to do the unimportant.
- Look ahead.
- Ask: Is this trip necessary?
- Know your energy cycle.

2. Source unknown.

- Control telephone and email time.
- Send out the meeting agenda.
- Overcome procrastination.
- Manage by exception.

As we learned in Chapter 5, the project manager, to be effective, must establish time management rules and then ask himself four questions:

- Rules for time management
 - Conduct a time analysis (time log).
 - Plan solid blocks for important things.
 - Classify your activities.
 - Establish priorities.
 - Establish opportunity cost on activities.
 - Train your system (boss, subordinate, peers).
 - Practice delegation.
 - Practice calculated neglect.
 - Practice management by exception.
 - Focus on opportunities—not on problems.
- Questions
 - What am I doing that I don't have to do at all?
 - What am I doing that can be done better by someone else?
 - What am I doing that could be done as well by someone else?
 - Am I establishing the right priorities for my activities?

6.5 STRESS AND BURNOUT

The factors that serve to make any occupation especially stressful are responsibility without the authority or ability to exert control, a necessity for perfection, the pressure of deadlines, role ambiguity, role conflict, role overload, the crossing of organizational boundaries, responsibility for the actions of subordinates, and the necessity to keep up with the information explosions or technological breakthroughs. Project managers have all of these factors in their jobs.

A project manager has his resources controlled by line management, yet the responsibilities of bringing a project to completion by a prescribed deadline are his. A project manager may be told to increase the work output, while the work force is simultaneously being cut. Project managers are expected to get work out on schedule, but are often not permitted to pay overtime. One project manager described it this way: "I have to implement plans I didn't design, but if the project fails, I'm responsible."

Project managers are subject to stress due to several different facets of their jobs. This can manifest itself in a variety of ways, such as:

1. *Being tired.* Being tired is a result of being drained of strength and energy, perhaps through physical exertion, boredom, or impatience. The definition here applies more to a short-term, rather than long-term, effect. Typical causes for feeling tired include meetings, report writing, and other forms of document preparation.

2. *Feeling depressed.* Feeling depressed is an emotional condition usually characterized by discouragement or a feeling of inadequacy. It is usually the result of a situation that is beyond the control or capabilities of the project manager. There are several sources of depression in a project environment: Management or the client considers your report unacceptable, you are unable to get timely resources assigned, the technology is not available, or the constraints of the project are unrealistic and may not be met.

3. *Being physically and emotionally exhausted.* Project managers are both managers and doers. It is quite common for project managers to perform a great deal of the work themselves, either because they consider the assigned personnel unqualified to perform the work or because they are impatient and consider themselves capable of performing the work faster. In addition, project managers often work a great deal of “self-inflicted” overtime. The most common cause of emotional exhaustion is report writing and the preparation of handouts for interchange meetings.

4. *Burned out.* Being burned out is more than just a feeling; it is a condition. Being burned out implies that one is totally exhausted, both physically and emotionally, and that rest, recuperation, or vacation time may not remedy the situation. The most common cause is prolonged overtime, or the need thereof, and an inability to endure or perform under continuous pressure and stress. Burnout can occur almost overnight, often with very little warning. The solution is almost always a change in job assignment, preferably with another company.

5. *Being unhappy.* There are several factors that produce unhappiness in project management. Such factors include highly optimistic planning, unreasonable expectations by management, management cutting resources because of a “buy-in,” or simply customer demands for additional data items. A major source of unhappiness is the frustration caused by having limited authority that is not commensurate with the assigned responsibility.

6. *Feeling trapped.* The most common situation where project managers feel trapped is when they have no control over the assigned resources on the project and feel as though they are at the mercy of the line managers. Employees tend to favor the manager who can offer them the most rewards, and that is usually the line manager. Providing the project manager with some type of direct reward power can remedy the situation.

7. *Feeling worthless.* Feeling worthless implies that one is without worth or merit, that is, valueless. This situation occurs when project managers feel that they are managing projects beneath their dignity. Most project managers look forward to the death of their project right from the onset, and expect their next project to be more important, perhaps twice the cost, and more complex. Unfortunately, there are always situations where one must take a step backwards.

8. *Feeling resentful and disillusioned about people.* This situation occurs most frequently in the project manager’s dealings (i.e., negotiations) with the line managers.

During the planning stage of a project, line managers often make promises concerning future resource commitments, but renege on their promises during execution. Disillusionment then occurs and can easily develop into serious conflict. Another potential source of these feelings is when line managers appear to be making decisions that are not in the best interest of the project.

9. *Feeling hopeless.* The most common source of hopelessness are R&D projects where the ultimate objective is beyond the reach of the employee or even of the state-of-the-art technology. Hopelessness means showing no signs of a favorable outcome. Hopelessness is more a result of the performance constraint than of time or cost.

10. *Feeling rejected.* Feeling rejected can be the result of a poor working relationship with executives, line managers, or clients. Rejection often occurs when people with authority feel that their options or opinions are better than those of the project manager. Rejection has a demoralizing effect on the project manager because he feels that he is the “president” of the project and the true “champion” of the company.

11. *Feeling anxious.* Almost all project managers have some degree of “tunnel vision,” where they look forward to the end of the project, even when the project is in its infancy. This anxious feeling is not only to see the project end, but to see it completed successfully.

Stress is not always negative, however. Without certain amounts of stress, reports would never get written or distributed, deadlines would never be met, and no one would even get to work on time. But stress can be a powerful force resulting in illness and even fatal disease, and must be understood and managed if it is to be controlled and utilized for constructive purposes.

The mind, body, and emotions are not the separate entities they were once thought to be. One affects the other, sometimes in a positive way, and sometimes in a negative way. Stress becomes detrimental when it is prolonged beyond what an individual can comfortably handle. In a project environment, with continually changing requirements, impossible deadlines, and each project being considered as a unique entity in itself, we must ask, How much prolonged stress can a project manager handle comfortably?

The stresses of project management may seem excessive for whatever rewards the position may offer. However, the project manager who is aware of the stresses inherent in the job and knows stress management techniques can face this challenge objectively and make it a rewarding experience.

PROBLEMS

6-1 Should time robbers be added to direct labor standards for pricing out work?

6-2 Is it possible for a project manager to improve his time management skills by knowing the “energy cycle” of his people? Can this energy cycle be a function of the hour of the day, day of the week, or whether overtime is required?

CASE STUDY

THE RELUCTANT WORKERS

Tim Aston had changed employers three months ago. His new position was project manager. At first he had stars in his eyes about becoming the best project manager that his company had ever seen. Now, he wasn't sure if project management was worth the effort. He made an appointment to see Phil Davies, director of project management.

Tim Aston: "Phil, I'm a little unhappy about the way things are going. I just can't seem to motivate my people. Every day, at 4:30 P.M., all of my people clean off their desks and go home. I've had people walk out of late afternoon team meetings because they were afraid that they'd miss their car pool. I have to schedule morning team meetings."

Phil Davies: "Look, Tim. You're going to have to realize that in a project environment, people think that they come first and that the project is second. This is a way of life in our organizational form."

Tim Aston: "I've continually asked my people to come to me if they have problems. I find that the people do not think that they need help and, therefore, do not want it. I just can't get my people to communicate more."

Phil Davies: "The average age of our employees is about forty-six. Most of our people have been here for twenty years. They're set in their ways. You're the first person that we've hired in the past three years. Some of our people may just resent seeing a thirty-year-old project manager."

Tim Aston: "I found one guy in the accounting department who has an excellent head on his shoulders. He's very interested in project management. I asked his boss if he'd release him for a position in project management, and his boss just laughed at me, saying something to the effect that as long as that guy is doing a good job for him, he'll never be released for an assignment elsewhere in the company. His boss seems more worried about his personal empire than he does in what's best for the company."

"We had a test scheduled for last week. The customer's top management was planning on flying in for firsthand observations. Two of my people said that they had programmed vacation days coming, and that they would not change, under any conditions. One guy was going fishing and the other guy was planning to spend a few days working with fatherless children in our community. Surely, these guys could change their plans for the test."

Phil Davies: "Many of our people have social responsibilities and outside interests. We encourage social responsibilities and only hope that the outside interests do not interfere with their jobs."

"There's one thing you should understand about our people. With an average age of forty-six, many of our people are at the top of their pay grades and have no place to go. They must look elsewhere for interests. These are the people you have to work with and motivate. Perhaps you should do some reading on human behavior."

