

Introducing new tools to a team

Project management tools and processes are always evolving. In this reading, we will discuss the importance of choosing the right tools for a project and the implications of introducing new tools to your team.

As a project manager, it is important to be open to implementing new tools that may be beneficial to a project's outcome. You will experience change in lots of forms throughout your project's life cycle, and navigating change is essential. But if you choose to implement a tool that your team is unfamiliar with—especially if you decide to roll it out midway through a project—your team may be hesitant. People embrace change differently, particularly if the change will directly impact their routine and the way they work. Simply put: Change can be met with resistance.

Before you introduce a new tool to your team, you should be sure that this change is actually going to benefit the project, and ensure that those involved in your project understand the benefits of this change. Demonstrating to your teammates and stakeholders that you understand the tool and have evaluated its competency will help build trust, especially if this new tool is replacing an existing tool. Taking the time to introduce the new tool to your team members will also demonstrate that you have the best interest of the team in mind—not just the success of the project.



Here are some important considerations and keys to successfully introducing new tools:

- **Discuss the tool early and often, if possible.** The team should not feel blindsided by a new change. Make sure they know the change is coming as early as possible. This will help them prepare for an introduction or migration to the new tool.
- **Ask for feedback from key stakeholders.** You could get great feedback on features that you may have overlooked by asking for their expertise. You can solicit this feedback by requesting their input about functionality or have them list features in order of priority. The key is to create an opportunity for stakeholders to provide their feedback and allow you to incorporate their feedback into next steps.
- **Involve the key stakeholders in demonstrations as you get closer to making the final decision on the project tracking tool.** You will be able to leverage key stakeholders' acceptance by letting them test the product or sign up for a trial run. It is also important to make sure that the tool is actually going to meet the mark and provide a meaningful change for the project. You may want to pull in key users from your team to test and familiarize themselves with the tool prior to rolling it out. This will allow the team to get on board with your plans or discuss their concerns beforehand. This will also highlight in-house experts for future training, assistance, and implementation.
- **Ensure the tool is fully functional before the team is introduced to it.** Whenever possible, hold off from introducing the tool if it still has any issues. Make sure the tool is accessible for all users. Keep in mind, your team members may resist a tool that doesn't live up to how it is supposed to function. This will impact implementation and acceptance fairly significantly, so put your best tool forward!
- **Set up training for the tool as needed before you ask the team to actually use it.** Everyone has different levels of comfort with different tools. It is your job as the project manager to ensure that each team members' needs are addressed. Setting up training also helps create positive first impressions, which will lead to higher productivity and quicker, more successful implementation and acceptance.

Remember, some pushback is normal, but successful project managers should take the steps to prepare and mitigate any friction for their team when possible.

Pro tip: If time allows, plan for a period of transition if you are replacing an existing tool. It is common to allow both tools to operate during this period. You will need to “sunset,” or retire, the existing tool eventually, but allowing for a period of transition between using the old tool and the new tool can help stakeholders and team members feel more at ease and give them time to gain familiarity with the new tool. Be prepared for productivity to be impacted as the team transitions from one tool to another.