Project Planning and Time Management

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Project/Time management in Industry

Industry: Before you even start

"You have to be very careful if you don't know where you are going, because you might not get there."

-- *Yogi Berra, Baseball player, coach and manger*

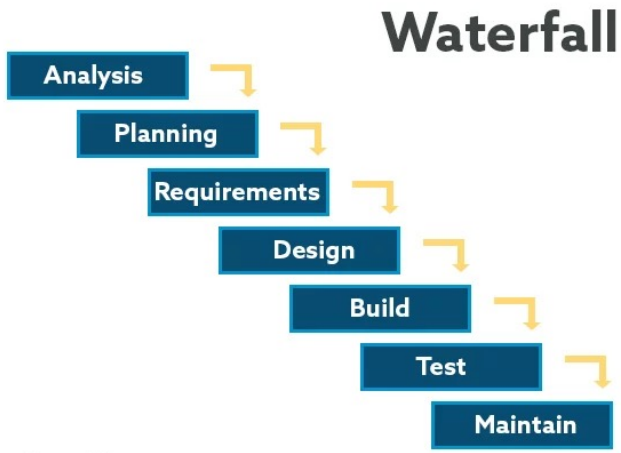
- Main questions in project management
  - Why are you doing the project? What problem are you answering?
  - What is the plan to get the project done?
  - How do you know when you are done?
  - How well did the project go?

Forbes 6 tips for productivity

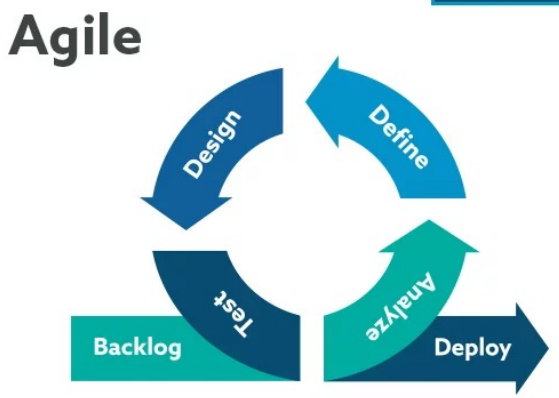
1. Don’t touch things twice.
   - As soon as something gets your attention, act on it
2. Tackle the dreaded tasks first
   - Your reward for tackling the dreaded task is doing the stuff that excites you.
3. Don’t confuse urgency with importance
   - Distinguish between what is important and simple tasks that <u>feel</u> like they have to be done right away.
4. Say No
5. Check email/slack on a schedule
6. Avoid multitasking

Ways to manage a project

- Waterfall
  - Works best with clear goals and clear end
  - Supervision/Monitoring
  - Client is not often not involved
  - Great for simple projects with low risk



- Agile
  - Doing sprints at regular intervals
  - Goals could change
  - Less supervision but client is involved
  - Adaption from feedback



Project and Time management in Academia

Common Tips

- Spend time organizing and planning
- Time blocking or a fixed schedule
  - If it’s not on your calendar, it is not getting done?
  - Example: 9am – 10am check/write emails; 10am-11am Review manuscript
- Budget time for fun/social activities
- Learn to say No
- Break down tasks into manageable task
  - Write 4 paragraphs on X by Friday
  - NOT: Finish Chapter 4

Flexibility is a benefit and bane

- When there is no structure in your day
  - Feel scattered and overwhelmed
- Organizing/planning out your schedule
  - Reduces procrastination
  - Determine priorities
  - Keep on track
- Create a fixed weekly/monthly schedule
  - Choose your ideal work hours for work/life balance
  - Set your own hours and still to it

Multiple approaches

- Back casting a semester or project
  - Reverse planning from the final goal to first task
- Accomplish 2 things before doing anything else
  - Write for X amount of time and read for Y amount of time
- Granular planning and Rule of Threes
  - Committing to 3 small tasks that comprise the main goal
- Focus on moving a project forward or moving a paper foward

How I handle planning and time management

Be realistic

- I am not Super Woman
  - I need sleep
  - Things will happen, I will get sleep
- Working in the office / Working from home
  - Home
    - Uncontrolled interruptions
    - Schedule tasks that can be interrupted or small tasks that are easy to complete
  - Office
    - No interruptions
    - Schedule tasks that can not be interrupted and take focus

Fixed and Flexible schedule

- Tuesday always work in office
- First hour check email / slack and manage small tasks
  - Any ‘grass fires’ aka does anything need my immediate attention
- Work around meetings and events
- Last hour prepare for the next day
  - What are my three tasks for tomorrow?
- Saturdays are my free / no science day

Sunday Meeting aka Prep meeting

- Spend 1 – 2 hours going through the next two weeks
- Tasks that are at a set time
  - Work meetings
  - Seminar / Webinars
  - Personal tasks – doctor’s appointments etc
- Tasks with a deadline
  - Look two weeks ahead so a deadline doesn’t surprise you
- Ongoing tasks with no deadline
  - Fill up the remaining time

Staying focused

- Focus timer
  - Focus on one tasks for 25 – 30 minutes; take a 5-minute break; repeat
- To do lists
  - Listed by importance/Due date
  - Outlook has a task list feature with due dates and reminders
- Calendars
  - Appointments
  - Block off time for writing / focus time
  - Block off personal time (i.e. doctor appt)

Emails / Slack

- Limit your time checking email / slack
  - Answer emails / slack that REQUIRE immediate attention first thing in the morning
  - Later in the day when 2 major tasks for the day are done – then go to email

- Limit distractions
  - ”Dings” from email or slack – Turn those off

Resources:

- Professor Raul Pacheco-Vega Blog
- Professor Randy Pausch Time Management
  - Lecture
- Books:
  - 7 Habits of Highly Effective people
  - Essentialism
  - Atomic Habits