



The most practical project management software

What Would an Ideal Project Management Tool Look Like?

Article at a glance

What kind of project management software do you need? What features are essential? With so many project management software applications, it may be hard to determine which tool you are going to invest your time and money in. You probably want your tool to make your life easier and save you time. What else? Probably, you should start by defining the problems you want the application to solve.

This article explores what a perfect project management tool should and shouldn't be. Read on and you will get robust guidelines for your future software search and probably will change your opinion about your favorite project management application.

What Would an Ideal Project Management Tool Look Like?

Experienced project managers know how inefficient traditional project management applications can be. Let's analyze the drawbacks of traditional tools and then picture how an ideal tool should be able to overcome the problems connected with them and make project managers more productive.

The need for transparency

Organization leaders often don't have adequate visibility of their internal operations. This is due to misalignment of strategic plans, quarterly plans, project plans and daily to-do lists of team members. All of these elements should be a part of one master plan to provide a real-time view of what is going on in the organization. An ideal tool should be able to easily merge all these parts into a bigger picture. With the help of such a tool, daily to-do lists should emerge into project plans. Projects should lead to achieving strategic goals.

The ideal project management tool should let teams interact in the project management environment, turn their input into shared plans and allow them to update plans when necessary. The plans should be automatically merged into a bigger picture, and changes in the schedule should be immediately available to everyone on the team to see. This way, input from the bottom of the organizational tree can be effectively combined with the guidance and control from the top. Together, the top-down and bottom-up approaches to project management allow companies to become more agile and productive. Then the whole structure is transparent and can be traced from a quarterly goal to a daily task of a team member. This is the real-time visibility into a company that lets corporate executives lead their business in the right direction.

Getting rid of excessive routine jobs

Today, the project manager is the center of all project communications. It's his or her duty to compile status updates through e-mails and meetings and put them together like pieces of a puzzle. Then the project manager must input the mix of change requests coming from stakeholders and outside business environments, then manually update the plans email the updates to team members, report the progress to the upper management and remind employees about due dates and overdue tasks. This painful process is then repeated on a daily basis, slowing down project managers and organizations.

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The ideal tool should eliminate a big chunk of this routine. Here's what the whole daily routine should look like. The tool e-mails people about due dates and overdue tasks, so there's no need for the project manager to spend time and energy on that. When tasks are done, employees simply click on a link in the reminder e-mail to set tasks as complete. The information that the task is complete goes directly into the shared workspace, so there is no more need to gather status updates through meetings and e-mails, and there's no need to copy this information from e-mails to project files. E-mail notifications keep people on the same page, so the project manager doesn't need to send additional messages about the updates. Stakeholders have direct access to reports and schedules updated in the real-time, so there is no need for them to pull that information from the project manager. It's on their fingertips 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the globe. So what's left for the project manager? Guidance and leadership. They can stop doing the daily, routine tasks and focus on making the whole process more productive, effective and enjoyable for all participants.

E-mail integration

Another big problem of traditional project management tools is that information often bypasses them in e-mails. It's counterproductive and boring to manually copy updates from e-mails to another software application. This is the reason people often skip this procedure, leaving the plans outdated. There's little value in obsolete plans. So all the complex scheduling features of traditional project management software often become useless in reality, especially in multi-project and agile environments where the schedule evolves over time.

The ideal project management tool should bring e-mail communications into the collaborative project management environment automatically. [E-mail integration](#) is as important as the ability to let team members update project plans themselves. A big part of the manager's routine tasks will then be taken away, leaving more time for leadership and strategic thinking.

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Summary

Having examined all the constraints connected with the use of the traditional project management software, we are now able to draw a complete picture of an ideal project management tool.

An ideal project management tool unleashes the power of collaboration and lets employees contribute to the planning and tracking process. At the same time, it lets project managers control changes and keep track of the progress. The project manager guides the team's work based on the most up-to-date information.

The ideal tool is simple, agile and inexpensive. It is used by the whole company from top managers to rank-and-file employees.

Most importantly, the ideal project management tool helps companies gain an important competitive advantage by being able to see through all the internal operations and react quickly to changes in the business environment. The adoption of such a tool will then be to everybody's benefit.

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Since 2001, Andrew Filev has been managing software teams in a global environment. His technical expertise and his management vision are reflected in online and offline articles that have had hundreds of thousands of readers. His ideas on new trends in project management are published in the Project Management 2.0 blog. Andrew has given speeches on new trends in project management and deployment of the next-generation, Web-based applications on deferent events, including the PMI Silicon Valley Tools and Techniques Forum and the Office 2.0 Conference (Project Management panel).

Andrew's innovative ideas and passion to improve project management tools are applied in Wrike, a leading online project management solution. Andrew now leads the company as a founder and CEO.