



How to Optimize Project Management Processes to Prevent Failure



Why do projects fail? You can list dozens of reasons, such as unrealistic deadlines, scope creep, budget overruns, and many more, but all can be linked to the mistakes made at different project stages.

Project management processes optimization is improving external and internal business processes to increase clarity and consistency, improve team communication, and reduce errors that may result in delays, poor final product quality, and project failure.

How to Optimize Business Processes to Prevent Project Failure

Project Management Lifecycle

Stage 1. Initiation and Planning

- Setting Up Project Goals
- Defining Project Scope
- Creating Work Breakdown

Stage 2. Scheduling and Resources Allocation

- Making Estimates
- Creating Project Timeline
- Assigning Tasks to Team Members

Stage 3: Project Execution

- Tracking Individual Tasks
- Checking with the Initial Plan
- Fixing Issues

Stage 4. Project Closure and Performance Analysis

- Measuring KPIs
- Comparing Effort and Cost
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Project Management Lifecycle

The project management lifecycle is a framework of business and work processes required to deliver a successful product.

It's usually split into four (sometimes five) phases or stages, including:

1. Initiation and planning.
2. Scheduling and resources allocation.
3. Execution.
4. Closure and performance analysis.

More to read on the topic: [Work Management Process Explained: A Brief Guide.](#)

Below you'll find a detailed breakdown of each stage and the tips and tricks to optimize the key processes.



Stage 1. Initiation and Planning

In the planning phase, your abstract project idea turns into a set of meaningful goals, tasks, and technical requirements combined in the project roadmap. The project manager assesses the feasibility of the project, estimates the timeline, creates a project plan, and determines the roles and responsibilities of each team member.

More to read on the topic: [Free Project Plan Template & How to Create One in 6 Steps.](#)

The critical project planning steps are:

- Setting project goals
- Defining project scope
- Creating work breakdown

Setting Up Project Goals

Project goals that are accurate and realistic will streamline its execution... easier said than done.

Common challenge: Confusing the fundamental goals and objectives with the work you need to do to achieve these.

Outcome: Final product that fails to meet the customer's expectations.

Solution: Link your goals to company purposes and values. To set your goals right, you need to answer just one question: Why are you launching this project?

The answer should explain the expected outcome of a project and state what exactly you want to achieve or improve.

How actiTIME can help:

- Create goal-associated projects and segment them into smaller tasks in a few clicks.
- Set time estimates and deadlines to make your goals time-bound.
- Add comments to communicate project objectives to the team.

More to read on the topic: [Best Software for Setting SMART Goals.](#)

Defining Project Scope

Project scope lists and describes all the tasks, activities, and deliverables included in your project, the time frame, budget, etc.

The work scope is aimed to ensure clarity between the stakeholders and the project team regarding what needs to be done and in what volume.

Common challenge: Unclear work scope with vague requirements.

Outcome: Missed deadlines and budget overruns.

Solution: Document your stakeholders' requirements and ensure all of these are clear, measurable, and linked to the project objectives.

How actiTIME can help:

- Create complex work structures.
- Gain a bird's eye view of all workflow steps.
- Export and task lists to keep all data in one place.

More to read on the topic: [Best Software for Setting SMART Goals](#).

Creating Work Breakdown

Work Breakdown Structure (WBS) is a hierarchical decomposition of the project scope, breaking the project into smaller, more manageable components or work packages. It is a valuable project management tool that helps to organize, plan, and communicate the project scope, schedule, and budget.

Common challenge: Creating too many or not enough tasks.

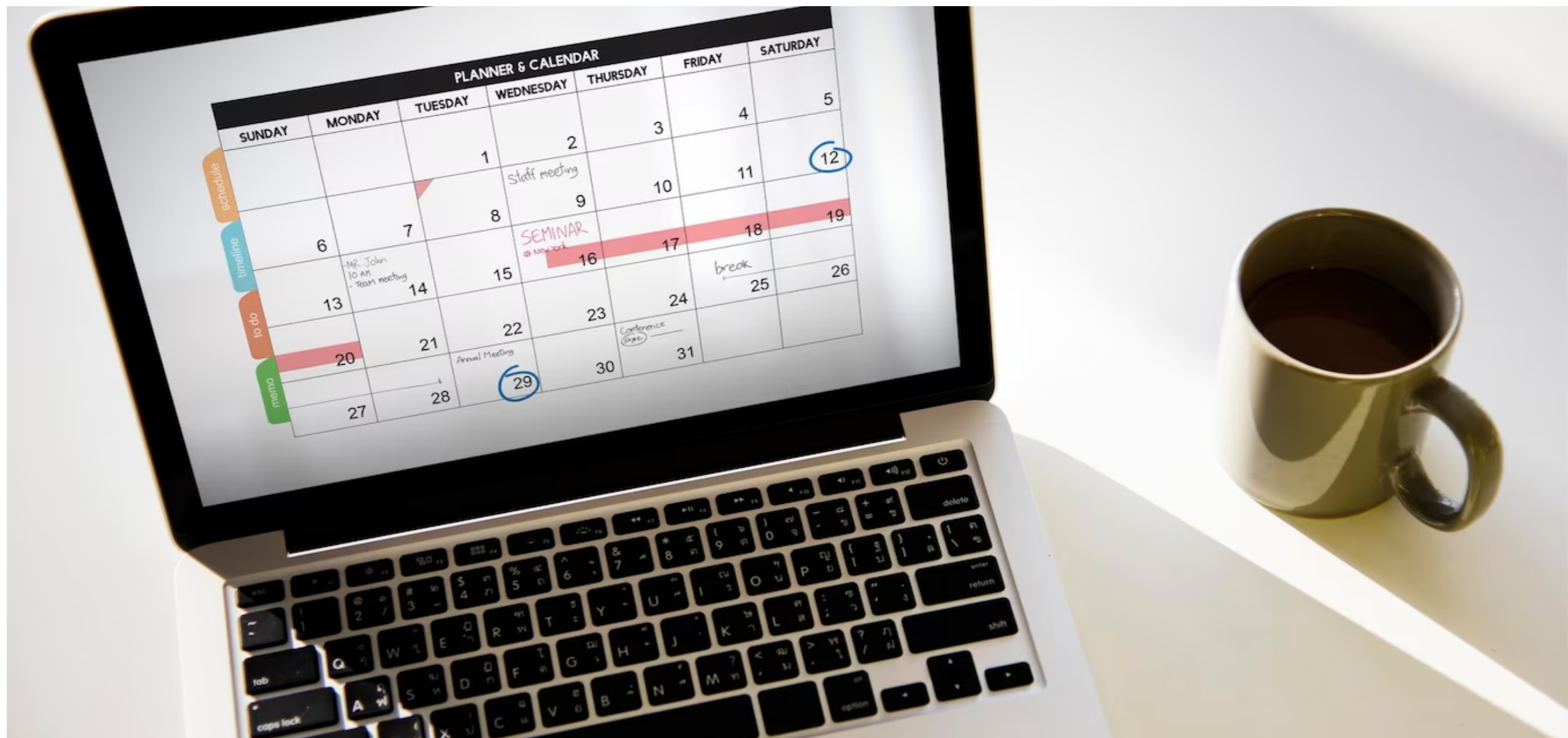
Outcome: Poor scheduling, confusion, and loss of team members' accountability.

Solution: Create a level-by-level structure of your project going down from the project to the work package level. Estimate the average time needed to complete a task at each level and avoid decomposing beyond the level that makes sense.

How actiTIME can help:

- Use the Kanban board view for a more straightforward decomposition.
- Categorize data and visualize timelines.
- Get a high-level overview of the project work scope.

More to read on the topic: [What Are Project Milestones and How to Set Them Properly?](#).



Stage 2. Scheduling and Resources Allocation

At this stage, the project manager creates a detailed project schedule, establishes a timeline for each task, and identifies the workforce and other resources needed.

The key project scheduling and resources allocation steps are:

- Making estimates
- Creating project timeline
- Assigning tasks

More to read on the topic: [Free Project Schedule Template](#).

Making Estimates

Estimation is crucial for both setting project expectations and timelines and determining its volume and costs. However, the project health is subject to too many factors that can be foreseen.

Common challenge: Inaccurate preliminary estimates.

Outcome: Budget deficits, delivery delays, frustrated clients.

Solution: Making 100% accurate predictions is close to impossible. However, you can take your WBS and compare each task to a similar one completed previously to see how much time and effort it took and why.

How actiTIME can help:

- Use the historical Estimated vs. Actual Time report to compare the initial time estimates against the actual time spent on any task.
- Filter the tasks by type or team to establish the pattern behind each potential delay.
- Check the Time Track in Detail report to see the amount of time spent on any task by a team or team member.

More to read on the topic: [6 Project Estimation Techniques: Pros + Cons](#).

Creating Project Timeline

To create a project timeline you just need to list the project tasks in chronological order, giving each of them a corresponding start and end date.

Common challenge: Not seeing the dependencies.

Outcome: Missed deadlines.

Solution: The easiest way to identify the interconnected tasks and sequencing the workflow accordingly is visualizing the workflow.

How actiTIME can help:

- Set up project deadlines based on your estimates.
- Use custom fields for collecting non-standard task information.
- Integrate with [actiPLANS](#) to see if you have all the needed human resources.

More to read on the topic: [6 Project Estimation Techniques: Pros + Cons](#).

Assigning Tasks to Team Members

Although assigning tasks may seem like a basic managing function it may be challenging especially in a distributed team. Explaining tasks, communicating group objectives, and assigning roles leave a lot of space for miscommunication and disorganization.

Common challenge: Hoping your teammates can "read between the lines."

Outcome: Increased overwork and employee burnout, poor final product quality.

Solution: Remember that things that are obvious to one may not be obvious to another. Be specific when setting tasks, include detailed instructions, add references, and ensure access to the tools needed to complete each task.

How actiTIME can help:

- Analyze each employee's workload to ensure even task distribution.
- Use task descriptions to give your team details, leave comments and share valuable links.
- Configure automated notifications to keep your team informed of current work progress.

More to read on the topic: [How to Improve Workflow Efficiency Using actiTIME's Flexible Settings](#).



Stage 3: Project Execution

At this phase, the project plan is implemented, teams work on their tasks, and the project manager monitors progress to resolve potential problems and ensure the project is on track.

The key project execution monitoring steps are:

- Tracking individual tasks
- Checking with the initial plan
- Fixing issues that arise

More to read on the topic: [How to Track Project Progress](#).

Tracking Individual Tasks

Tasks differ by many parameters and to ensure all your team members are moving forward at the same pace you need to need to put a system in place to track them over time.

Common challenge: Micromanagement.

Outcome: Underinformed stakeholders, frustrated employees.

Solution: Define unified metrics to measure progress, apply them across teams and departments, and start sharing data with all the concerned parties to ensure transparency.

How actiTIME can help:

- Introduce precise and stress-free time tracking.
- Use the Kanban board in actiTIME to visualize progress and individual task statuses.
- Specify granular user permissions to let the managers distribute the workload and approve employee timesheets.

More to read on the topic: [How to Measure Project Progress with actiTIME Reports](#).

Checking with the Initial Plan

The proactive approach always wins over the reactive. By regularly checking if the project adheres to the timeline and budget and making minor adjustments, you can avoid much bigger problems in the future.

Common challenge: Tracking too many metrics.

Outcome: Project manager burnout.

Solution: By trying to be just everywhere, you risk losing focus—leverage automation to collect sufficient data and manage your expectations. By trying to be just everywhere, you risk losing focus—leverage automation to collect sufficient data and manage your expectations.

How actiTIME can help:

- Visualize your team's performance data on sparkline charts in actual time, updating the info every five minutes.
- Classify your works by priority levels, project phases, or custom parameters and attach different ticket numbers, budgets and dates to them.
- Check the Custom Fields Report to see how much time is spent on a specific task category.

More to read on the topic: [How to Monitor Project Progress with actiTIME: 8 Helpful Tips.](#)

Fixing Issues

Issues are an inevitable part of your journey. They can be caused by diverse factors, including technical problems, market changes, employee turnover, or simply bad luck.

It's crucial to keep in mind that issues are not failures. They are a part of the process and need to be acknowledged, documented and fixed.

Common challenge: Letting emotions guide your judgement.

Outcome: Blamegame.

Solution: Data-driven accountability lets you discover who did something wrong, why it happened, and how it impacted the project.

How actiTIME can help:

- Access time tracks, attachments, and comments for any task to thoroughly investigate each case.
- Create and analyze all kinds of reports to estimate potential losses.
- Adjust your time estimates and project deadlines based on the collected data.

More to read on the topic: [How to Use Timesheet Reports for Superior Project Results.](#)



Stage 4. Project Closure and Performance Analysis

This phase is needed to compare the actual project progress against the plan, the team's strengths and weaknesses, and plan corrective actions to address the issues.

The key steps of project performance analysis are:

- Measuring KPIs
- Comparing effort and cost
- Documenting project learnings

More to read on the topic: [25 Essential Project Management KPIs: A Brief Guide.](#)

Measuring KPIs

KPI is a metric that shows how much your project contributed to achieving the company's strategic goals. Though KPIs are verifiable, attributable, and easy to understand and use, sometimes separating them from other meaningful project data becomes quite tricky.

Common challenge: Tracking irrelevant KPIs.

Outcome: Wrong team performance evaluation.

Solution: This usually happens due to the failure to establish the connection between the metrics you track and the project goals. It's never too late! Just establish a project measure for each KPI.

How actiTIME can help:

- Calculate the time spent on project work based on the Time-Track in Detail report.
- Use time tracking and cycle time data to assess the accuracy of your time estimations.
- Run the analytics reports by the entire staff or a specific team to calculate other KPIs.

More to read on the topic: [Tracking Project KPI in actiTIME: Get More of Your Time-Track Data.](#)

Comparing Effort and Cost

Measuring project profitability requires dozens of complicated calculations, such as summarizing employee work costs, calculating overtime, summarizing billable amounts for different staff groups, etc.

Common challenge: High risk of human error when doing calculations manually or using spreadsheets.

Outcome: Mistakes in future estimations

Solution: Automate the process as much as possible.

How actiTIME can help:

- Measure project profitability using the Profit / Loss report.
- Visualize the cost of management activities on an informative chart.
- Display the team members' efficiency as annual, monthly, quarterly, etc., revenue per employee.

More to read on the topic: [How to Set Up an Efficient Cost Tracking Process.](#)

Documenting Project Learnings

The experience you gain when running a project can be used to drive improvement within your team and to anticipate potential risks at the initiation and planning stage of a new project.

Common challenge: Inability to identify the essential items to learn from due to the need for more objectivity.

Outcome: Documenting loads of useless data.

Solution: Analytics-based approach. Connect each issue detected during the current project, e.g., a missed deadline, to a respective data set to define whether the process needs further improvement.

How actiTIME can help:

- Use real-time widgets to contrast different datasets and compare different metrics.
- Show your current data compared to previous periods to highlight the impact of its issue.
- Determine downward and upward trends in each process.

More to read on the topic: [How to Simplify Performance Analysis with Data Visualization.](#)



Managing Remote Teams: Best Practices

Optimizing business processes in hybrid or remote teams takes all the effort described above... and a bit more as remote work presents additional challenges.

By understanding these challenges, managers can take steps to address them and ensure that their remote team is productive, engaged, and motivated.

Here are some tips and tricks you can try:

1. Streamline communication and collaboration. Your team members may be in different time zones, making it challenging to coordinate schedules. They may also have different work styles and preferences, leading to misunderstandings, miscommunications, and delays.

How actiTIME can help:

- Commenting and attaching files to tasks
- Customizable email notifications
- Adjustable your work schedules

2. Introduce transparency. Keep your employees involved by regularly sharing project progress data and discussing potential improvements.

How actiTIME can help:

- A variety of reports to download and share
- Adjustable work statuses for easy segmentation and prioritization
- Tracking of employee activities across several projects in one place

3. Help your team stay organized. Help your employees keep abreast of all the tasks they are responsible for and their expected results.

How actiTIME can help:

- Commenting on tasks
- Customizable email notifications
- [Time Management Assistant](#) for automated online activity tracking

4. Make monitoring stress-free. Monitoring and tracking are integral parts of any project, but how you introduce it can make a difference. Nobody likes spyware that takes photos of your screen and counts the cursor movements.

How actiTIME can help:

- Manual or automated timesheet filling
- Tracking on desktop and mobile
- Integrations with external tools



Conclusion

So is there a proven way to protect your project from failure? Unfortunately, even with all business processes optimized, some things can go out of control at any moment.

However, there are five fundamental principles to stick to stay on the safe side:

1. Proper planning with clear goals and the project scope aligned with them.
2. Well-thought-out project schedule with no resources and no employees overloaded.
3. Ongoing execution monitoring involving proactive, informed decisions to avoid delays and budget overruns.
4. Automated performance analytics based on transparent and objective criteria.
5. Recorded and analyzed wins and losses used to introduce improvements, not to shift blame.

Such a data-driven approach will provide extra protection to your upcoming project, leaving nothing but productive work to your team.