Survival Guide for Successful Collaborative Work Management
Seven practical ways to beat the workplace chaos
Everyone is a Project Manager

The nature of work has changed. You may have found yourself in charge of a team and been tasked with leading it toward a positive outcome. This often involves tracking a rapidly-expanding list of tasks and deliverables to meet tight deadlines.

Projects have become the default way of working for today’s teams. Whether you’re a Marketing Manager, a Finance Manager, or even a role that doesn’t have ‘manager’ in the title, you need a better way to get things done.

However, managing people and work presents its own challenges, which can make life pretty chaotic if you have geographically dispersed teams made up of people from different departments, functions and agencies. To add another layer of complexity, using multiple tools often creates confusion that leads to inefficiencies, missed deadlines and unhappy stakeholders.

The good news is, there’s something you can do about it. At Projectplace, we’re experts in bringing teams together to improve work collaboration. We’ve collected seven practical tips that can help you overcome workplace chaos and lead teams to success. Adopting these helpful approaches will instill better, more productive ways of working that deliver the measurable business results you want.
Content

04  Stop juggling too many tasks
06  Work smarter, not harder
08  Use one tool that does more, not more tools
10  Create a virtual office
13  Use Kanban boards to become more agile
16  Turn your plan into a reality
18  Report on success
Stop juggling too many tasks

If you’re expected to oversee a plan, organize a team, delegate tasks and track progress, it can often feel like you’ve got too much work and too little time to do it.

Chances are you’re juggling too many tasks, which can negatively affect timelines, quality and cost, not to mention employee productivity. The first step to achieving your goals in a smart and efficient way is to stop doing so many things yourself and claim back some of your time.
What you can do about it

Get collaborative
From the start you need to establish the plan and the goals with the team so everyone can envision the end goal. Then encourage your team to ask questions and give them the responsibility to take on tasks.

Prioritize and delegate
Help your team understand which tasks are a priority and help them focus on the ones that get you closer to the goal. Define the difference between urgent and important items. Then delegate tasks to team members with the skills and capacity to get them done.

Make sense of the chaos
The days of having your plan on a whiteboard in the middle of the office are over. Create a virtual office space so all your important plans, documents and tasks are easily available to anyone, anywhere.
Work smarter, not harder

Getting things done and achieving your objectives can be a struggle, especially when the final goal can seem so huge that it’s insurmountable. In a complex work environment it can be challenging to understand how to use the team around you effectively, especially when people are using a multitude of different tools that don’t link up neatly.

However, there are some simple changes to workplace behavior and culture that can help you work smarter and stop inefficient ways of working.

"62% of people responsible for taking the lead on tasks or initiatives (projects) have no formal project management training."
What you can do about it

**Plan, but stay flexible**
The planning stage is an opportunity to set clear goals. You can break down the plan into a series of a smaller, specific deliverables to simplify complex projects and make it digestible for all involved. Planning also makes it easier to adapt to unexpected changes in direction so that they don’t become a roadblock.

**Balance team workload**
It’s crucial to find a way to manage the amount of work on everyone’s plate. Managers need to be able to see whether the team has too much, too little, or just enough work.

**Ditch the tools that get in the way**
Emails are easy to ignore or forget about and your inbox usually ends up being a vault for documents that your colleagues can’t access. If you focus all document storage and communication around a centralized collaboration tool, your team will always have the most up-to-date information that they need to carry out their tasks.
Use one tool that does more, not more tools

It’s hard to allocate workloads and prioritize tasks efficiently if the information you need is held hostage across a host of inboxes, desktops, personal cloud drives and IM conversations. Embracing a centralized, feature-rich tool will allow team members to collaborate effectively, share ideas, keep track of actions and store all relevant data in one place.

"33% of workers say that everyone using different tools is one of the top five work collaboration hurdles."
What you can do about it

Stop switching between tools
Invest in one work collaboration tool that helps you keep track of everyone’s progress and lets the team see everything that has been said around a task or initiative. This fosters greater transparency, especially for team members contributing remotely or from different time zones.

Digitize your milestones
The right tool will let you store your plan and the key activities that contribute toward the end goal, preferably with a way to assign ownership of tasks and visually indicate status to team members and stakeholders alike.

Keep everything in one place
Cloud-based document storage enables your team members to access files whenever and wherever they are. Which means no more time wasted scouring through file folders for documents or accidently working from an outdated document.
Create a virtual office

It’s hard to get everyone together in a meeting room when teams are increasingly made up of people from different departments, businesses and time zones. A virtual office can combat this organizational challenge by bringing people together from far and wide to collaborate.
What you can do about it

**Stay connected wherever you go**

With a cloud-based virtual office, no matter where you are, you still have access to all of your essential files and work information, directly from a smartphone, tablet or laptop. You can keep up-to-date on the progress of work from each of your team members wherever in the world you are.

- 28% work with geographically dispersed colleagues.
- 38% work on cross-functional teams.
- 70% work with members both inside and outside the organization.

CHECK OUT THE INFOGRAPHIC →

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What to look for in a virtual office

- A secure, cloud-based solution that can be accessed anywhere, anytime, from desktop or mobile.
- A tool that blends work collaboration, planning and execution in a single workspace (including Kanban task management, file sharing, and Gantt planning features).
- Dashboard and reporting capabilities that meet the needs of management and stakeholders.
- A tool that can grow with your business and support future needs.
Use Kanban boards to become more agile

Sometimes it’s tricky to present the plan to your team in a way that they can easily and instantly understand. And when plans are not broken down into small chunks of incremental, iterative tasks, team members struggle to see how what they’re working on contributes to the overall objective.

This makes it especially challenging whenever there’s an unexpected change in direction. To work in a more agile way, teams must be able to rapidly adapt and reprioritize at any time. This is why many teams use Kanban boards.

"Office workers are 20% more productive when the information they need is visually displayed."
WHAT ARE KANBAN BOARDS?

Kanban boards consist of cards that represent tasks. These cards flow through different columns to represent status, usually ‘To Do’, ‘In Progress’ and ‘Done’. As tasks progress, cards move through the columns. This a visual approach that boosts overall productivity and facilitates responsiveness.
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Be more agile with Kanban, here’s how:

1. Connect individual task to the bigger picture

   Kanban boards allow teams to visualize work and absorb large amounts of information quickly while providing instant clarity, even with the most complex projects. Team members get an easily digestible overview of current tasks and next steps, which, over time, facilitates more productive working practices.

2. Let your team take control

   When all team members can see who is working on what, the status of every task, and what is next in line, team members are empowered to take the initiative and start working on things without needing to ask for permission.

3. Increase transparency of work in progress

   Kanban boards allow you to quickly adjust your plan and workflows in the event of an unexpected change in direction. A visual model lets you observe the flow of work moving through your Kanban system, making it easier to spot bottlenecks and reassign resources to address them.
Turn your plan into a reality

When you or your team have no clear way to manage or keep track of work, it can be difficult to connect day-to-day tasks to the overall strategy. This means that teams struggle to prioritize and manage the work. Connecting strategy to the reality for your team will help make every minute count.

* Performance Management: Putting Research into Action, William Schiemann

"Only 14% of employees understand their company’s strategy and direction."
What you can do about it

**Use technology to stay on top of tasks**
An added benefit of Kanban boards is that cards can be assigned to team members and you can easily track their progress to completion. Your team can understand what to do and when, and easily keep track of what others are working on.

**Rank the importance of tasks**
Use a collaborative platform that lets you add completion dates for tasks, score their importance and quickly mark whether something needs to be done today, tomorrow, or later. This approach helps you and your team understand which tasks have higher priority over others and focus on the deliverables that add the most value.

**Show how everything works toward the end goal**
Collaborative workstreams can streamline the interaction between activities on the overall plan and specific tasks and milestones. This gives everyone a single, consolidated view of all the tasks necessary to complete an activity on the plan, making it easier to visualize how tasks contribute toward the overall goal.

**Handle change more gracefully**
No project runs to completion without some evolution along the way, so your team needs to be able to respond quickly to changing business conditions. Having visibility into your team’s workload means you can stay continually updated on who is available or overloaded without having to wait for people to report in. So you can reassign resources if a change in direction demands it.
Report on success

Achieving success depends on being able to confidently track progress of tasks and deliverables. Is everything on track? Will the deadline be met? If not, what needs to be done to course correct? The problem comes when you don’t have information about what people are working on, or you cannot reconcile the information needed for decision making.

"40% of workers say that work information is not easily accessible and data is difficult to share."
What you can do about it

Let your team tell you about their work
Workload management tools allow team members to personally assess, and provide instant feedback on the balance of their workload. This gives managers the insight into who is working on what and allows the opportunity to make informed decisions based on the team’s capacity.

Present to stakeholders easily
The best work collaboration and management tools let you select, share and present useful data in exportable reports. View the status of KPIs (i.e. time, cost, budget, cost-to-date, expected outcomes) and share them with stakeholders in real-time.

See your progress with dashboards
Invest in software that provides an overview of how work is progressing in relation to the plan. Dashboards provide a visual overview of the project and metrics such as cumulative flow (the number of tasks that are planned, ongoing or complete) and cycle time (the average time taken to complete a task) can help team leaders ensure work is always moving in the right direction.
Overcome the workplace chaos

To deliver the work that matters most to the business, you must:

- **Stop juggling too many tasks** and dedicate your time to things that add value.
- **Work smarter, not harder** and eliminate chaotic ways of working.
- **Use one tool that does more, not more tools** and stop wasting valuable time switching between multiple platforms.
- **Create a virtual office** and store all of your important plans, documents and tasks and make them available to anyone, anywhere.
- **Use Kanban boards** to become more agile and adapt to change.
- **Turn your plan into a reality** and connect their day-to-day tasks with the overall plan.
- **Report on success** and let your team and stakeholders know how the plan is progressing.

Most importantly, use a centralized collaborative work management tool that bring teams together to get work done.

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