

# How to Thrive as a Resource Manager Today



According to recent research, resource management is the biggest challenge faced by PMOs, and that hasn't changed in over 10 years. Back in 2006, researchers were able to zoom in and identify capacity planning as the number-one difficulty in a list of ten, with problems 4-10 being variations on the same theme (see list below).

But you know that already, right? You're probably anticipating a panicked colleague forcing you to drop everything and start hustling even as you read this. Seriously, though, why is it that we're still facing the same challenges? Let's take a closer look at that list.

We'll delve into the second and third points – the right people – a bit later. For now, I'm going to concentrate on the right time. (I think we can agree that the right project is the intersection of these two concepts.) The complaint I hear most often from resource managers is that you have a really hard time being certain. Of what people are currently working on, of what's coming up in terms of needs, and of whether you need to hire or not.

Perhaps you're using a spreadsheet system, or maybe you've invested in a software solution improving your visibility. Either way, your current tools are still missing key information to enable you to make decisions with confidence.

## Fear of the unknown

### A SPREADSHEET-USER'S OBSESSION

Your spreadsheet probably allows you to get an overall view of team allocation, zooming in on what each individual team member is working on. I'm sure you can also switch over to a project view and see who's booked on it and when. Getting an overall picture and, especially, ensuring both views are consistent, can be tricky though if you're constantly having to move between tabs. You start to doubt what you know.

The bigger problem, however, is that your spreadsheet is a snapshot in time based on the information you had at a given moment. Unforeseen circumstances, vacations, delays, even scope creep, affect availability, requirements and allocation – right now. And planning, of course, also requires being able to forecast demand. Ever feel like a chicken, running between Project Management, Sales and your resources, trying to get all the information you need, just so you can keep your tables updated? And no sooner do they reflect reality than the reality changes again.

## 10 RESOURCE MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES

1. Resource capacity planning is poor
2. Resource risks are not assessed
3. Not enough appropriately skilled resources
4. Resource use is not optimized
5. Schedules/deadlines are unrealistic
6. Resources are assigned inconsistently
7. Too many unplanned requests for resources
8. Shifting resources to respond to problems
9. Resource utilization is poorly documented
10. Transition process for resources is inadequate

No wonder you're constantly worried something new and unforeseen is going to come out of nowhere and bite you. If your day-to-day goes off without a hitch, your worries turn to the longer term. You have difficulty knowing whether you should hire or not because you're going on intuition or gut feeling about how busy you are. When you have time to think about it, you know you're subjectively basing that feeling on how busy the last person you talked to was. It could be Joe in Sales, who said you had a ton of projects about to be signed but a month later they haven't materialized. It could be Maria, a senior consultant in high demand, who's really busy, even overbooked. Then you can be surprised when you talk to junior consultant Robin, who says he's twiddling his thumbs.

If only you could see what demand was coming, and your project managers would spread the load better.

## Fear of entropy

### WHEN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE FAILS TO COVER ALL EVENTUALITIES

If you have software, your life is no doubt less frantic. You can see what everyone is working on, and drill down to how a particular person is booked if you need to. You can get a per-project view and see all the projects together. If your project managers aren't allocating resources optimally, you know it: You can actually see that your senior resources are booked solid and your junior resources are being left on the bench. Changes in projects are reflected in the team view. When people put in for vacation, their unavailability shows up in the project plan as well. And maybe you can even see what projects are upcoming through CRM integration.

In theory, you have an overall view of resource availability, enabling you to evaluate your capacity and make hiring decisions, and your project managers to allocate correctly. So why do you still have that feeling of uncertainty?

Well, "the best laid plans of mice and men..."; if your people swap vacations between them, or even projects, or work more hours than they were scheduled to, (hello scope creep), your plan can "often go awry". And when it does, you can't be sure the information you have can be trusted.

Additionally, you don't know how much this is costing you. You know that highly skilled people are probably doing things less qualified people are more than capable of doing, and your margins aren't optimized as a result. You also know that you're diminishing your skill pool in the long term by depriving the younger ones of a chance to gain experience. What you don't know is what the impact of that is. Without reliable, measurable information, how can you make decisions about the future and stay on course?

## Overcome your fears and gain certainty

Reducing uncertainty means increasing control. And software is a great way to do this. The fun thing about software is its ability to integrate with other platforms, enabling your plan to change dynamically and reflect your situation in real time. As resource management often requires a little creative know-how, we've concocted this recipe to guide you to success:

- **Start by combining project management and resource management** – You, and all stakeholders, will benefit from a complete overall picture, viewable by all interested parties, (but modifiable only by those authorized), and constantly updated to reflect reality. Resource management modules that are rich in information give laser-sharp focus to that picture, overcoming fear of the unknown. 'Cost rate' and 'billing rate' per resource enable calculation of the overall project cost and comparison with forecast revenue. With this information, you and your project managers will be able to fully understand the impact of resource-allocation decisions on your bottom line. Information regarding skill levels will enable you to investigate same-skill-different-cost scenarios. With this information, you can more efficiently manage resources so Robin doesn't move on from boredom, and Maria doesn't burn out. Finally, software that includes a leave-approval process will enable you to work against entropy by increasing control over resource availability. When project managers receive leave-request notifications directly, they have time to object or adjust, giving them greater control over their projects.
- **Add CRM integration** – Visibility over pipeline projects is essential so you can start forecasting demand for your resources. Software that enables you to 'pencil in' demand can allow you to see that your team is overbooked by 50% for the next 6 months, for example, and make appropriate hiring decisions.
- **Bind together with timesheet integration** – Finally, a true, real-time picture includes actual hours worked so you can adjust and plan your capacity accurately, but also get visibility on how resources are actually being used compared to the plan. You'll see if project managers are continually booking the same people and overworking them, leaving other resources idle. And once you know, you can take action.

Scrambling is tiring and stressful. Not knowing what's going to happen, or not being able to trust the information you have, are also nerve-wracking. Software that maps your workflow and gives all stakeholders visibility and control over their domain makes for stronger teams and a more relaxed working environment.

Now that we've addressed that issue, let's touch on a different area: managing a global workforce.

With the global economy becoming more project-oriented, the trend for remote working on the increase, and ongoing consolidation in major project-based industries such as Engineering and Construction, there's a good chance you're now managing resources in foreign countries or in multiple remote locations. And there's an even better chance it's causing you headaches.

If you've suddenly found yourself in charge of people in different lands, you may have new surprises every week, discovering not only that holidays aren't the same, but that skills aren't either. And this isn't just limited to global companies. Even if you're speaking the same native language, and share cultural references, you can be caught out when your familiar company jargon isn't understood by your new colleague in a different state or from a newly acquired practice. It can be a major cause of frustration.

And the frustration isn't necessarily limited to you as a resource manager. Your project management colleagues have to deal with this too. And the resources themselves. The good news is: this situation also offers opportunities.

Earlier in the article we touched on how to stop scrambling for resources, we listed the "Top Ten Resource Management Challenges". While most are linked to capacity planning, there are three that relate to availability of the right people. The first, (number two on the list) is "Resource risks are not assessed." While it is in fact difficult to assess risk, greater mobility within your resource pool can offset it. The second is "Not enough appropriately skilled resources", which may be due to a lack of effective skill evaluation as much as to a lack of actual resources. Finally, the fourth greatest resource management challenge is "Resource use is not optimized". While this can mostly be corrected through efficient capacity planning, it's also about being aware of the full capabilities of your resources. Do you see the opportunities?

With the right approach and the right tools, you can turn this frustration into major respect for your resource management capabilities. We recommend the following:

## 1. Start by standardizing skills

Stellar resource management implies knowing exactly how your people can help. Of course, this begins with academic and professional qualifications. But it can be hard to compare them internationally, sometimes even nationally. Qualifications of the same name vary, in terms of level of competency, but also in terms of what skills are included.

This makes understanding difficult, and that limits the availability of appropriately skilled resources, as well as their mobility. To overcome this, you can agree on proficiency levels to try to provide common understanding, but qualifications aren't the only skills consultants have. Additional obstacles to moving resources around can be lack of language skills or cultural competency to work in certain places. Or it could be that some people just aren't willing to travel there. Proficiency levels in your tool won't take into account these differences.

Ideally, you'll want to be able to record these kinds of soft skills and preferences systematically – not just as notes in your database that no-one reads – and filter for them in searches. And you'll want to be able to ensure you request this information systematically too, because if you don't ask, you may never know. Often, you discover by fortunate accident, over a post-lunch coffee or round the water-cooler, that Jeff speaks fluent Mandarin or Maria has super-advanced Excel programming skills. Such revelations can prove very useful. Maybe you can even think of situations where a project manager lamented not having those capabilities available. Unfortunately, when you manage resources remotely,

your chances of getting to know people personally and uncovering those skills are reduced to a couple of times a year if at all, so a system that captures that information for you can go a long way towards improving the skill-appropriateness and, therefore, mobility of your workforce.

Software that enables you to create a fully customized skills library can be a great start. You can widen your definition to include general business competencies like “business analysis”, or “global market strategy”, or specifics like “product-line knowledge”, or experience in particular verticals, such as “healthcare”, “government”, “educational institutions”. You can even include geographical zones where people are willing to travel or have the cultural competency to operate in – basically anything that can make a resource a good or bad match for a job.

But it's easy for things to get out of hand. One client I helped recently had ended up with hundreds of different skills, many of which appeared to be similar but slightly different expressions of the same thing. Resource and project managers couldn't say what the difference was between them, and the search function wasn't smart enough to pull up similar expressions. If you were looking for someone with “advanced Excel”, Pete with “high spreadsheet proficiency” wouldn't show, for example.

Opt for software that guides you in defining a set of skills on which everyone agrees; with proficiency levels everyone agrees on. Your organization will then have a standardized vocabulary for discussing skills – which will give you the added bonus of reducing jargon – and your resource pool will become significantly wider.

## 2. Help project managers tap into the wider pool

To offset resource risks, project managers will benefit from a wider pool, but you may need to help them think about alternative resources to the ones they're used to. As a global or multi-location resource manager, you can see certain resources in a newly acquired company that would be very valuable in another region because they have skills that are in short supply there. You could call the attention of project managers in that region to those resources but, if their need is not immediate, the information might be forgotten. You could also choose to flag the resources and cross your fingers the PMs will look at them when the time comes.

However, if you could see in advance exactly when and where these skills would be needed, you could work proactively with your project managers to use resources optimally. Investing in software that puts all projects in one system, both those that are confirmed and those that are still under negotiation, will give you that visibility.

## 3. Get holidays under control

Now you've widened the resource pool and got your PMs on board with making the most of new skillsets, perhaps better suited to certain projects, you don't want to have a wrench thrown in the works with unexpected availability issues.

Public holidays of course vary from country to country, and there can even be differences between regions within the same nation. If your current tool doesn't allow you to manage these variations at

all, you could encounter problems. Maybe your project managers will be lucky and a colleague will remind them, as they schedule work, that availability is limited that week due to local holidays. Maybe they'll think to look up the notes you conscientiously added to your main resource database. Or maybe they'll have to deal with an irate Bob complaining they scheduled him to work on a holiday or, worse, an irate customer complaining Mary didn't turn up for work, or that the deliverable will be late because 40 hours of work were booked on a 32-hour week.

Some software tools incorporate public holidays but only specific to a particular country and only nationally observed ones. They may have the ability to add in certain holidays, such as company founder's day or others specific to your organization, but they can't handle multiple variations at the same time. This is something to look out for. You could maybe get creative and add in all possible variations, specifying applicability, (à la Google Calendar), but you run the risk of your colleagues pegging you as just adding noise rather than being helpful.

If you're looking to invest in software, or renew the tools you have, we recommend seeking out a platform that enables you to set holidays by site. With this function, you can take into account country variations, like US Christmas, Canadian Christmas, and Ramadan; regional variations like Rosa Parks Day in Missouri or Family Day in some Canadian provinces; even locally agreed holidays such as whether to have Black Friday off or observe Easter on Friday or Monday. With available hours better managed, you can avoid unpleasant surprises.

## About Tenrox Resource Management

Tenrox Resource Management gives organizations visibility into their people, so you can make sure they are working the right projects, at the right time and in the right place. Cloud-based, configurable and easy-to-use, it gives real-time insight into the skills, availability of your people. Tight integration with your CRM system facilitates resource planning and the ability to balance capacity against demand. Whether your team is internal or external, it will help you centralize information about all your resources so you can ensure maximum utilization and optimize the team for maximum revenue.

Tenrox Resource Management gives you a strategic edge to deliver the best possible projects to your customers. To learn more, visit [tenrox.com](https://tenrox.com) and request a demo.

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