Teamwork Benefits from Planning — and the Right Tools for Collaboration

Planning then executing a project from beginning to end is vital, and managing the right people is crucial to meeting goals. Tracking activities and effort is one aspect of modern project management; enabling team collaboration is another important component. At

Bluedog, we see a project as a temporary group or solo activity with an end goal in mind, on a schedule. Projects typically have a clear beginning as well as a clear end, and the processes to complete them may differ dramatically depending on the size and scope.

Task tracking is simply the measurement and documenting of activities and hours (or some other unit) worked. With the right tool, organizations can also follow other trends, such as efficiency or productivity. From a project management view, anytime more than two people are involved in an effort, keeping track of dependencies, schedule, and budget become paramount. Integration with accounting systems streamlines the financial side of any project. Task management integrated with collaboration and communication processes improves efficiency. Time tracking enables organizations and staff to be more productive.

Often, we rely on the so-called "honor method." To figure out how much to bill a client, the customer asks how many hours have been spent on the project. From the answers, one comes up with a rough estimate of how many hours worked, and prepares an invoice accordingly. This is an inaccurate approach. If clients want a break-down of how billable hours were spent, there is no record. And if there is a need to know how staff spent their time, they won't have a detailed break-down, either.

In the early days of consulting, the notebook was an important tool. Staff physically logged time in their individual notebook timesheet, which had the advantage of making one hyper-aware of how time is being spent. Because that notebook was always with a consultant, it was ubiquitous: whether in the office, on a client's site, or out in the field.

However, if a consultant lost or damaged the written timesheet, crucial financial and productivity information was lost. If one forget to use it, that data was lost. Moreover, if anyone else wanted to see the timesheet (a client wants to view a consultant's, or a manager wanted to review a team member's), then copies would have to be made. The timesheet was often faxed weekly to the accounting office for approval and tedious processing.

Spreadsheets such as Excel are endlessly flexible, and can easily be used to record how much time is spent on projects or individual tasks. This can be as easy as a few columns: Date, Activity, Start Time, End Time, and Hours Worked. Sometimes adding a column for Client Name and Hourly Rate might be beneficial. This is less labor-intensive than the manual approach — and one doesn't need much more than Google Sheets and a watch. Without integration to invoicing and other financial tools, this method still requires manual reporting for billing purposes. If one uses a project management app (like Workbench "Always on the Job!"©), then managers can seamlessly track the time spent on each task, and roll up projects. Other reporting helps with budgeting, planning (via a GANTT chart, for example), and work allocation.

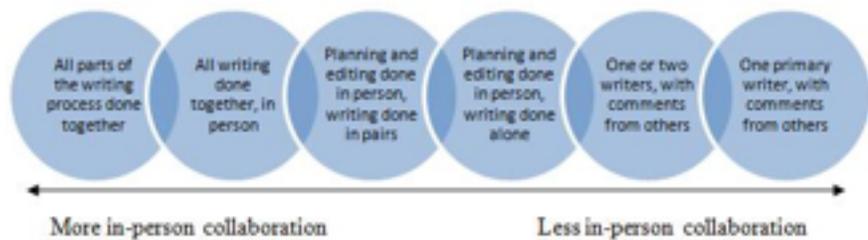If one needs help allocating a team's workload and getting collaboration working, Workbench is a good choice. Get an instant overview of who might be overwhelmed with activities (missing deadlines), who is being productive, and who is being under-utilized.
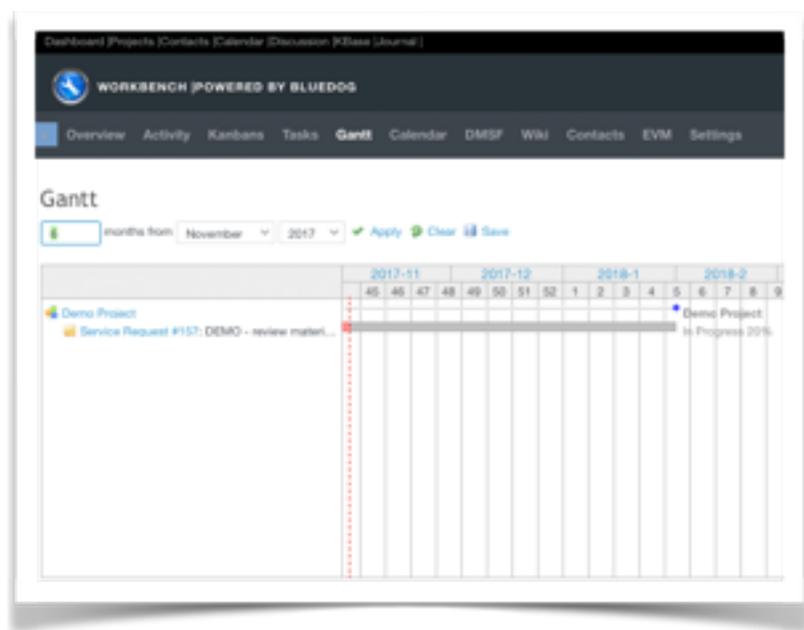
Collaboration has always been an important part of any organization, although virtual collaboration is becoming more and more pertinent as the internet enables geographically dispersed teams to be fully interconnected. Social collaboration, for example, has made cooperation with colleagues scattered throughout the world an easy process. With Workbench "Always on the Job!"©, we are able to capitalize on the overlap between project management and project collaboration.

Project collaboration from the Bluedog perspective is how people work together to complete a project, leveraging their shared knowledge and expertise. These (sometimes hidden) processes may be at the direction of the project manager, or are just organic. Workbench "Always on the Job!"© enables remote workers to collaborate, discuss projects, and carry out specific tasks within a virtual workspace.

All parts of the writing process done together | All writing done together, in person | Planning and editing done in person, writing done in pairs | Planning and editing done in person, writing done alone | One or two writers, with comments from others | One primary writer, with comments from others

More in-person collaboration ←——————————————————→ Less in-person collaboration

Documents are shared, and workflows are tracked, to ensure milestones are met. One benefit: workers solve problems together, thus expediting finishing a task. Logging messages via the portal has positive impact on communication, and provides a clear understanding of needs. Another excellent tool of Workbench "Always on the Job!"© is the calendar system — depicted as the usual 30-day view or via the GANTT chart.

By monitoring how productive each person on the team is, one can easily determine who is contributing to the common goal and who needs assistance. Time tracking also enables working with remote staff, freelancers, and contractors, dramatically reducing the budget. With Workbench, you can overcome inefficient workflows — discover the bottlenecks in processes, fix them, and finish projects faster. As a successful manager, you know efficiency means saved time and energy, which translates to saved money. Solid project management with social collaboration "baked in" can help streamline tasks and ensure that you are getting as much out of your team as possible.