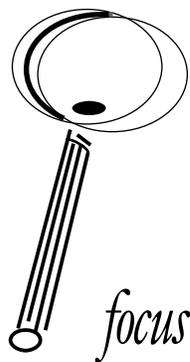


The Challenges of Multiple Project Management



Learning Objectives

By the end of this chapter, you will be able to:

- Explain why individual multiple project management situations differ so greatly.
- Define key terms of multiple project management, including *project*, *operations*, *work program*, and *portfolio*, and use each in appropriate business settings.
- Perform a self-assessment of your multiple project management environment.
- Describe your organizational environment from both a portfolio and a program management perspective and explain the differences.
- Identify key risks and issues that provide challenges to managers of multiple projects.
- Assess whether your issues are primarily in the field of project management or time management.

Estimated timing for this chapter:

Reading	40 minutes
Exercises	60 minutes
Review Questions	10 minutes
Total Time	1 hour 50 minutes

INTRODUCTION TO MANAGING MULTIPLE PROJECTS

Project managers manage *projects* — temporary work to achieve specific ends. A project can be anything, from remodeling your kitchen to building the International Space Station. Everybody manages projects, not merely at work but also in coping with everyday life.

If you manage more than one project at a time, you're managing multiple projects. Some multiple project managers are called program managers, because a *program* is the name for a group of projects being managed together.

Professional *project managers* manage projects for a living, often have the title “Project Manager,” and may have professional certifications, such as the Project Management Professional (PMP®) designation. Professional *program managers* manage formal collections of projects, and may also have the title and appropriate credentials. This self-study course is not limited to certified project or program managers, but is designed to support any manager with multiple project responsibilities, regardless of level.

“Managing multiple projects” means different things to different people. Consider which situation best describes you:

- I am the manager of a project so large that its major subcomponents are also considered projects. I have subordinate project managers who are primarily responsible for accomplishing the individual work packages. (Large-scale project management)
- I am the manager of an ongoing program to accomplish a series of projects; new projects come in as old ones finish. I have subordinate project managers who accomplish individual projects while I manage the overall program. (Program management)
- I am the project manager of multiple simultaneous projects, reporting to a manager who oversees the program level. (Multiple project manager)
- I am both the project manager and the sole or primary worker on a number of small, simultaneous projects. (Multitasker)

A large-scale project manager manages multiple projects within the envelope of an overall project. Sometimes the large project is called a project; sometimes it's called a program, to distinguish it from its components.

- If you are a corporate executive responsible for moving the company's headquarters, you are a project manager.
- If you are the general contractor building the new campus, you are a project manager, subordinate to the executive in charge.
- If you are responsible for moving and relocation for the new campus, you are a project manager reporting to the executive in charge.
- If you are in charge of industrial security, you are a project manager who reports both to the construction project manager and to the executive in charge of the project.

And so on. In this sense, managing multiple projects and managing very large projects are the same thing.

Some program managers manage an ongoing operation — not a project. If you run new product development for a soup company, you have individual project teams developing and test-marketing new soups. Individual projects succeed (“It’s raining soup!”) or fail (“No soup for you!”) — but either way, they end. On the other hand, your program — developing new soups — does not have a planned end point. In this sense, managing multiple projects isn’t the same thing as project management at all, though you do need to know how to supervise those pesky project managers.

Another type of multiple project manager is the project manager with more than one job assignment at a given time. You don’t have subordinate project managers for those projects: you’re a juggler. You’ve got to keep all the balls in the air until the act is done.

Finally, you can be both chief cook and bottle-washer. “One-man band” project managers have a difficult challenge, especially when you have multiple projects. In this sense, multiple project management is essentially the same thing as high-end time management.

Almost everyone manages multiple projects at some level, whether the projects are small or large, simple or complex, few or many. In some cases, multiple project management will be a specific job responsibility; in others, multiple project management is simply the everyday reality of the workplace.

Because of the huge range of situations and circumstances that go by the name “multiple project management,” it’s essential that you apply the lessons in this self-study course to your own situation, not to some hypothetical ideal of multiple project management. You may find that formal project management tools are of substantial benefit, or you may find that the skills of time management and goal setting take you farther along the road to success.

In this course you’ll discover a wide range of techniques, skills, and insights to apply to your situation. Remember, however, that one size does not fit all. In this chapter, you’ll be able to explore your specific issues so that you can select effectively among the strategies provided and achieve the results you seek.

Projects + Operations = Work

A *project*, says the Project Management Institute (PMI), is a “temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product, service, or result.” (Project Management Institute, 2008, *PMBOK® Guide*, 1.2) That’s how we distinguish projects from ongoing *work* efforts (*operations*): projects are temporary, with a definite beginning or end; operations are ongoing, without a planned end.

Your work consists of both projects and operations, in varying degrees. Your projects may be small or large; you may do all the work yourself or direct a staff of thousands; you may be judged primarily on the success of your projects or primarily on the effectiveness of your operations.

Project management, PMI goes on to say, is the “application of knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to project activities to meet the project requirements.” (*PMBOK® Guide*, 1.3) There is a discipline of project management that is designed to help you organize, plan, execute, monitor, control, and finish the projects for which you are responsible.

Because the range of project size and complexity varies from something as simple as planning a dinner for ten to something as complicated as the building of a cutting-edge Las Vegas resort, one size definitely does not fit all where project management is concerned. Especially when you are managing not merely one project, but multiples, you need to choose carefully so that you have the right tools — neither too many nor too few — to get the job done.

Characteristics of Your Multiple Project Environment

A formal project management process assumes that you are responsible only for a single project, and that you have organizational control over the resources necessary to accomplish the work. In contrast, multiple project managers have to split time, resources, and energy across a range of projects, and often a range of operational responsibilities at the same time. Exactly how you do that and what strategy is most appropriate for you varies.

Exercise 1-1 helps you identify the nature of your multiple project environment, so that you can make informed choices about tools and techniques. You will also use the information from Exercise 1-1 in later exercises as you develop a multiple project management strategy that's best for you.



Exercise 1-1

Self-Assessment: Your Multiple Project Environment

1. How many projects am I managing?

Make a list of your current projects. Use additional paper if necessary.

- (a) _____
- (b) _____
- (c) _____
- (d) _____
- (e) _____

Fewer than 5 — Low complexity 5-10 — Medium complexity More than 10 — High complexity

2. How much effort do these projects require?

For each project, determine how long it would take you to complete it—assuming that you work on nothing else and have no waiting time.

- (a) _____
- (b) _____
- (c) _____
- (d) _____
- (e) _____

Days — Low effort Weeks — Medium effort Months — High effort

Exercise 1-1 continues on next page.

Exercise 1-1 continued from previous page.

3. How much time do I have to work on them?

- Determine how much of your day is required to perform your operational responsibilities, and how much is available for your multiple projects. Which statement most closely describes your situation?
- Operational work takes essentially 100 percent of my time, and project work is supposed to be performed in addition to it. (No official time)
- Operational work takes 60–80 percent of my time and project work the remainder. (Little time)
- Operational work takes 30–60 percent of my time and project work the remainder. (Moderate time)
- Operational work takes less than 30 percent of my time; my focus is primarily on my projects. (Focus of my efforts)

4. What resources are available and are they sufficient?

For each project, how many people are needed to do the work? How many people do you have available?

- (a) _____
- (b) _____
- (c) _____
- (d) _____
- (e) _____

I have more resources than strictly needed to accomplish the work — Overstaffed

I have appropriate numbers of resources to handle the work — Properly staffed

I am short of the resources necessary to accomplish the work — Understaffed

The first two questions in Exercise 1-1 are important for anyone managing multiple projects: what do you have to do, and how much time and effort will it take you to do it? As a professional, you should perform this step on a regular basis in order to stay on top of a dynamic and fast-changing work environment.

The third question compares what you have to accomplish with the time available for its accomplishment. Clearly, the toughest situation (though surprisingly common) is the first: you have a full-time operational job and yet long-term projects must be accomplished somehow. However, even if operational work makes minor demands on your time, the number of projects for which you are responsible can still create a mismatch between available resources and work to be accomplished.

Finally, while it would appear obvious that small projects are necessarily easier than large projects, it sometimes depends on the volume. A large number of small projects can be tougher to accomplish than a single big one, even if the total amount of work to be performed is roughly identical. Multiple

small projects require scheduling and control just as much as bigger ones, and the myriad details can become overwhelming.

In addition to these questions, consider one additional factor: are you the manager, or are you part of the team? You may be studying this course because of your own multiple project issues, or because you are operating in a multiple project environment that you do not directly manage. Of course, these are not mutually exclusive. You can have multiple projects of your own and also be part of someone else's multiple project *portfolio*.

Challenges in Your Multiple Project Environment

Obviously, the greater your operational responsibility and the greater the number of your projects, the more difficult your challenges are likely to be. But not all challenges are created equal, and having a good grasp of your own issues is also essential in figuring out how best to manage them.

Exercise 1-2 is an assessment to determine the degree to which you experience common challenges in managing multiple projects, along with commentary about the nature of these challenges. You will use this information throughout the course.



Exercise 1-2

Self-Assessment: Challenges in Managing Multiple Projects

The following self-assessment with commentary will measure the difficulty and complexity of your multiple project management environment. Rate your answer to each on a scale of 1 to 5 as indicated below:

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Almost Always	Always

1. The projects for which I am responsible are similar in subject matter, scope, and complexity.

In managing multiple projects, one way to improve efficiency is to create templates for common reoccurring project types. If you prepare a quarterly briefing package, the contents change every quarter, but the process is likely to remain relatively stable. A great variety of project types, on the other hand, means that templating is of relatively little benefit, and projects require far more individual control.

My rating: _____

My project issues: _____

2. I have clearly defined resources and appropriate authority to accomplish my projects.

The nature of multiple projects requires that resources be shared as well. If you control all the necessary resources with sufficient authority, then you can allocate those resources

Exercise 1-2 continues on next page.

Exercise 1-2 continued from previous page.

among your projects based on your priorities. If you work in a multiple project environment where many project managers share the same resources (a department of programmers, for example), by definition at least some project managers won't have direct supervisory control over resources they need to accomplish their projects. Managing resource/authority mismatches is a critical challenge for multiple project managers.

My rating: _____

My project issues: _____

3. The volume of projects for which I am responsible tends to be constant, without wide fluctuations in workload.

Even if resources are sufficient to the overall workload, abrupt peaks and valleys dramatically complicate the situation. You normally cannot afford to employ enough resources for the peaks because they will sit idle most of the time, so you use contract or temporary resources to cover overloads. If volume fluctuates in a regular pattern (tax season in an accounting firm), you can plan more effectively to manage the project inflow. If volume is triggered by external events or emergencies, however, you are likely to be caught short because bringing temporary resources on-line takes time.

My rating: _____

My project issues: _____

4. The projects for which I am responsible are generally in my area of expertise and competency.

In a collection of multiple projects, there are often at least some things for which you are responsible that fall outside your areas of expertise and competency. You can (and do) learn, of course, and as you grow into a job, your skills evolve. When you do have projects outside your comfort zone, you are often required, in the words of Tennessee Williams' character Blanche DuBois, to "rely on the kindness of strangers." Your skills in motivation, persuasion, trust-building, and coordination are normally far more important than your official managerial power.

My rating: _____

My project issues: _____

5. New projects arrive in an orderly and scheduled process; project changes and unforeseen emergencies are uncommon.

The degree of advance notice you get about upcoming projects affects your ability to schedule resources to do the work. Projects added on an emergency basis ("firefighting") are particularly challenging and require special strategies to cope with them.

Exercise 1-2 continues on next page.

Exercise 1-2 continued from previous page.

My rating: _____

My project issues: _____

6. I have subordinates who perform the bulk of the work on projects for which I am responsible as a manager; my role is primarily to coordinate, oversee, and schedule.

A common experience among multiple project managers is the feeling of wearing too many hats: project manager, technical lead, administrative support, procurement chief, documentation manager, and all the other roles. When you can limit the bulk of your effort to the coordination and oversight role, it's easier to apply more of the formal tools of project and time management to your environment.

My rating: _____

My project issues: _____

7. The primary purpose of my job is to accomplish my projects, not to perform operational work.

For some professionals, projects fall under "other duties as assigned." You have a regular job that under normal circumstances occupies the bulk of your time. But projects accumulate nevertheless: a new regulation forces you to modify your process, you upgrade your IT system, you prepare your annual budget report, you organize a meeting. Because the total time and resources available are already so heavily committed, you have limited resources to apply to planning and scheduling.

My rating: _____

My project issues: _____

Scoring:

0–11 Easy	Scheduling and organization are the chief worries.
12–25 Medium	Influence management, planning, and resource control are keys.
Over 25 Hard	Consider making a business case for additional resources/authority, or for fewer projects.

Comments: _____

As you move forward through this self-study course, keep your answers to these questions in mind. You'll use the answers to make informed decisions among the range of tools, techniques, and strategies provided throughout.

MANAGING PROGRAMS AND PORTFOLIOS

Two important types of multiple project collections are known as portfolios and programs. These are normally managed by more senior professionals or by executives, depending on their size and relative importance to the organization.

Portfolios are ways to group projects and operations around strategic business objectives. (*PMBOK® Guide*, 1.4.1) The projects in a portfolio are not necessarily interdependent or even directly related to one another. For example, the 44,000-person company SAIC provides technical services and solutions in a variety of areas: national security, energy, environment, infrastructures, and health (SAIC company website, 2010). An IT project in health has many characteristics in common with an IT project in national security or energy, but they are grouped in different portfolios because it's more important in this case to align resources with strategic objectives rather than to group projects by technical similarity.

Programs are groups of related projects that are managed in a coordinated way to provide benefits and control not available from managing them individually. (*PMBOK® Guide*, 1.4.2) *Dungeons & Dragons®* game manufacturer TSR, Inc. (now part of Wizards of the Coast, a Hasbro subsidiary) organized its new product development operation into games, books, magazines, miniature figures, and licensing. Each area was a program: the projects were related both in subject matter and resources.

Difference Between Programs and Portfolios

Programs and portfolios often coexist in the same organization. TSR had a program management orientation. The departments were aligned with the programs: a game development group produced games, the book department published books, and the magazine department put out magazines.

Brands at TSR, however, often cut across department lines. One of the company's most successful offerings, *Dragonlance®*, had games, books, miniature figures, and more in its range of products. While individual products were produced and overseen by the appropriate departments (programs), there needed to be a portfolio management function as well: something to bring together the range, to ensure consistency, and to plan for wider market reach.

Portfolio Management

Portfolio managers are responsible for steering significant strategic business objectives to success, and as a result tend to operate at senior levels of the organization.

The measure of project success is often described in terms of the four objectives: on time, within budget, to scope, and with quality. But business

goals and project goals are not necessarily the same. Executives aren't necessarily interested in these internal project management metrics; they prefer to measure concepts like profitability, return on investment, customer satisfaction and retention, and competitive benchmarking.

It may be far less significant in the long run whether you met the stated objectives than whether the result of your project has value. The Leaning Tower of Pisa failed to meet its schedule, dramatically overshot its budget, and botched its performance requirements — but who would know the town of Pisa otherwise? (Dobson and Feickert, 2007)

Harvey Levine, author of *Project Portfolio Management*, observes that the kinds of questions executives (especially those in the for-profit sector) care about:

- What mix of potential projects will provide the best utilization of human and cash resources to maximize long-range growth and return on investment for the firm?
- How do the projects support strategic initiatives?
- How will the projects affect the stock price? (Levine, 2005)

Nonprofits and governments ask about similar things: what mix of projects achieve the greatest good? How do the projects support strategic initiatives? And, of course, how will the projects affect the polls?

While this self-study course is not focused on portfolio management as a discipline, portfolio managers are responsible for the management of multiple projects in the course of their work. There is a substantial overlap in the tools and skills necessary for success. Adopting a portfolio perspective helps you prioritize your efforts with regard to any collection of projects you happen to manage.

Program Management

The word *program* means different things to different people. PMI, as noted, uses the word to describe any set of projects that are being managed together because someone sees an advantage or benefit to doing so.

There are many reasons to group projects into programs. In fact, there may be more than one way to group the same set of projects. As noted, TSR grouped its projects into programs based on product category: games, books, and magazines. It could also have grouped them by product line. Each approach has advantages and limitations. Organizing by category improves efficiency of resource utilization; organizing by line improves consolidated strategic direction. Organizations necessarily make operational choices.

The government sector often uses *program* where private industry would use *project*. Project management authority Harold Kerzner, Ph.D., uses the words interchangeably. (Kerzner, 53) A more useful distinction is to suggest there are two distinctly different types of programs, independent and interdependent.

An *interdependent program* is a project so large that its major components are projects in their own right. The U.S. moon shot was a program; so was Apollo, one of its major components. The Saturn V rocket launches consti-

tuted a program. Within the program, a given Apollo mission (a huge undertaking in itself) would be a project.

The alternative, a program of independent projects, is different: the program is not itself a project. New projects are added as old projects are completed. The consolidated program management is there to provide operational support for project activities. (Dobson, *Juggler's Guide*, 5) Both kinds of programs can be aligned with portfolios or not, depending on how the organization wishes to proceed.

This course will refer to both kinds of programs throughout, and show you how the nature of your program environment affects the strategies you can follow to manage your projects.



Think About It . . .

Are you managing a program of independent projects or an interdependent program (very large project)?

OPERATIONAL WORK AND TIME MANAGEMENT

Because this self-study course concerns managing multiple projects, operational work takes second place in our discussions. That may not describe your situation in real life. If your issue is how to manage your projects when your main work takes precedence, you need to look for different lessons than if your issue is how to improve focus and delivery on the projects that are your main reason for being.

There are quite a few similarities between project management and time management, but also one key difference: time management focuses on operational work. That's not to say, of course, that managers of multiple projects can't find great value from better time management. In fact, skillful time management is one of the linchpins of your ability to manage.

Exercise 1-3 is a self-assessment of your time management skills. If you aren't satisfied with your score, there are numerous resources and tools to help build your competency in this vital area. (Alexander/Dobson, 1)



Exercise 1-3 Time Management Diagnostic

Check one column in each row to assess your time management skills.

Question	Often (4 points)	Sometimes (2 points)	Rarely (0 points)
Do you handle each piece of paperwork only once?			
Do you begin and finish projects on time?			
Do people know the best time to reach you?			
Do you do something every day that moves you closer to your long-range goals?			
When you are interrupted, can you return to your work without losing momentum?			
Do you deal effectively with long-winded callers?			
Do you focus on preventing problems before they arise, rather than solving them after they happen?			
Do you meet deadlines with time to spare?			
Are you on time to work, to meetings, and to events?			
Do you delegate well?			
Do you write daily to-do lists?			
Do you finish all the items on your to-do list?			
Do you update in writing your professional and personal goals?			
Is your desk clean and organized?			
Can you easily find items in your files?			
Totals			

Exercise 1-2 continues on next page.

Exercise 1-3 continued from previous page.

Scoring (add totals for all three columns):

49–60 Very good	You manage your time well. You are in control of most days and most situations.
37–48 Good	You manage your time well—some of the time. However, you need to be more consistent with time-saving strategies and add new techniques.
25–36 Fair	You would benefit from adopting a structured approach to time management.
13–24 Poor	You are close to losing control. Remedial support is required.
0–12 Overwhelmed	Your stress levels are probably very high. Help is needed immediately.

Comments:

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Almost every professional manages multiple projects, but each collection of projects is unique. In approaching this self-study course, it's vital that you apply each lesson to your specific environment. Projects, which are “temporary and unique,” can be distinguished from ongoing work efforts, known as operations. Your total work consists of the projects and operations for which you are responsible. Project management is “the application of knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to project activities to meet the project requirements.” It is a sophisticated discipline that contains tools appropriate to very large and very small projects. Select and apply only those elements of project management that will help you.

Formal project management assumes you have only one project and that you control the resources necessary to get it done. Multiple project managers have to split time, resources, and energy across a range of projects and at the same time accomplish their operational responsibilities. There are a number of potential challenges in your multiple project environment, including variation in kind of project, lack of clearly defined resources and authority, fluctuations in workload, wide range of subject matter (including some in areas with which you are not familiar), frequent surprise additions of new projects and emergency responses. Whether you have staff to whom you can delegate or whether the primary purpose of your job is to accomplish projects or perform operational work also add complexity.

Portfolios group projects and operations around strategic business objectives. Programs, on the other hand, are groups of related projects managed in a coordinated way to provide benefits and control not available from managing them individually. Organizational leadership tends to look at projects from a portfolio perspective: what optimizes utilization of human and cash resources to maximize long-range growth and return on investment for the organization? Whether or not you have a formal portfolio management approach, it's always useful to keep a portfolio perspective in mind. Programs can be very large projects, in which the major subsections of the program are projects in their own right. Programs may not be projects at all, but rather a stable management structure that completes related projects on an ongoing basis.

You can't separate multiple project management from operational responsibilities, and the link between the two is time management. Good time management skills are essential to success.



Review Questions

INSTRUCTIONS: Here is the first set of review questions in this course. Answering the questions following each chapter will give you a chance to check your comprehension of the concepts as they are presented and will reinforce your understanding of them.

As you can see below, the answer to each numbered question is printed to the side of the question. Before beginning, you should conceal the answers by placing a sheet of paper over the answers as you work down the page. Then read and answer each question. Compare your answers with those given. For any questions you answer incorrectly, make an effort to understand why the answer given is the correct one. You may find it helpful to turn back to the appropriate section of the chapter and review the material of which you were unsure. At any rate, be sure you understand all the review questions before going on to the next chapter.

1. Which of the following is a challenge of managing multiple projects? 1. (b)
 - (a) My projects are similar in subject matter, scope, and complexity.
 - (b) I do not have authority and control over key project resources.
 - (c) The volume of projects for which I am responsible tends to be stable and consistent.
 - (d) Project changes and unforeseen emergencies are uncommon.

2. Responsibility for managing multiple projects tends to be: 2. (d)
 - (a) held primarily by executives and senior managers.
 - (b) always secondary to accomplishing operational work.
 - (c) something for which you need certification as a Project Management Professional (PMP).
 - (d) something done by almost everyone at some level.

3. A project, according to the *PMBOK*[®] *Guide*, is: 3. (a)
 - (a) temporary and unique.
 - (b) either a portfolio or a program.
 - (c) the operational work of the position.
 - (d) something for which software is required.

4. A program of interdependent projects is: 4. (c)
 - (a) a strategic business objective of the organization.
 - (b) always managed by an executive.
 - (c) another way to describe a very large project.
 - (d) not a project itself.

5. In managing portfolios, senior executives are most concerned with: 5. (a)
- (a) what mix of potential projects provides the best utilization of human and cash resources to maximize long-range growth and return on investment.
 - (b) whether the project processes align with the *PMBOK® Guide*.
 - (c) whether you accomplish your goal on time, on budget, and within requirements.
 - (d) how little money you spend.