



Project scope management

Introduction

At many businesses, it's a tale as old as time. You get a project all planned and scoped out—then someone brings up a point you hadn't considered, so it's back to the drawing board. You put together a revised plan and it's all good to go. That is, until another department gets involved or your client comes back with a new request. Before you know it, your project scope has ballooned to be twice as big (and [expensive](#)) as you had planned. It was supposed to be done already but you still haven't started.

That's **scope creep**—the words alone are enough to strike fear into the hearts of even the most experienced [project managers](#). But how do you prevent it? To save time, effort, and headache, you need an effective project scope management strategy. That starts with planning ahead.

What is project scope?

Project scope is the sum total of all project deliverables. The [PMBOK Guide](#) puts it this way: Project scope is “all the work required, and only the work required, to complete the project successfully.”

The first step to making sure your project stays within the bounds of its intended scope is defining exactly what that scope is. We recommend summarizing your project's scope in a [project scope statement](#). Below, we'll show you how to write one, step-by-step.

Writing a project scope statement

Completing a project scope statement is important because it forces you to slow down and really examine your problem. Scope creep often happens because you're rushing—if you speed through this planning process, you're likely to miss something important.

Imagine a doctor treating a patient—if they speed through the examination, they may misdiagnose the problem and prescribe the wrong treatment. While it may seem counterintuitive, you need to go slow to go fast. The more work you do up

front to really understand your problem and plan out your solution, the easier it will be to stay within your project scope.

[Here's an example outline of a project scope statement](#). At the beginning of a project, you may not have all the answers—and that's okay. Just fill it out to the best of your ability. You can always revisit it with more detail later.

Writing a project scope statement can also help better communicate your goals and enforce project bounds to your stakeholders, whether they are external clients or internal managers. This is important because scope creep can easily happen when your stakeholders don't understand what they're asking for.

As per the [Dunning-Kruger effect](#), people with the least knowledge of a task tend to underestimate how difficult it will be to accomplish. Writing a project scope statement can help clearly articulate everything that goes into the process, including how much time and effort it will take to deliver.

The planning fallacy

We humans tend to underestimate how long it takes to do things thanks to the [planning fallacy](#)—an optimistic cognitive bias that we can complete tasks in less time (or for less money) than reality. When you're developing your project scope, you have to check this impulse.

Interestingly, the planning fallacy goes both ways—while we underestimate how long it takes for ourselves to complete tasks, we overestimate how long it will take for others. You can use this to your advantage by getting a teammate to double-check your estimates.

Time tracking can give you a more realistic picture of how long projects take to complete, enabling you to make better estimates.

Using time tracking for project scope management

Using a [time tracking tool](#) gives you a historical record to draw from—as you log

your hours, you build up an archive of past projects. Then, when you're scoping out new work, you can look at similar types of projects to see what they cost in terms of time and funding. Over time, you'll be able to make more accurate estimates based on what you learn.

Here's a real-life example: Luis Klefsjo, Delivery Manager at [YLD](#), a development agency, uses Harvest whenever he receives a new request for information (RFI). Recently he received one that had a lot of similarities to a project they're currently working on—so he went into Harvest to see how the project is tracking.

"I could see from early on that the team was possibly a little overworked, and they had a bit too much to do," says Luis. "We probably should have had some more people on there. For this project, we didn't want to cause the same staffing issues." This time around, he's adding more people to the team from the outset, to factor in the extra design and engineering load.

Checking your project scope against your time tracking log is the best way to verify that your plan is realistic. Building an archive of past work to cross-check with, even if you're starting from scratch, will improve your accuracy by leaps and bounds.

From mayhem to project scope management

Scope creep may be a recurring nightmare for many teams, but it doesn't have to be that way. With careful project scope management, you can ensure that you stay on track and under budget. The key is to slow down, carefully consider the problem you're trying to solve, and collect time tracking data to make an informed estimate.



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