Ln4 Solutions AB

The sudden reality 'Work-from-home' – a threat or an opportunity

'Work-from-home' is in no way something new – but suddenly many organizations have been forced to apply it on a completely new scale. We are not talking about 'checking email from home in the evening' or 'take the meeting from home' – we are talking about being forced to move the complete work place **to your 'home office' and physically away from the colleagues**.

How big must the consequences be for you and the company, is it realistic to continue work efficiently and being 'present' even in extremely **distributed environments** – or could this even be a good opportunity to improve the way we run and follow-up ongoing projects, e.g., by making the work assignments more well-defined and concrete described for everybody.

The new Challenge:
Distributed projects and Project Management Offices (PMO)

When 'stand-up-meetings' by a whiteboard with post-it notes is overruled – the challenge turns into having a well-structured way-of-working, understood by everybody, possible to handle by each and every one, wherever located. **A challenge on a completely new level.**

Have your projects not already turned to **digital information management** – it has by now become even more important. This is actually very straightforward, at least if you make use of **the most modern tools** – which at the same time could become a strong **alignment and self-guiding support** for running well-structured projects.

A big challenge has proven to be to develop systems that support all the main roles (i.e., is fully role-based), and base it on a common consistent data base – which is a necessity for the wanted functionality. In addition, all user interfaces need to be intuitive and flexible to support the company's specific way of working, at the same time as they can be introduced in feasible steps. Finally, the information must be transparent and available in the correct format, at exactly the right time, for all who actually **need it and has the right** to access it.

Transparent distributed project management in reality

'Self-administration', adapted to each and every role, is actually the key to efficient and correct work planning. It is the one who knows the best who should communicate his/her plans, but should only need to do it once, and it should immediately become correctly available in all related views for all involved roles.

Self-administration is rather easy to achieve, **by adopting the correct structure**. As soon as you have access to an IT-support based on each participant's work hours – and which only requests you to plan your participation and assignment of available time, the actual planning becomes very easy to handle. To administer your own time based on decided/agreed participation is very natural – you know the best, at each point in time, how to optimize your time between the projects and activities where you are engaged. Everybody is motivated to **plan and be in control of his/her work**.

When the level of participation has been agreed for all engagements, and when **the resulting assignments are in line with available work time** – every co-worker can in a controlled way **propose or negotiate with his/her project manager** around what assignments that

realistically will fit into the assigned time for each project. This simple scenario gives most of the control back to the co-workers, and eliminates the frequent feeling of being in-sufficient, as **the expected result and the assigned time are now truly related to each other** – not at least important when you frequently work in the 'home office'.

There is already today at least one modern system on the market, fulfilling all the relevant requirements – and support traditional ways of working and project models, as well as the different agile methods. Maybe not very surprising, its base is developed in Sweden, a place often in the forefront of digitization and an early adopter of new management thinking.

Digitized project management – what's required by system and technology

Role-based interfaces
The line manager, the project manager, the portfolio owner, and human resources all need individually adapted views and functionalities to perform their work – as well as the rest of the management team, and all co-workers. To simultaneously support all the important roles in one single system – **a complete and role-based tool is necessary**.

Self-administration
The most important view is frequently **the individual co-worker's user interface**, as that is what everyone has to use to be in control of his/her work environment. It should rather work without any specific system knowledge, or any specific project methodology.

The Definition
Each and every project needs at some point in time to be defined – but without any un-necessary details. The project's **Scope** – **what to deliver** at **what point in time** (i.e., mile-stones) and based on **which work effort** (budget). An **Execution plan** – covering **speed of resource utilization** and a **confirmed resource availability** plan needs to be established.

It is fundamental that all available information automatically will become visible in real time in all views, in order for decisions to be taken in the best possible ways without any delay.

The Execution
It is **easy to get started**, as you only need to describe to which projects and how much time has been allocated – and you can always start from today's activities, using existing time reports or other available estimates.

Each co-worker needs (based on agile terminology) only access to the **Kanban board** (what should be done) and the **Gantt diagram** (when it is planned) – for each project he/she is participating in. Both views show your own and all other assignments, with respective estimates, who is responsible and **present status**.

The Projects manager is in this way released of most planning, while still in charge of securing that all expectations are fulfilled – i.e., deliverables, delivery times as well as costs.

Summary
Based on communication between the manager/project manager and the individual co-worker, the latter is often best positioned to determine how to allocate his/her own work efforts in detail between activities and projects. Even when the work is mostly performed outside the office, it is with a correct support tool possible to achieve **full transparency and efficiency**. Each person can preferably administrate and report his/her own plans digitally. As a result, the manager/project manager will be relieved of many tasks – and even more important**, plans will become realistic and achievable**.

Main functionality
Some **needed main functionality** is shortly introduced in the boxes below.

Role-based interfaces

1. **The Management team and the Portfolio owners' responsibility** is to manage in line with the owners' directives, in the long- and short-time frames. The Effect targets, as well as to distribute budget and resources are controlled by them too. The Value is created by the co-workers.
2. **The Line manager's responsibility** is to be in control of his/her resources, all their assignments, vacations, and time reports.
3. **The Project manager's responsibility** is to plan, secure, and follow-up the progress.
4. **Human Resources responsibility** is to describe the organization – its structure as well as all its available competences.

The Project definition

1. **Project Definitions**
    The **Project's scope** is defined by its Effect targets, and the project's Deliverables with their time estimates. Each of them has their Stakeholders, an approval process, and a Steering group.

    Milestones are defined by the project management. Progress is measured vs. the milestones, and the status of the deliverables required to achieve a milestone.

2. **Project Planning**
    The project is characterized by its budget and a prognosis for the final cost – based on the reported and remaining hours and expenses.

    The project is allocated a planned (speed of) execution, for all the hours that the resource schedule should fulfill.

Self-administration

1. **Your own presence** is planned within given frames. Each co-worker can easily see how he/she has been allocated and can himself make changes.
2. **Time Reports** is very helpful to counteract the most common cause for delays – the intended work effort (time) was never spent on the topic.
3. By means of the project's Kanban board, you can yourself administrate your 'notes', and understand **your team's total status, and your and your team's progress**.

The Execution

1. When working remotely, a function is very much needed to present and access both your own and all co-workers' **assignments**. The **Kanban board** is a key tool to prioritize your own notes – as well as offer managers firsthand and real time information e. g., to support **prioritizations**. The Kanban board shows the team's total status and progress. A Kanban board is needed for each project.
2. A frequent question within/towards a team is, for 'when the tasks on the notes have been planned'. Gantt planning is here the unmatched tool. Every 'note' on the Kanban board corresponds to one line in the **Gantt diagram**. In the Gantt view, you can read and change the plans, check the status, and see who is in charge. One Gantt diagram is needed for each project.
3. **Periodic follow-up** of actual vs. planned schedule is, of course, a very necessary function. The project's **status reports** are always, in real time, available – by means of automation.

User interface for Self-administration

Self-administration relieves project managers, line managers and the project office many burdens.

In a user interface with a **monthly overview**, all **vacation days** will be defined – which besides automatically creating a vacation list, also is the basis for the **available work time**. By pointing at a specific date, status for flex time and comp time, and remaining vacation become visible.

Individual monthly overview

In the user interface for **self-administration** the **actual work hours** are shown week by week, considering the contracted time, the local calendar, and the scheduled vacation. The detailed **planning is based on participation** in activities and projects. This gives every individual co-worker control over his/her allocation of the work hours, even when a project leader has assigned the time. The line manager can see and later approve the allocation.
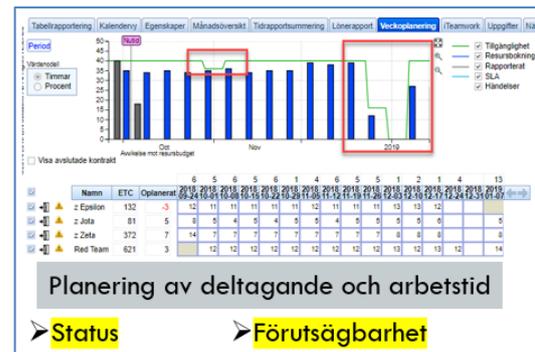

Individual work hour planning and allocation

Time reporting becomes meaningful and self-rewarding when related to the actual plans. It facilitates how to allocate the daily work hours – and not least to define when the day is 'over', even if all tasks have not been fully completed. This makes it easy to separate 'work at home' from 'be at home'.


Time reporting and overview of future plans

Each activity and project have its own **Kanban board** ('what to be done'), which each co-worker can access and manage in his/her own user interface. Own as well as other co-workers' or unassigned tasks can be accessed and moved. Each co-worker can, if wanted, define his/her own sprint period, and by that restrict the tasks to what is relevant for a specific period.
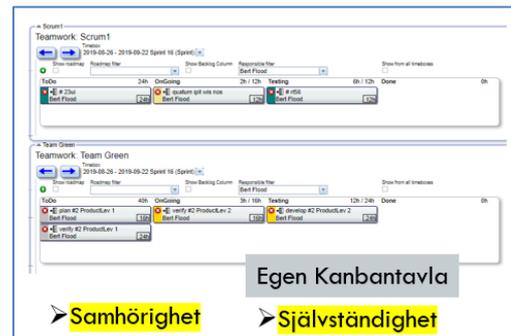
Own individual Kanban board for each project

Every activity and project have its own **Gantt diagram** ('when it should be done') in which each co-worker can access and manage the tasks in his/her own user interface. Status, estimates and responsible are the same as on the Kanban board. Gantt diagrams within the sprint period are shown on the Kanban board, when planning sprints.

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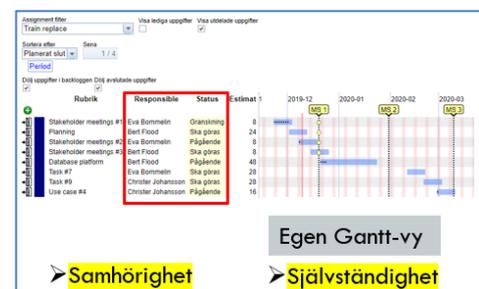
Own individual Gantt diagram for projects

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