



# Time flies

---

Integrate timelines  
with commitment  
and results

Classic project management is not able to keep up with today's volatile and fast-changing business world anymore. Sophisticated procedure models and a focus on long-term schedules are no longer in keeping with the times. As a result, projects fail in terms of results, time and costs. Thus, a different, powerful approach is needed that accepts the priority of time over content.

by Frank Kühn and Michael Kempf

Two more reasons for the failure of classic project management are well known – and neglected consistently. Firstly, projects are substantially influenced by emotions and politics. Even so, most projects are planned in technical terms, underestimating the need for communication and commitment, change and conflict management. This leads to a lack of both quality and acceptance. Secondly, project scopes are planned as if all the required capacities were available. This can, in the end, only lead to frustration.

Micro Project Management is a different approach that relates to a new rule in our speedy business world: time over content. Similar to Time Boxes, Open Space sessions and Scrum Sprints, the procedure pre-defines a certain number of workshops. This ensures that energy and motivation levels are kept high and that people keep focusing on working on prioritized issues and rapid decision-making. We have used this design for projects that had to deliver results quickly, with scarce resources. Our experience shows that you can achieve the best possible results having four to five workshops with a core team, one or two days each, over a time period of two to four months.

### Where is the design used?

Micro Projects can be used in various situations:

- Business issues that have to be started immediately.
- Process optimization focused on defined critical issues.
- Strategic projects needing a specific intervention or a boost.

The approach can either be used for separate initiatives or embedded into larger change processes. By accepting the scarcity of time and capacity, Micro Projects lead to creative problem solutions »out of the box,« as shown in the following three cases:

#### 1. Restructuring Project

The new structure has to be implemented quickly. There is no time for updating the organization manual. Instead, key practitioners are asked what their most burning top-ten questions are concerning the new processes, accountabilities and rules. The answers are re-circulated so that the affected managers can act upon them within a few weeks.

#### 2. Capability Building

The new organization is to be rolled out in Europe, the new roles have to be implemented and the people have to be trained. Adhering to a strict timeline, the project team sets priorities for a first version: They coordinate the urgent development and training issues, define the criteria for the vendor selection, and draft a new cross-functional development program.

#### 3. Process Optimization

There is no time to analyze and outline the process landscape. Instead, critical issues are identified and ranked. A particular focus lies on the points of contact with the customers. The project team and the process owners work on the critical issues, agree on action plans and start first steps immediately.

### How does it work?

In its »pure mode,« everything is done within workshops: working, decision-making, starting action and implementation. An »extended mode« may allow additional phone conferences, face-to-face talks or decision-making meetings. The project starts with a half-day preparation workshop where the management team sets the direction and prioritizes key issues, the aim of which is to explore the issues and plan the steps for further elaboration, communication and decision-making. The subsequent workshops are driven by a core team who involve further experts and decision-makers when needed. In the final half-day evaluation workshop with the core team and the management team, the process and results are reviewed. A facilitator might be helpful; the project manager can be supported by face-to-face coaching.

### What's in it for you?

As time and capacities are limited, you have to set genuine priorities and define a manageable »version number one.« You will experience a highly committed team and the best possible result you can get out of the project. Besides, the organization will experience a new working mode: quick, lean and effective. This accepts the somewhat different design that priorities in business life have changed and we will not have the time and resources for perfection anymore. ●