GUIDE

The Complete Guide to Resource Management for Creative Teams

How to Assign Work with Marketing Work Management

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Contents

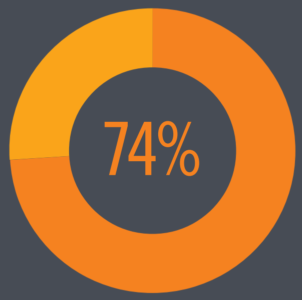
Introduction

Achieving balance is never easy, especially for creative teams. With the nearly non-stop flow of projects and ad hoc work requests, creatives quickly become overwhelmed. Unbalanced workloads are a chief contributor to the stress many creative professionals feel.

Most team managers, project managers, or traffic managers on creative teams—those who assign the work—lack visibility into who is working on what or how much capacity their team has to take on new work. Instead, managers assign work randomly—by skill set, by who is walking down the hall, or by who seems to get it all done no matter what the sacrifice. The result is that some team members end up over-allocated and overwhelmed while others have little to do and feel undervalued. Either way, no one is happy.

Because resource management and capacity planning are haphazard exercises for most creative services teams, creatives often feel stressed and unbalanced by their workloads. It also explains why 74 percent of all creatives work more than 40 hours a week.[1]

But there is a way to achieve workload balance—and this guide will show you how.

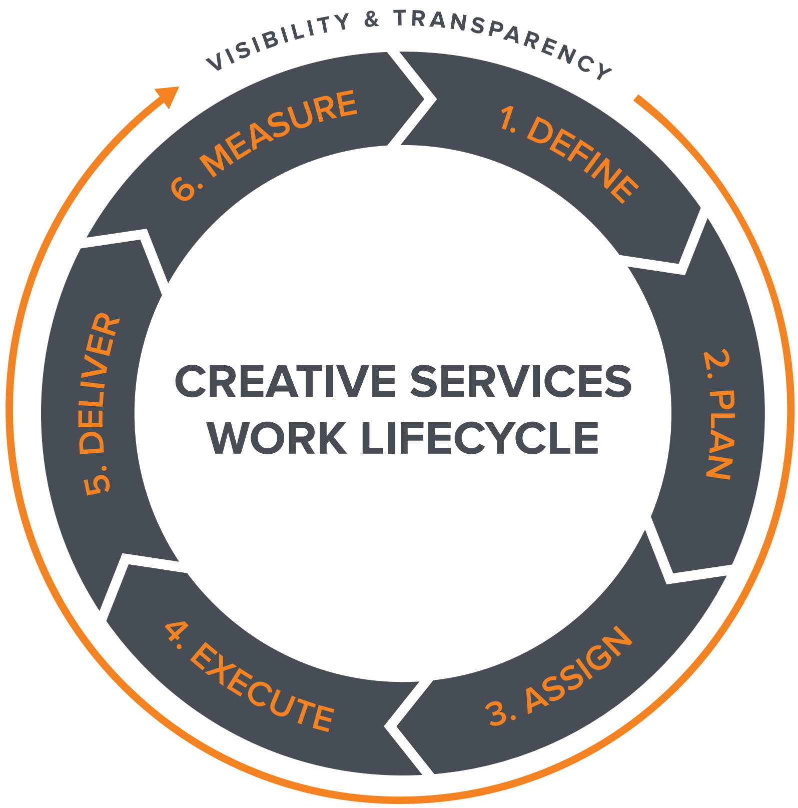


74% of creatives work more than 40 hours per week.[2]

Achieve Workload Balance with Marketing Work Management

Marketing Work Management (MWM) is a methodology for managing all marketing and creative work seamlessly through its entire workflow with increased efficiency. MWM helps marketing departments and creative teams increase productivity by balancing the need for efficient processes with the need for creative time.

The creative services work lifecycle represents the typical flow of creative work—from the initial work request to measuring outcomes and all the stages in between. This work lifecycle follows six stages: define, plan, assign, execute, deliver, and measure.



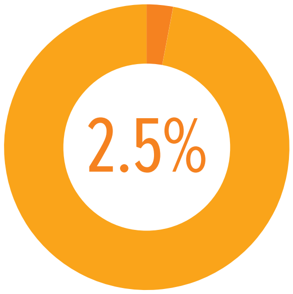
Assigning work is the third stage of the creative services work lifecycle and the focus of this guide. In the Assign stage, work is broken down into tasks and assigned to specific resources who commit to doing the work. Using the MWM approach, work is assigned in a balanced, holistic manner through a series of semi-agile processes and appropriate resource utilization—ensuring that a resource's time is allocated optimally between projects and non-project work, such as answering emails and attending meetings.

How to Assign Work with Marketing Work Management

Whether you manage a large creative team that executes thousands of projects a year or a smaller team with hundreds of projects a year, the amount of work is constant and often overwhelming. Often, creative leaders or resource managers struggle to know who is working on what or what's currently in each team member's queue. But, as many have found out the hard way, if they don't ask their team first whether they can take on more work, they're likely to push some team members to the breaking point, while others may be twiddling their thumbs.

To try and get a handle on who is working on what and what their capacity is, many resource managers assign work through meetings, emails, or phone calls, and use detailed spreadsheets to keep track of it all. They may even print out work lists for each member of the team every day. Unfortunately, this process eats up creative leaders' time and the team's time.

The MWM approach allows the team manager visibility into everyone's workload and availability. Through the MWM processes outlined in this guide, creative leaders can assign resources and manage capacity and utilization rates in a balanced way that reduces project delays, keeps clients and resources happy, and improves overall team productivity.



Only 2.5% of companies successfully complete 100% of their projects.[3]

Only 55% of creative leaders indicated their team was appropriately staffed when considering full-time and contingent staff.[4]

IN THE ASSIGN STAGE, FIVE STEPS ARE CRITICAL TO THE MWM APPROACH:

1. **Commit resources**
2. **Take a mixed-methodology approach to resource management**
3. **Assign tasks to teams or job roles**
4. **Know your utilization rates**
5. **Get commitments from resources**

Read on to learn how to apply these steps.

1 Commit Resources

Having already developed a centralized view into work requests, defined the skills needed, and estimated resources as outlined in the first two stages of MWM (see our The Complete Guide to Request Management and The Complete Guide to Planning Projects), you now have visibility into both demand and capacity for all of the individuals on your team. This type of visibility lets you commit resources in a holistic manner that results in accurate capacity planning and more balanced workloads—neither overburdening nor under-utilizing your team.

To commit resources holistically, you need to:

1 Be realistic when assigning tasks

Delegate an amount of work that is challenging, but not overwhelming. To make this possible, first determine the appropriate amount of billable or project work a resource can take on outside of daily operational tasks and unplanned work, such as managing email, attending meetings, and working on ad hoc projects that frequently pop up. The appropriate amount will vary by organization, so you'll need to assess how much time your own team needs for these activities—a good estimate may be 25-30 percent of a 40-hour work week.

2 Keep reasonable work hours

Assign work and its corresponding deadlines according to the amount of work that can realistically be completed during a regular work day/week without requiring individuals to work overtime. Take into consideration other work your team has already committed to and other daily non-project or non-billable work that must be completed. Allow for sick days, paid time off, and vacation days as well, and figure these into your estimate.

When your team isn't burned out from overwork, they can be more productive. According to a study cited in the *New York Times*, the more hours people work beyond 40—and the more continuously they work—the worse they feel, and the less engaged they become.[5]

According to a study cited in the *New York Times*, the more hours people work beyond 40—and the more continuously they work—the worse they feel, and the less engaged they become.[6]

3 Don't spread your team too thin

When individuals or teams are spread too thin, productivity suffers and it can take longer to get a project done. Resource utilization levels that are too high—typically above 80 or 90 percent—can have serious negative side effects. Research from the Harvard Business Review shows a project's speed, efficiency, and output quality inevitably decrease when managers completely fill the plates of their employees—no matter how skilled those managers may be.[7]

4 Define concrete roles

To help determine what tasks are right for each team member, first make sure you have a solid understanding of each team member's skill set, their ability to work with other team members, and how well they adapt to learning new skills when necessary. Make sure you have more than one resource available for each type of job description so that if someone's plate is already too full, there's someone else you can turn to.

HOW TO DETERMINE RESOURCE ROLES

Instructions

Use the below template to help you determine your team's roles and skill sets.

1. List all of the resources you use—this includes agencies, freelancers, and salaried employees.

2. Include all of the known skill sets each resource currently has. (It's a good idea here to reach out to each resource and have them provide you with their skill sets—they may have some skills you are unaware of.)

3. Rank, on a scale of 1-10, what each resource's ability is to work well with others. If there is a known conflict personality between resources, it may be helpful to make a note of that as well.

4. Rank on a scale of 1-10, what you think each resource's ability is to learn new skills. You may want to include notes if you think some resources may be particularly strong or weak in certain areas—such as learning new technology.

5. Look at the skill sets all your resources currently have and identify where you have gaps. Then, use the last column to determine which resources you think could best fill those gaps with some additional training. Doing so will allow you to start training resources now and filling in those gaps before it becomes a crisis.

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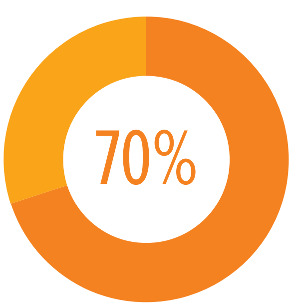
Resource Name	Skill Sets	Ability to Work With Others (1–10)	Adaptablity to New Skills (1–10)	Additional Skill Training



Adding extra resources to the areas where utilization rates are 70 percent or higher can significantly reduce waiting time.[9]

5 Be prepared to turn to outside help

Agencies and freelancers can work as a pressure valve, helping fill the gap when your internal resources aren't enough or lack a certain skill set. Adding extra resources to the areas where utilization rates are 70 percent or higher can significantly reduce waiting time.[8]

Research shows a project's speed, efficiency, and output quality inevitably decreases when managers completely fill the plates of their employees—no matter how skilled those managers may be.[10]

2 Take a Mixed-Methodology Approach to Resource Management

Using some Agile management tactics—such as defining how much time is spent on different types of work—can help maximize utilization rates.

Here are some Agile strategies you can implement to make assigning work easier and more balanced:

1 Have each team member determine the total number of operational task hours for the week

Set team-wide goals, such as spending 70 percent of your time on strategic, prioritized work and 30 percent on operational tasks like meetings and managing email. To determine the right amount for your team, first map out the hours per week that each individual must spend on operational or non-billable work.

HOW TO DETERMINE OPERATIONAL TASK HOURS PER DAY OR WEEK

Instructions

1. Have each team member roughly estimate how many hours per day they will need to spend on certain operational tasks (and what those task will be).
2. While it is recommended that each individual complete his or her own form, you may want to tally all team members' hours for each day of the week so you also have a team tally.

Number of Operational Task Hours Per Day

Operational Tasks	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Total Operational Task Hours Per Week
Meeting Hours	0	1.5	2	1	1	
Email Hours	0	1	1	1.5	1	
Other	0	0	0	0	0	
Total Hours	0	2.5	3	2.5	2	10

2 Calculate the hours allotted for each type of work in each day

Now that you know how much time must be spent each day on non-strategic work, you need to determine how much time is left each day to devote to strategic or billable work.

For example, in a scenario with a 70/30 split of a regular 40-hour work week, team members should spend no more than 12 hours a week on operational work and 28 hours a week on strategic work. Defining the exact amount of hours for each type of work makes it easier to understand how much time resources can dedicate to strategic work and helps eliminate over- or under-burdening them. Also, don't forget to subtract any paid time off, sick days, or holidays that might occur during a specific week.

HOW TO DETERMINE BILLABLE OR STRATEGIC WORK HOURS PER DAY/WEEK

Instructions

1. Using the hours from the previous form, fill in the hours for each day that will be spent on operational tasks.
2. Enter any time off or vacation hours.
3. Then, fill in the remaining hours left for strategic work. In the example below, we are assuming a 40-hour work week.
4. If you have some employees who work less than 40 hours, you will need to adjust the "total hours" so that it reflects that team member's total available hours in a given work week.
5. Again, it is recommend you start with each individual team member so you know which team members are available and for how many hours. Then, if desired, you can create a team-wide tally from the individual results.

Number of Hours Per Day						
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Total Hours
Operational Tasks	0	2.5	3	2.5	2	10
Time -off/Vacation	8	0	0	0	0	8
Strategic/Billable Hours Remaining	0	5.5	5	5.5	6	22
Total Hours	0	8	8	8	8	32

3 Work in sprints

Part of the modified Scrum practice typically used by Agile marketing teams, sprints are short efforts to complete a certain amount of work. Working in sprints allows your team to be more agile as ad hoc work or urgent requests come in the door.

HOW TO DETERMINE YOUR TEAM'S AVAILABLE HOURS FOR A SPRINT

Instructions

1. **Determine how long your sprint will be.** Sprints typically range from one to three weeks. Decide what the appropriate length is for your team.

2. **Calculate how many strategic or billable hours you have available in the sprint for each individual.** Using the numbers determined above (i.e. how many available hours there are in a day for strategic work), calculate how many hours that comes to over the period of the sprint. Again, you'll want to make sure you've considered whether any team members are planning to take paid time off or if there are holidays as well as general non-project hours. For example, if there are 5.6 hours a day available for strategic work, that would equal 56 hours over a two week sprint for one individual. If your sprint is longer than one week, be sure each individual has completed the above calculations for the total number of weeks your sprint will run.

3. **Calculate how many hours the team has available for strategic work.** Once you have individual calculations, you'll want to figure out how many members are on the team and what the total availability is of the entire team over the length of the sprint.

HOW TO DETERMINE YOUR TEAM'S AVAILABLE HOURS FOR A SPRINT

Step 1

Have each team member determine their total number of "lights on" hours for the week

NUMBER OF "LIGHTS ON' HOURS PER DAY						
"LIGHTS ON" ACTIVITIES	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	
MEETING HOURS	1	2	2	1	1	
MEETING HOURS						
VACATION HOURS						
HOLIDAY HOURS						
EMAIL HOURS	2	2	2	2	2	
OTHER						TOTAL "LIGHTS ON" HOURS FOR WEEK:
TOTAL HOURS:	3	4	4	3	3	17

Step 2

Find the total available hours, per person, for the week

TOTAL HOURS/WEEK - TOTAL "LIGHTS ON" HOURS/WEEK	40 – 17
= TOTAL AVAILABLE HOURS	23

Step 3

Find the percent of availability, per person, for the week

TOTAL AVAILABLE HOURS X 100	23 x 100
AVAILABLE HOURS TOTAL (A) / TOTAL HOURS PER WEEK	= 2300 / 40
= PERCENT OF AVAILABILITY	= 57.5%

Step 4

Repeat process for each week in the sprint

Step 5

Gather numbers from entire team for the week

TEAM MEMBER	AVAILABILITY	DAYS OFF	AVAILABLE HOURS
JOHNNY	57.50%	0	23
FREDDY	60%	0	24
ASHLEY	55%	0	22
SHAINA	65%	0	26
JUAN	60%	0	24
TOTAL AVAILABLE TEAM HOURS FOR THE WEEK:			119

Step 6

If your sprint is multiple weeks, do steps 1-5 for each week of the sprint and add totals accordingly

4 Assign points according to the time commitment of the task

In Agile, tasks are called “stories.” Each story needs to be assigned a value—either in hours or “points.” Determine the hour value by estimating the amount of time, in hours, the story will take to complete. Determine point values based on the complexity of the task and/or based on the time it will take to complete it. Whether or not you decide to use the Agile terminology, it’s important to determine how much time and/or effort each task with take so you can evaluate if resources have enough time to work on a specific task, or if there’s enough room for the task in your next sprint.

HOW TO DETERMINE THE POINTS OR HOURS PER TASK

Instructions

1. List all of the tasks that need to be completed in the sprint.
2. Estimate the time each task will take.
3. Assign a point value based on the hours and/or complexity of the task. Come up with a point system to help you do this. For example, in the table below, the point system is based on hours. If a task takes 1-2 hours, it is assigned 2 points. 3-4 hours = 4 points. 5-6 hours = 6 points, and so on. Customize your point system so it works for you.
4. Tally the total hours and total points, so you can see how it matches up with the number of strategic hours you have available in your sprint.

Task	Estimated Hours	Points
Outline eBook	5 hours	6
Write first draft	12 hours	12
Review first draft	3 hours	4
Write second draft	3 hours	4
Review second draft	3 hours	4
	Total Hours = 26	Total Points = 30

5 Create a visual way to see who is working on what

Agile uses visual boards, such as a white board, a wall covered with sticky notes, or work management solutions with Agile functionality and views to provide at-a-glance clarity to the entire team about who is working on what. The board is at the center of the team's sprint management process.

Vertical "swim lanes" help visually distinguish the work that needs to be done, the work in progress, the work in review, and the approved or completed work. Each task to be included in the sprint is written on a sticky note and assigned a point or hour value and then placed in the appropriate swim lane. Teams hold 15-minute daily stand-up meetings to coordinate efforts and keep work moving. Team members can move sticky notes around according to the progress made.

A digital storyboard, such as the one shown below, is another way to visually track the progress of your team's work. With a digital storyboard, you simply drag and drop tasks from one swim lane to another as needed. To be effective, digital boards need to be hosted in a manner that provides the entire team real-time access to the board.

Visual boards offer several benefits to the entire team. They make it easy for team members to see at-a-glance what tasks need to be done and allow them to "volunteer" to work on tasks. Additionally, because a visual work board provides a comprehensive view of all the work that needs to be done in a sprint, it helps the entire team take more ownership and accountability for their work. Everyone can see whether their tasks are progressing or not. Likewise, it helps all the team members better understand project dependencies. And, at times, it can even introduce a little healthy competition, pushing everyone to keep moving their tasks forward—as no one wants to be seen as the one who isn't pulling their weight.

HOW TO CREATE A VISUAL BOARD

Instructions

1. Make a list all of the tasks that need to be completed in the sprint (sticky notes is a great way to do this if you're not using a digital storyboard).
2. Place the tasks in different columns according to where they are at in the sprint. Typically, at the start of the sprint most tasks will be in the "New" column.
3. Team members move the tasks from column to column as the work goes through the stages.
4. The goal is to get all the tasks to the "Approved" column by the end of the sprint.

New	In Progress	in Review	Approved
Outline Q1 eBook	CTA Banner	Q4 WP (designed)	Campaign LP Design
CTA Banner for IT campaign	Review Brand Style Guide	Video blog #1	Blog post #5
Blog post #7	Logo redesign	Blog post #6	Q4 eBook (designed)
Q1 Email blast landing page	Playbook for Finance Vertical		

6 Assign work according to availability

Now that you know each team member's availability for billable or strategic work and the time it takes to complete each task, you can accurately assign work according to each member's capacity to take on more work.

HOW TO ASSIGN WORK ACCORDING TO AVAILABILITY

Instructions

1. List all of the tasks that need to be completed in the sprint.
2. Estimate the time each task will take.
3. Assign a number of points based on the complexity of the task.
4. Looking back at the form that determines how many hours each team member has available for strategic work and taking into account different team members roles and skills, assign tasks to individuals.
5. The last column helps you continue to keep track of each individuals remaining strategic hours for the sprint.

Task	Time	Points	Assigned To	Remaining Hours
Outline eBook	5 hours	4	John	26 hrs
Write first draft	12 hours	7	Tina	21 hrs
Review first draft	3 hours	2	Sara	26 hrs
Write second draft	3 hours	2	Tina	19 hrs
Review second draft	3 hours	2	Sara	24 hrs

③ Assign Work in a Variety of Ways

To make it easier to manage and balance your resources, you can assign tasks at different organizational levels. Doing so provides added flexibility for both you and your team.

Here are some of the different ways you can assign work:

1 Assign milestone tasks to the team

Also known as parent tasks, milestone tasks are larger project goals or tasks that rely on completing a certain number of tasks. For example, the first draft of a website redesign may be the milestone and encompasses a number of smaller tasks such as selecting a color scheme, designing a draft template, designing navigation, and writing copy for the main navigational pages.

2 Assign by job roles

A job role is like a job description, in that it should outline the skills needed to do the job. Once you determine job roles, you can assign the appropriate person to complete the work. For example, if a certain task requires a copywriter, the work can be assigned to anyone with this expertise.

3 Assign by availability

As described in Step 2, you will first need to figure out how many hours each person has available for strategic work and how many hours each task takes. Then, a project manager or traffic manager can look at each team member's availability holistically—taking into account already assigned strategic work as well as the remaining hours available and the number of hours a certain task requires.

4 Assign by choice

Let team members volunteer or sign up for tasks/stories in your sprint. During each stand up meeting, give your team an opportunity to select a new task or tasks to work on that day. This gives people more ownership of the work and helps alleviate managers of the resource planning burden. However, the Scrum Master, or the project manager, should stay aware of how many points each person is signing up for to make sure no one is over-committing.

④ Know Your Utilization Rates

Utilization rates are the percentages of time individuals spend doing billable work or strategic project work. If your team does not bill for its services, it's still important to know your utilization rates to ensure your team is staying focused on the right kinds of work. To develop an optimal utilization rate for your team, take into account the time they need to spend on non-billable work or operational tasks, such as checking email or attending trainings.

A 70 to 75 percent rate may be appropriate, but look at your team's unique situation and/or research industry utilization benchmarks. Then assess how each individual resource is trending and try to keep the workload balanced. Utilization rates help you determine how well the team is operating and where improvements can be made.

Here are some best practices that will help improve resource utilization:

1 Define the difference between billable and busy

Even if your team doesn't bill clients, you should track how much time each individual is spending on strategic work versus administrative tasks to help keep a pulse on the team's productivity and efficiency.

Other, non-billable work includes time spent on things like managing email, attending meetings, or other work that falls into being more busy work than strategic or billable work. Make the difference between these two types of work clear, so everyone is on the same page about what types of work add strategic value.

2 Track billable hours versus non-billable hours

To determine whether your team is meeting its goal to devote 70 percent of its time (or whatever percentage you determine is right for your situation), you need to track all of your team's time—both billable and non-billable. Only then will you know:

- How much time your team is spending on each type of work
- How much strategic or billable work a team can take on each week or sprint
- How to accurately assign points to tasks (because now you have a way to see exactly how long each task takes.

88% of spreadsheets have errors[11]

3 Match your long-term project pipeline with capacity planning

To ensure you have enough resources to meet demand and deliver work on time, you need to consider long-term projects and how many resources they will require over time. Then, consider on average, your daily resource needs. If you can see that you will not be able to supply both long-term projects and regular projects with enough resources, you need to consider outsourcing some of the work or hiring additional temporary staff.

4 Avoid different versions of the truth

Having a uniform system that tracks all aspects of resource management and capacity planning will provide you with greater visibility and clarity. More importantly, it will provide you with a single and accurate version of the truth—letting you see a true picture of resource availability.

Also, by consolidating information in one place rather than on a myriad of spreadsheets, you gain visibility of account and project progress across the organization.

5 Get Commitments from Resources

Ask all teams and individuals to commit to the project deadlines, estimated hours, and the overall duration of the project that were defined during the Planning stage of MWM. If a resource or team cannot commit to the planned schedule, discuss together what the restraints are, redefine the estimates, and make adjustments as necessary to the schedule or budget.

To make this process smooth, keep these tips in mind:

1 Remain agile

As you look to commit resources, evaluate whether a deadline is unrealistic, and if so, change it so it is attainable. If someone who is assigned a task isn't the right person for the job, re-assign it.

2 Don't forget Little's Law

Little's Law says that, under steady state conditions, the average number of items in a queuing system equals the average rate at which items arrive multiplied by the average time that an item spends in the system.[12] For example, a creative team that accepts 10 new projects per week, each project taking approximately 20 resource hours to complete, will require a team of five each working a total of 40 hours to complete the projects. To complete these projects faster with the resources on hand requires either reducing the time it takes to complete the projects or reducing the number of projects underway.

Additionally, when partially completed work sits idle because your team had to move on to more urgent work, it will take longer to complete the work when you return to it (i.e. it takes additional time to pick up where you left off). By carefully controlling the rate at which new projects are started, you can avoid this issue. You can do this by not assigning new work until other work is completed and by making sure that projects are adequately staffed throughout—this includes avoiding the temptation to sneak resources from an ongoing project to squeeze in new ones.

3 Commit to fulfill the sprint goal

If you decide to take a more Agile approach to resource management, have resources commit to deliver all the stories or tasks in a sprint by the end of the sprint. If the other steps outlined have already been followed—such as assigning work only according to a person's availability to take on new work—making and keeping the commitment should be achievable.

4 Provide a definition of 'done'

Whether it's a one-off request or a series of tasks from larger projects, it's important to have a clear definition of "done." This way, at the end of a sprint, everyone knows what is expected in terms of delivery–whether it's completing a single task in a larger project, such as the first draft design of a digital asset or the full completion of a request for a tradeshow banner. Using a creative brief, as recommended in the Planning Stage, can help here—as the brief will cover all the various tasks involved in completing a project, as well as what the outcome should be when the project is complete.

Conclusion

Studies show that the more organizational support employees receive around their work and decisions, the less job burnout they experience.[13] Assigning work according to the MWM approach will improve resource management, utilization rates, and team morale. But more importantly, when work is assigned in a balanced way, team members avoid burnout and are engaged with their work more often.

Following the MWM approach gives creative leaders and resource managers the necessary insight into their team's workloads and capacity levels and boosts productivity by eliminating wasted time previously spent in meetings or email trying to gain visibility. What's more, because resource assignments are balanced, creative teams can move into the next steps of the workflow successfully—without the delays and chaos that often occur when teams are overburdened and managers lack insight into who is doing what.

Get a Better Handle on Resource Management with Workfront

Make the MWM approach to resource management even easier. Workfront offers a single work management solution that streamlines the processes outlined in this guide, providing both creative leaders and their teams visibility into all aspects of the entire workflow. With your work tools and processes connected in a single location, Workfront will help your team to:

- Increase visibility into your resource utilization
- Prove your team's worth to upper management
- Decrease chaos and increase productivity
- Find more time to do creative work

To learn more, request a custom demo at workfront.com.

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