

ACTION PLAN/GANTT CHART

What it is:

An action plan/Gantt chart is a graphic representation of a project's schedule, showing the sequence of tasks, which tasks can be performed simultaneously, and the most critical tasks to monitor. The plan/chart can be used for an entire project or for a key phase of a project. The plan/chart allows a team to avoid unrealistic timetables and schedule expectations, to help identify and shorten tasks that are bottlenecks, and to focus attention on most critical tasks.

When to use it:

Because they are primarily project-management tools, action plans/Gantt charts are most useful for planning and tracking entire projects or for scheduling and tracking the implementation phase of a planning or improvement effort.

How to use it:

Identify all tasks or project components. Make sure the team includes people with firsthand knowledge of the project so that during the brainstorming session all component tasks needed to complete the project are captured. Document the tasks on small note cards.

Identify the first task that must be completed. Place the appropriate card at the extreme left of the working surface.

Identify any other tasks that can be started simultaneously with task #1. Align these tasks either above or below task #1 on the working surface.

Identify the next task that must be completed. Select a task that must wait to begin until task #1 (or a task that starts simultaneously with task #1) is completed. Place the appropriate card to the right of the card showing the preceding task.

Identify any other tasks that can be started simultaneously with task #2. Align these tasks either above or below task #2 on the working surface.

Continue this process until all component tasks are sequenced.

Identify task durations. Using the knowledge of team members, reach a consensus on the most likely amount of time each task will require for completion. Document this duration time on the appropriate task cards.

Construct the action plan/Gantt chart. List tasks in sequence of occurrence in a vertical column on the left side of the plan. Divide the right side of the plan into a time line that spans the total required time to complete the project. For each component task, draw a horizontal bar spanning the time from the task's anticipated start date to its end date.

Note: Most commercially available project management software will routinely generate an action plan/Gantt chart.

