

Master Schedules

Do you have a
Master Schedule
in place?

Despite having a likeness in appearance to a Gantt chart, a Master Schedule is not just a project plan. It is a simple, but powerful, tool for planning and monitoring transformation within the context of events happening throughout an organisation. There is usually an abundance of project plans within most organisations, each focusing on a different project, at different levels and managed by a variety of people. A Master schedule brings all these individual project plans together and is used in a very different way.

Master Schedules are formed of two interlinked parts; firstly, the “business stuff” which includes all current project plans in your organisation, and secondly (but most importantly), your transformation plan. To ensure a golden thread of transformation activity runs through your whole organisation, a Strategy Schedule for senior management and detailed Area Schedule for frontline staff are often created in conjunction with a Master Schedule. This aligns transformation activity across the hierarchy of your organisation.

Transformation is never implemented in isolation, so bringing together all of these elements in one Master Schedule is essential for success. This maintains a focus of transformation, ensuring effective results and a substantial ROI.

In our experience, the act of creating the Master Schedule in itself is illuminating and value adding for senior managers. It is often a revelation for each individual to become aware of just how much is going on, and what colleagues are managing. It also, sometimes for the first time, allows them to all have the same perspective of the organisation as a whole. Most importantly, it allows the sensible and realistic scheduling of the actions required to transform.

Why use a Master Schedule?

- They provide complete visibility of all upcoming tasks and activities
- They highlight any project dependencies that exist
- They provide a clear picture of what resources are tied up at any one time
- Because of the collaborative way they are developed there is good ownership of all activity on the schedule
- You get a complete overview of all the activity planned to deliver your strategy, and any omissions are easy to identify
- Having one ensures that activities and milestones don't get missed or forgotten about

A top-level Master Schedule is built by the Senior Management Team of your organisation. The simple steps below show you how to create a Master Schedule; detailed planning and a number of alterations are necessary to get it to a realistic plan.

Five basic steps

1 Make a list of all the Transformation activity that needs completing. Common tasks will include value stream mapping workshops, frontline suggestions, setting up of Information Centres and roll out of 5S. Each of these should be written on post-its.

2 Create a list of activity showing all the upcoming events, projects and deadlines ('business as usual') This should be for the whole organisation. Again, these should be written on post-its.

3 Create a 'calendar' stretching over 6-24 months. Add in all activity from steps 1 and 2. Use a wall or white board and place your post-it notes for transformation and 'business as usual' activities. Then capture into a spreadsheet.

4 Sign off the Transformation roll out plan. Validate with all the relevant managers individually and then with them as a team to gain agreement. Print onto A1 and transfer the final version to the Information Centre for weekly review, using the red-line technique.

5 Roll out the Master Schedule. Next, start to create localised Master Schedules.

NOTE: We would always recommend completing steps 1, 2 and 3 on a roll of paper using post-it notes, before transcribing the plan onto an electronic template in steps 4 and 5. This allows more realistic planning and negotiation.

Using the Master Schedule & the red-line technique

A red line is used to visually illustrate the progress of items on a Master Schedule. It is a physically drawn line on the printed Master Schedule (or a digital line on an electronic schedule).

A straight red line is drawn beside a task that has been completed for the previous week. If the task has not been completed to plan, a spike is drawn backwards to the task, if a task has been completed early then a spike is drawn forwards to the task. We call this 'red lining'. This provides a highly visual track for the team to quickly and simply see where they have been successful and where they need to focus on remedial action.

Strat. Ref	Item	Resp	Activity												
			wk 14	wk 15	wk 16	wk 17	wk 18	wk 19	wk 20	wk 21	wk 22	wk 23			
3. Safety	Accident Reduction	SB			Develop safety rules	Agree	Brief all members	Audit							

Things to remember

- Make it realistic, robustly challenge the timeframes and volume of activity on your Master Schedule
- Ensure localised plan maintain a link to the Master Schedule
- Ensure your Master Schedule is visible to all across the organisation
- Master Schedules must be activity driven - each line should be a specific task
- They must be simple to read & understand - somebody should be able to look at the Master Schedule and understand it within 3 minutes
- It should be signed off to show the 'Owners' (usually senior management) have agreed and are bought into the vision
- It must be regularly reviewed & red-lined - every week for optimum effect for most organisations

Say Hello! If you need any help with your Master Schedule, or would like any more information, get in touch. Please email hello@ad-esse.com or visit www.ad-esse.com.