

Professional Focus Management

Helping knowledge work professionals focus of key projects and the right next steps is crucially important in an age marked by constant distractions.

Robert West, December 2015

Few Excel, even though Opportunities are Greater than Ever

Studies show that 80% of employees do not achieve half of their potential at work. Most managers have only one or two top performers on their team.

Imagine the impact on your business results — and your career — if you could help the majority of your team truly achieve and maintain a high level of effectiveness. Imagine inspiring each person to unflinchingly make meaningful weekly progress. Imagine aligning each person's efforts with the rest of the team and with corporate goals, so that strategic objectives are targeted. Finally, imagine the enthusiasm that is rekindled when each person's mission is clear and expectations are well understood.

In this pervasive internet age, there are extraordinary opportunities to accelerate the pace of business as well as a host of new challenges. If you are driven become the best manager in your organization, you must change the way you lead and manage your team, coaching employees to to focus on the right strategic missions in the face of growing distractions. Good tasks often get in the way of the best tasks.



When it comes to blending management and technology, Steve Jobs said it well,

“My job is not to be easy on people. My job is to make them better... Technology is nothing. What's important is that you have a faith in people, that they're basically good and smart, and if you give them tools, they'll do wonderful things with them.”

The Problem: Today's Workplace Trends are Not Favorable

It has become incredibly difficult for professionals to focus because the pace of business, the pace of change, the pace of expectations, the frequency of distractions, and the pace of technology evolution are all accelerating exponentially.

Pervasive and instantaneous communications are at the heart of this disconnected-from-priorities urgency conspiracy. When everyone believes that each text message and e-mail should receive a near-real-time response, the idea of prioritizing work as a daily habit of excellence seems like mission impossible.

Simultaneously, most company software is overly detailed, complex, and often redundant. Knowledge workers generally input only the bare minimum data elements into these overwhelming systems which has resulted in poor implementation success records of systems such as CRM.

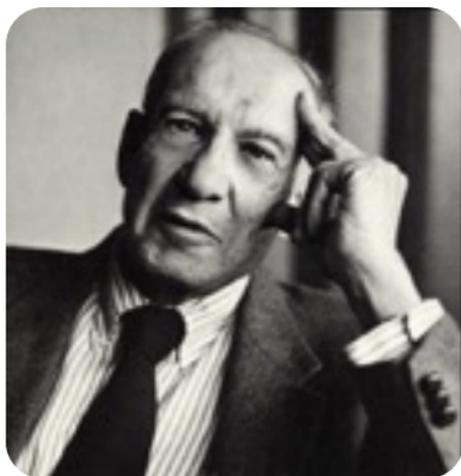
According to a broad Harris Interactive questionnaire of 23,000 corporate professionals, it is clear that knowledge workers are not well-aligned with company goals. Findings revealed that:

- only 37% said they have a clear understanding of what their organization is trying to achieve,
- only 1 in 5 workers are enthusiastic about the organization's goals,
- only 1 in 5 workers have a clear "line of sight" between tasks and their team's goals,
- only 15% felt they worked in a high-trust environment, and
- only 10% said their organization holds people accountable for results.

As Stephen Covey put it in his book ***The 8th Habit***, if a soccer team had these scores, "*only four of the eleven players on the field would know which goal is theirs, only two of the eleven would care, and only two of the eleven would know what position they play and what they are supposed to do.*"

One Key to Success Remains Constant

A cornerstone key to success stands in stark contrast to the workplace trends above. A personal discipline of pre-planning and prioritization — unfailingly identifying, distilling a task to its actionable essence, and working on your most important next step without hesitation or distraction — remains pivotal to success, as it has for the last century.



Peter Drucker observed, “*Doing the right thing is more important than doing the thing right.*” Too often, people procrastinate and do not work on the right things first. Even when they do tackle their big-rock task, they usually only use a fraction of their capabilities and attention because of multi-tasking and interruptions.

What is Professional Focus Management?

Professional Focus Management (PFM) helps professional “knowledge work” employees focus on the 20% of projects that invariably produce 80% of their meaningful progress and positive results. Specifically, PFM helps professionals identify their important projects, plan the crucial steps to accomplish meaningful progress, and collaborate with their manager to laser-focus their efforts.



Professional Focus Management helps the manager coach employees, improving their focus on “big rock” tasks that matter most. All the other smaller tasks will eventually be completed, if they are sufficiently important and urgent. The PFM concept borrows from Covey’s “big rock” task management ideas for personal

improvement, expanding and enhancing them to the collaborative business team level. If you are not crystal-clear on the idea of “big rock” prioritization, watch this [Covey Leadership video \(crucialmanagement.com/bigrocks\)](https://www.crucialmanagement.com/bigrocks) that concisely illustrates the point in less than two minutes.

What Makes PFM Different?

99.9% of corporate systems, no matter if they are task managers, project management systems, or customer resource management (CRM) systems, overwhelm users with excessive detail. These systems are over-engineered to be comprehensive, include many fields that matter to other constituencies such as finance or manufacturing, and only offer a snapshot view of the present.

From a manager’s perspective, all the detail makes it difficult to understand the big picture, to see the forest for the trees. Consequently, coordinating teamwork across employees is exceedingly difficult.

Professional Focus Management takes a different view:

1. PFM demands that only an employee's top projects are managed in the system, avoiding the less important busy work. This results in a "less is more" interface, without a lot of data elements to maintain.
2. PFM is forward-facing, focused on the next crucial step on only the most strategic projects.
3. PFM inspires "begin with the end in mind" planning, helping employees think through all the important milestones for a crucial project.
4. PFM keeps an indelible history, allowing the professional and his manager to review them, to learn from past experiences, and to re-assign projects without loss of detail or momentum.
5. PFM enables big-picture vision for managers, because it only concerns itself with each employee's top projects.

6. PFM improves the manager's ability to coordinate efforts across the team.

Professional Focus Management helps the knowledge worker focus, while keeping the manager involved and informed, saving hours each week by replacing many status update calls, meetings, and reports. Drucker cut to the chase when he said *“Meetings are by definition a concession to a deficient organization. For one either meets or one works. One cannot do both at the same time.”*

PFM from the Professional's Perspective

Imagine having a system that reminds you every morning, on one simple screen, what your top 5 - 10 projects are, as well as the next crucial step you have pre-planned on each of those projects.

When you accomplish one of the crucial steps, imagine making a few notes about the completion and then immediately deciding what the next important step will be. If you fall behind schedule, the system reminds you

to get back on track, helping avoid procrastination.

With PFM, daily planning and prioritization becomes a simple habit of excellence.

PFM from the Manager's Perspective

Imagine having a system that helps you see the forest for the trees, highlighting the projects your team members believe are most important and what they plan to do next on each of those projects.

When a task is accomplished, you see a completion alert and have visibility as to what the next step the employee chooses on a project. This gives you the ability to ask questions and coach as needed, in advance of the employee investing his time and effort.

If projects fall behind schedule, you can receive alerts, helping you facilitate progress over obstacles.

With PFM, the manager becomes part of the forward-looking strategy, more easily coordinating the group. Additional benefits

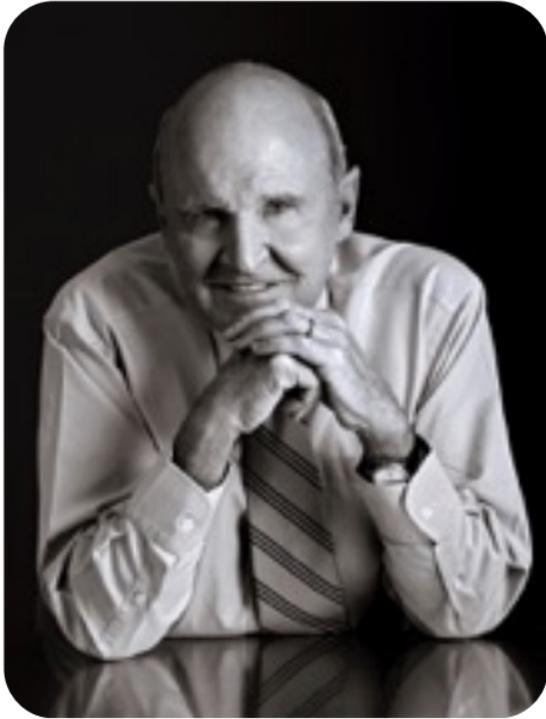
include hours saved each week on status updates, fair performance appraisals, and the ability to hand-off projects from one employee to another without loss of detail and historical perspective.

Do you have the vision and will power to improve?

Any change, even a straight-forward one such as adopting Professional Focus Management, requires vision, tenacity, and enthusiasm to complete successfully. The most relevant question is not whether PFM makes perfect sense in the age of distractions — there is little doubt that it does. The question is whether you have the will power to make change happen.

Jack Welsh rose to the top and re-energized General Electric into one of the largest and most successful organizations in the world. Jack was outspoken and has since written books about management and leadership.

Three of his wisdoms are:



“Change before you have to.”

“An organization's ability to learn, and translate that learning into action rapidly, is the ultimate competitive advantage.”

“Control your own destiny or someone else will.”

The willingness to embrace change is crucial for long-term success.

Is PFM a new category of corporate systems?

Professional Focus Management is indeed a new category of corporate systems, forged for the breakneck pace of the internet-enabled age. In essence, PFM brings the disciplines found in software's Agile Development and applies it to other creative knowledge work.

CrucialManagement is a leader in PFM. With the recent and sudden emergence of enterprise-class applications in the cloud, **CrucialMissions** is easily implemented for company teams without the slow ramp associated with in-house I.T. Implementations. A team can be up in running and more productive in just a few days. As a result, PFM is taking off with early-adopters who have decided to be proactive in their quest to accelerate business and personal success as a manager.

More Information:

Visit CrucialManagement.com and watch three short videos that overview:
Crucial's Suite in 60 seconds,
Why Crucial Makes Sense 3 minutes, and
How Crucial Works in 7 minutes.

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