

Essay One: Project Management Software Evaluation

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Abstract

A review of Workfront, a project management software program by the company of the same name. The review examines the program from several perspectives; namely, features and options, vendor reputation, ease of use, compatibility with other software, and price. The company aims to make the software a powerful player in the project management space via a deep, rich feature set with a strong emphasis on customization. This strength, however, also ends up being at the heart of Workfront's weakness, as it proves to be a complicated program to set up and use, especially for non-experts. The review concludes with a consideration of whether or not to purchase the product for use on a project.

Keywords: project management, project management software, evaluation, Workfront

Introduction

Workfront is a project management tool designed to coordinate the work of a team in one centralized place. The eponymous company made the tool highly customizable with the intention of serving a single team working on a basic project up to large enterprises with many complex projects, and every use case in between. Workfront is available on PC and Mac as well as mobile versions on Android and iOS. The company describes its tool as “a modern work management platform designed to connect people to work and accelerate organizational success across the enterprise” (About Workfront, n.d.).

Features and options

Workfront offers a high degree of customization via extensive tools and templates across its four plan tiers: Team, Pro, Business, and Enterprise. The Team tier is primarily just a project management tool for planning and assigning work. The other tiers have many more features and options including task, demand, resource, and budget management, client portals, collaboration tools, proofs and versioning, Gantt charts, time and expense tracking, reporting, and more.

The main interface is a dashboard that users can set up to display what they choose, such as project status, upcoming/past due tasks, or messages from teammates.

Vendor reputation

Workfront has a generally favorable reputation overall among both customers and review sites, though its status places it more in the second tier of project management programs.

Capterra is a leading site for consumers to find and compare software in many different categories. Within the project management category on Capterra, Workfront’s 1011 user reviews and 4.3-star rating (out of five stars) lags behind other popular programs such as Trello (16,464

reviews, 4.5 stars), and Asana (8,666 reviews, 4.4 stars). It is more on par with Basecamp (11,867 reviews, 4.3 stars) and Microsoft Project (1098 reviews, 4.3 stars) (Capterra, n.d.).

PC Magazine, in its top 10 picks for project management software in 2020, echoed Capterra users' assessment: "Plenty of well-known services, including the very popular Basecamp, Microsoft Project, and Workfront are not currently in our list. There's only room for the 10 best here, and those services (and others) simply don't make the cut" (Duffy, 2019).

What reviewers and users believe Workfront has working its favor are a rich feature set and deep customization. That customization comes at a price, however, in that those same reviewers and users say that the program can be complicated to set up and use.

Ease of use

It's worth noting that among the four ratings categories on Capterra – customer support, ease of use, features and functionality, and value for money – Workfront's lowest score is for ease of use (4.0 stars). *PC Magazine*, meanwhile, describes one of the program's cons as "Rich customization means several weeks' setup time required" (Duffy, 2017).

I have on-the-job experience with Workfront, and I and many of my teammates agree that the program is difficult to configure and confusing for beginning and even novice users. Layout and navigation can vary greatly from project to project depending on who set up the project and how. Reporting (e.g., for current task status or hours/resources spent) requires substantial training, and version control can become unruly when many assets and reviewers are involved.

Compatibility with other software

There is not a lot of discrepancy among the four Workfront tiers when it comes to integrations, especially between the Pro, Business, and Enterprise versions. Those three plans

support a few integrations the Team version does not; most notably, Jira and Salesforce, but also Adobe Experience Manager, Adobe Cloud, and Document Webhooks. However, libraries are not as likely to use these programs as they are more general collaboration tools such as Box, Dropbox, Google Drive, Microsoft One Drive, Microsoft Outlook, and Microsoft Teams – programs that Workfront supports across all four tiers.

Price

Workfront also charges for the tiers at different rates, but does not list any prices on its website; instead, potential users must submit a request to speak with a representative to get a quote. However, *PC Magazine* reports that “Pricing starts at about \$30 per user per month. . . . Prices depend on the type of users/permission level granted to different people in the account. Workfront is available in four package tiers, depending on how sophisticated a client’s work management needs are” (Duffy, 2017).

Conclusion

Workfront is a robust tool with a deep feature set. As such, however, it is not easy to configure or intuitive to figure out how to perform any but the most basic functions. The learning curve is therefore rather steep.

However, Searcy cautioned that you cannot expect too much out of any one program when he said, “no software is so easy that it does all the work for you. . . . Typically, the more powerful the software, the more challenging it is to set up and use” (p. 27). Because of the considerable ramp-up time and training Workfront requires, I would consider purchasing it if I worked in an organization that had many complex projects and fairly tech-savvy users, but not for a one-off project or two, nor if a more basic but also more user-friendly alternative such as

Trello or even Slack would suffice. If I worked in a library, especially a small to mid-size one, I believe a simpler program would be a better fit.

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