

Tempus Resource

Steve Cotterell discovers some interesting and innovative features in this resource management system.



A resource management system specifically designed to facilitate the creation of multiple, flexible what-if scenarios and to produce schedule and resource optimisation suggestions as quickly as possible.

Around ten years ago, the designers of Tempus Resource, all people with a project management software background, realised that, in their opinion, the PPM tools then available didn't provide the functionality required to support those performing resource planning. These people tended to use spreadsheets because they found them easier to handle than the PPM tools they had. However, they still found that resource management was a considerable challenge and the Tempus Resource designers felt that an easier tool was essential.

They felt that there were two main groups of people that would benefit from such a product. The first group were the people that needed a what-if simulation tool but found that the available PPM software was too complicated and was unable to provide the quick answers needed at meetings. Their intention was to create the most powerful tool on the market, capable of running what-ifs in real time.

The second group of potential users were those organisations who were not mature enough to take advantage of a full PPM system coupled with those who simply didn't want one and who just wanted a resource management tool.

Tempus resource is a web-based application, with no client installation required, that runs in Internet Explorer 10 and later. It's available in on premise or SaaS versions (there is a European data store for UK customers) and can be used either networked or in a stand-alone mode.

Tempus Resource can import data from any external system. Among its current clients are some large corporations that want to use data from their legacy PPM system with Tempus Resource but who also want to enter data directly, to be held in the Tempus central data store.

Whilst the system is being set up, users' details can be pulled in from Active Directory. Global roles and, for specific projects, project roles can be defined and managed, with access rights, features and permissions established for each role. Both global and personal calendars can be set up and these can include non-project work, time off and holidays.

Custom fields can be created, both for projects and for resources. These can be formatted for text, string, selection with drop-down, numeric and dates and

their completion can be made optional or required. Eight different currencies can be supported along with various date formats. If your organisation uses an alternative name for projects (such as "cases" for example) that title can be edited so that the system uses your alternative name.

The resource pool is established (either by importing the data from another database or by direct data entry) and this pool may contain a combination of both individual and generic resources.

To set up a new project, having first logged in with your user name and password, you can display a list of current projects and their attributes. You click the "Create Project" button, name your new project and fill in some more attribute fields, including start and end dates and any required and optional custom fields.

Information about tasks can be imported from another tool or entered directly and you can then allocate resources to these project tasks. When planning ahead you can, however, enter information at a higher level, including an estimate of what resources you think you might need at phase or project level.

You can plan in monthly, weekly or daily time segments, with the screen illustrating your work schedule over a span of time with a column for each month, week or day. You enter the number of hours work to be carried out in each period for each resource. Once you've made an entry in one column, you can copy that entry across to the resource's other columns

Both planned and later, actual data can be entered onto this screen, which can be displayed in both tabular format and as a Gantt chart. Data can be copied from a spreadsheet and pasted into this screen. As you enter data onto this screen, a button is available that gives you the ability to review the cross project work that the resource you're working on is already committed to. This enables you to know whether or not you're about to over allocate the resource.

As alternatives to entering the planned work in hours, you can enter it as a percentage of that person's full time work, as an FTE figure (Full-Time Equivalent - representing the number of people working full-time against this work item) or you can enter cash budget information.

The Bulk Project Allocation screen

	AUTOMATED SOFTWARE INSTALLATION	CLICK AND COLLECT	CONSTRUCTION SAFETY EQUIPMENT	FLAGSHIP STORE UPGRADES	HELMET WITH INTEGRATED SURVIVOR
Aaron Painter	10 %	5 %	0 %	0 %	0 %
Adam Barr	10 %	20 %	20 %	20 %	95.21%
Alex Darrow	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %
Alex Simmons	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %

Once your projects have been set up and resourced, you can create a series of "Models", collections of projects and resources that you want to run simulations on.

Tempus Resource's Bulk Project Allocation function allows the entry of both planned and actual data. Lists of your current resources and projects are displayed. The resource list can be filtered by skill, by team and by other attributes and the project list can be filtered by location, etc. You make check marks against the people and the projects that you're working with.

The next screen, the layout of which is configurable by the user, displays a row for each selected resource and a column for each selected project. You can then enter the percentage of each resource's full-time availability that you want to allocate to each of the projects. You can also allocate in hours, FTE and cash budget.

Similarly, the resource pool list can be updated in bulk when an attribute for many people is to be changed at the same time.

Once your projects have been set up and resourced, you can create a series of "Models", collections of projects and resources that you want to run simulations on.

To create a new model you name it, decide whether to share it or not, enter the start and end dates and set the time window for the model (one, three or five years – ten and twenty year windows, catering for major capital expenditure projects, are due to be added in the next release).

You choose how you want the display of resources grouped (by skill, role etc.) and choose which resources you want included in the simulation.

A list of the projects that will be in progress during the selected time period is displayed. You can filter the

project list further by selecting additional attributes from a drop-down list and you then check against those to be included in the model.

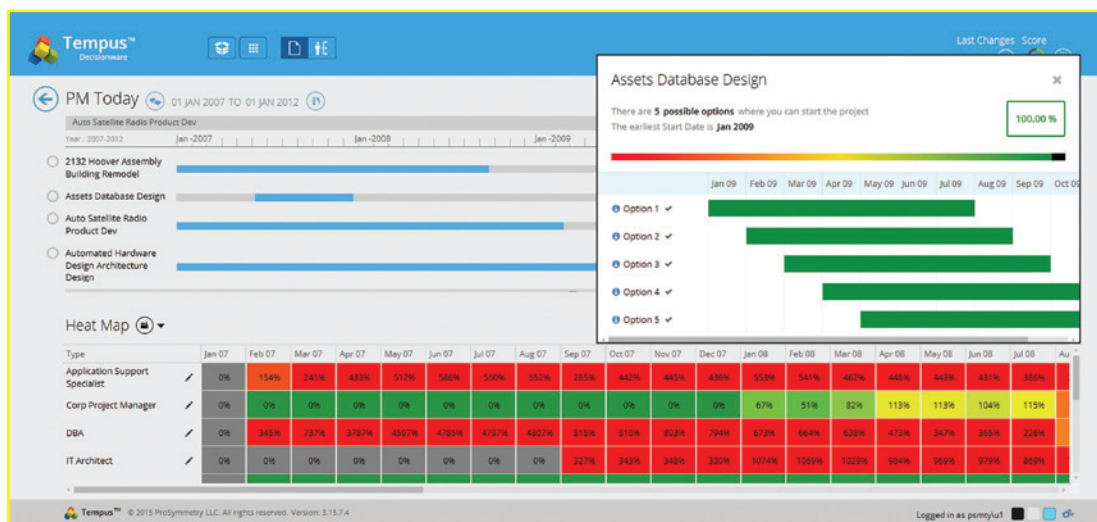
When connected to Microsoft Project Server, or Microsoft Project Online, Tempus Resource allows you to select either the Assessment Work or the Resource Plan Work for each project.

When the model has been created, it appears as a tile on a Model Listing Screen which can be displayed in a tile or a grid view, with the choice of three colour options, black, blue and grey.

On each tile is a set of iconic buttons. The first enables you to edit the model and the second offers an optimisation feature that collects a few pieces of information from you and then runs the model through multiple iterations to calculate what the best timing options for the projects within that model are. It's basically an automated way of producing multiple portfolio suggestions with scores against each.

A "Dashboard" icon displays a dashboard of reports about this model. A slider enables you to change the time window that the reports focus on and you can drill down within each report for more detailed information. Tempus Resource includes a report builder that allows users to create their own reports on models. Reports can be saved and shared if wished, so that others can embed them into their dashboards. Reports can be exported to Excel and PDF.

A "Clone" icon lets you copy a model so that you can use it as a template for a new model.



A Heat Map with an Opportunity Map superimposed.

You can set each person's efficiency percentage individually and then simulate the effect of changing people around within projects to make the best use of the best people

The "Settings" option lets you adjust the figures that the simulator uses. You can alter the efficiency of particular resources, recorded as an efficiency percentage and you can adjust the scoring applied during the optimisation process.

The "Project Notes" area lets you record textual information about the model.

When importing data from an external system, where that data uses a currency other than that already set using Tempus Resource's Global Currency setting, the user has the option of changing the currency symbol used by this particular model. The logo on reports can be changed to your own organisation's logo and layouts and colours can also be tailored.

When you click on the model's name on the Model Listing Screen, you open the Model Screen - the page on which you do most of the work on the model. This page is divided, horizontally, into two sections. At the top is a Gantt chart showing the position of each of the projects in this model at its place in time.

A table in the lower half contains a row for each of the resources and columns for the data display. This can show areas of resource over and under allocation on "Heat" or "Cool" maps. The data can also be graphed or displayed in its raw numeric form. In each case the chart is colour-coded to emphasise the information focus. The view can be exported to Excel or PDF.

If the Heat map shows that a resource is over allocated, you can display a Gantt chart showing the projects and tasks that the individual resource is working on. This lets you remove that resource from one or more tasks and search for a replacement resource with both the skills and availability to take that task over.

You can drag the projects back and forward in time on the Gantt and the data in the lower table is updated in real time. A setting can be changed so that a "Shadow" is left on the Gantt showing where a project was before it was moved and all changes to project positions are logged and can be undone.

If you had a problem resourcing one area of your project, it may be that you would want to gauge the effect of adding some more people to a task. You can simulate increasing or decreasing the headcount by cost, number or percentage. You run the simulation and Tempus Resource tells you what the effect of your action would be. You can also simulate increasing or reducing the number of hours in a working day.

If you have your resource pool organised down to individual level, you can set each person's efficiency percentage individually and then simulate the effect of changing people around within projects to make the best use of the best people

Projects can be excluded from a model. All changes are tracked and all or individual changes can be undone. An unlimited number of changes can be undone.

An "Opportunity Map" can be created which automatically calculates the best time to start a project, taking into account the commitment of resources to other work.

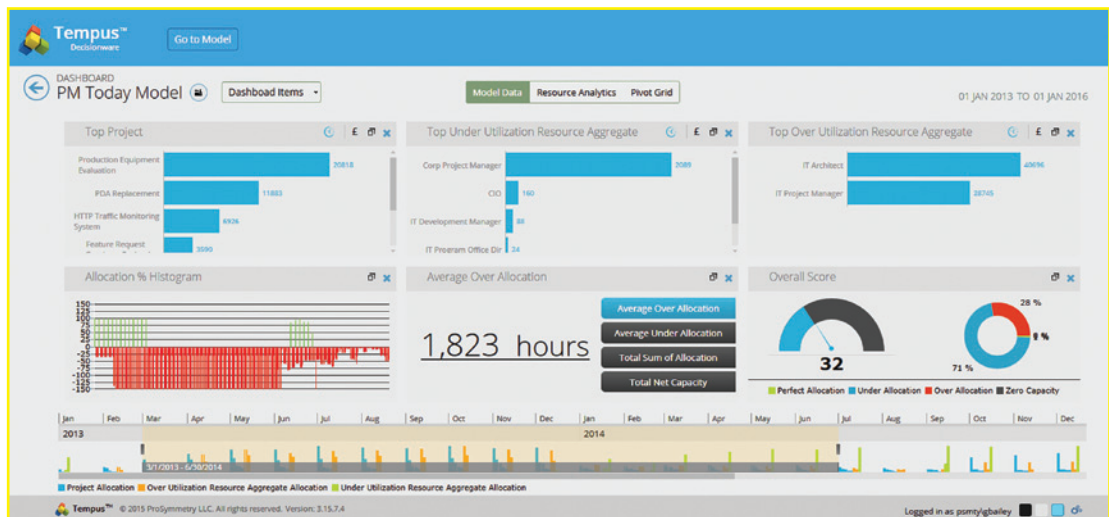
In the upper right-hand corner of the Model Screen is a "Light Bulb" icon. Click this and the system suggests the best move to make towards optimising your model. You can choose whether or not to apply this suggestion but, if you reject it, the system suggests the next best option, and so on.

You can group the projects at program level (using a custom field) and then do a model simulation at program level, comparing one program with another or a group of programs with each other.

Once a model is as you want it, a report can be produced showing all of the relevant data and this report is then presented to the project manager for the schedule to be updated and re-resourced.

The facility exists for this information to be passed automatically to the scheduling software, and rules can be written to control how it's actioned. However, to date, none of Tempus Resource's clients have used this facility, preferring the closer level of control that manually updating the schedule gives them.

A Dashboard containing a set of reports about a model



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"Ask Tempus" is a "heuristic" view that allows you to ask Tempus a set of queries. I found the way that this innovative screen works to be particularly interesting. When an answer is needed quickly, say during a meeting, this feature could be particularly useful. At present there are just four questions that you can ask.

Question one: "When can I start a new project?" Click on this question and you're asked for some relevant information such as your timeframe, the project duration and the resource types that you'll be using. Click the "See When" button and a diagram similar to the Opportunity Map shows the calculated optimal dates with a favourability percentage for each suggestion.

Question two: "When can I start an existing project?" When answering this question you select your project from a list of those available and then a similar procedure is followed to that of question one.

Question three: "I want to start a new project, what do I need?" If you ask this question, Tempus Resource tells you whether you have the required resources available and what new resources you are likely to need. If you change the start date of the project, Tempus Resource gives you the revised information in real-time.

Question four: "Can I compare models?" The answer to this question enables you to compare one model with another and helps you decide which one to use.

The designers are working on voice enabling the "Ask Tempus" function and there are more questions and answers on the way.

How much does it cost?

Tempus Resource is priced relative to the size of the resource pool, number of actual direct entry users (if any), the number of Microsoft Project users importing MPP files and the number of required interface modules. Subscription pricing is offered both for cloud and On-Premise versions with perpetual pricing also available for On-Premise deployments. With the majority of their customers having resource pool sizes from 25 to 7500 they offer a tiered pricing model.

Right to Reply

It is a very exciting time for all of us at ProSymmetry, and we are working hard to make Tempus Resource the premier solution in what we like to call "Resource Portfolio Management."

As Steve highlights in his excellent review, we are expanding the 'Ask Tempus' functionality of the tool, with client feedback telling us this is a really popular use case and one that can deliver detailed insights without requiring complex configuration or data manipulation from the end user. We really do want to support the sort of scenario Steve describes, where users can ask Tempus Resource questions in planning meetings and get instant answers.

Indeed, the array of 'What If Analysis' functionality in Tempus Resource is proving extremely popular with our customers. As Steve says, the tool can be used standalone - as data can be manually entered - or it can be connected to any of the popular PPM solutions. We now also offer full support for importing Microsoft Project MPP files directly.

Those wanting to find out more can check out our website or YouTube channel, where we have a wealth of video content detailing the key features of the product. We are also excited to be included in the latest Gartner PPM report along with being named an Emerging Technology Vendor and exhibitor at the Gartner Symposium/IT Expo being held in Barcelona this November.

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