

MODULE 1: PROJECT MANAGEMENT FOR STARTUPS

Objective: This module equips participants with practical guidance on using digital project management tools to plan, monitor, and coordinate AI startup activities effectively. It helps young entrepreneurs turn ideas into structured tasks, create realistic timelines, collaborate with their teams, and track progress from the first idea to implementation.

The module gives an overview of project management for startups, introduces the main tool guides developed in the toolkit, and provides practical templates such as task lists, Gantt charts, and milestone planners.

Core idea:

A project management system should be simple enough to use every week, but structured enough to show who does what, by when, and why it matters.

1. Introduction to Project Management

Project management is the process of organising tasks, resources, time, and people to achieve a specific goal. For startups, this usually means managing product development, customer research, marketing, content creation, AI testing, operations, and funding activities at the same time.

Unlike traditional projects, startup work is often uncertain and changes quickly. This makes it important to use a flexible system that helps the team stay focused without creating too much administration.

Why it matters for AI startups:

1. AI startup work is usually fast-moving and experimental.
2. Teams are often small, remote, or working with limited time.
3. Tasks come from many areas: product, AI testing, business planning, marketing, ethics, and user feedback.

4. Progress must be visible so the team can understand what is completed, blocked, or delayed.
5. Funders, mentors, and partners often expect a clear plan, timeline, and milestones.

Common Mistakes in Project Management for Startups

1. Keeping tasks only in your head or in scattered chats.
2. Creating tasks that are too vague, such as "work on marketing" instead of "write first Instagram post draft".
3. Using too many tools at once.
4. Not assigning a clear owner for each task.
5. Not updating task status regularly.
6. Overplanning instead of testing, learning, and improving.

Tip:

Break large goals into small, concrete tasks that can realistically be completed and reviewed.

2. Project Management Structure

A simple project management structure should answer four basic questions: What needs to be done? Who is responsible? When is it due? What is the current status?

2.1. Task Planning

Element	Description	Example
Task	What needs to be done	Create landing page text
Owner	Who is responsible	Luca
Deadline	When it should be completed	15 March
Status	Current progress	Not started / In progress / Done
Deadline	How urgent or important the task is	High / Medium / Low

2.2. Workflow Structure

Stage	Description
Ideas	Tasks or opportunities that may be useful but are not yet prioritised
To Do	Tasks that are planned and ready to start
In Progress	Tasks currently being worked on
Review	Check progress during the week and update the board
Done	Review what was completed and what needs to change next week

2.3. Weekly Planning

Step	What to do
1	Define the main priorities for the week
2	Add tasks to your project management tool
3	Assign tasks to specific people
4	Add deadlines and status fields
5	Check progress during the week and update the board.
6	Review what was completed and what needs to change next week

2.4. Task Breakdown (for example, creating social media publication)

A big task should be divided into smaller actions. This makes it easier to assign responsibilities and track progress.

Goal: Publish first social media post. Smaller tasks: Define topic; write caption; design visual; review; publish; track engagement.

Goal: Test AI chatbot prototype. Smaller tasks: Define test scenario; invite 5 testers; collect feedback; analyse issues; update prototype.

Goal: Prepare pitch deck. Smaller tasks: Write problem slide; define solution; add market data; prepare timeline; rehearse presentation.

2.5. Collaboration & Accountability

Element	Description
Team roles	Define who is responsible
Communication	Share updates within the tool
Tracking	Monitor progress visually
Deadlines	Ensure tasks are completed on time

2.6. Milestones and Gantt charts

Milestones are important points in the project that show major progress, such as completing a prototype, launching a test, or submitting a funding application. A Gantt chart is a visual timeline that shows when tasks start and end, how they connect, and which milestones are coming up.

Tool	What it helps you see	When to use it
Task list	Individual tasks, owners, deadlines, and status.	Daily or weekly work management.
Milestone planner	Key achievements and decision points.	Planning a startup launch, pilot, funding application, or testing phase.
Gantt chart	Timeline, dependencies, overlaps, and deadlines.	When several tasks depend on each other or when the team needs a shared timeline.

3. Tool Guides Overview

The AI Startup Toolkit includes separate practical guides for specific project management tools. In this module, participants only need a short overview to understand which tool may fit their needs.

Tool	Best for	Useful startup example
ClickUp	Detailed project setup, task assignment, deadlines and automation.	Managing many project areas in one workspace: product, marketing, operations, and reporting
Notion	Team collaboration, knowledge base, goal tracking, and flexible templates.	Creating a startup dashboard with tasks, notes, AI experiments, and meeting summaries
Trello	Simple visual boards, task cards, checklists, and timelines.	Tracking early-stage work with lists such as Ideas, To Do, In Progress
Asana	Coordinating tasks across teams with clear responsibility and timeline views.	Managing a structured business planning process with sections and deadlines
Monday.com	Visual work boards, automation, integrations, dashboards, timeline and Gantt-style planning.	Managing an AI startup launch plan with tasks, milestones, dependencies, and team updates

How to choose a tool:

If your team needs...	Choose a tool that supports...
A very simple workflow	Kanban boards and checklists
Documentation and tasks in one place	Pages, databases, and templates
Clear responsibility and deadlines	Task owners, due dates, notifications, and status updates
A launch timeline	Timeline or Gantt view
Repeated workflows	Templates and automations

4. Practical Templates

4.1 Task Planning Template

Category	Task	Deadline	Owner	Status	Priority	Notes
Business planning						
Product						
Marketing						

4.2 Milestone planner template

Milestone	Why it matters	Target date	Owner	Success indicator
Prototype completed	The team can test the solution with users.			Prototype is ready for testing.
First user test	The team receives feedback from real users.			At least 5 users give feedback.
Business plan draft	The startup idea becomes clearer for mentors or funders.			Business model and basic costs are completed.

4.3 Simple Gantt chart template

Use this simplified Gantt chart to map tasks across weeks. Mark the weeks when each task is active.

Task	Owner	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Milestone / output
Define problem and users		X				Clear problem statement
Create prototype plan		X	X			Prototype plan completed
Build first prototype			X	X		Prototype ready
Test with users				X	X	Feedback collected
Improve solution					X	Next version planned

5. Best Practices for Startup Project Management

5.1 Agile vs. Waterfall for startups

Agile and Waterfall are two common ways to organise work. Startups usually benefit from Agile thinking because their ideas change as they learn from users, but some Waterfall elements can still be useful when deadlines are fixed.

Approach	How it works	Best for	Risk
Agile	Work is divided into short cycles. The team tests, learns, and improves regularly.	Startups, product testing, AI experiments, user feedback, marketing iteration.	Can become chaotic if priorities and responsibilities are not clear.
Waterfall	Work follows a fixed sequence: plan, design, build, test, launch.	Projects with clear requirements, fixed deliverables, grant reporting, final publication deadlines.	Can be too rigid when the startup needs to adapt quickly.
Hybrid	The team uses milestones and timelines, but reviews and adapts work regularly.	Most early-stage startups and youth entrepreneurship projects.	Requires regular communication and review meetings.

Recommended approach for young AI startups:

Use a hybrid approach: define milestones and a simple timeline, but work in short weekly cycles where the team reviews progress and adapts based on feedback.

5.2 Team collaboration tips

- Use one main project management tool instead of spreading work across many platforms.
- Every task should have one owner, even if several people contribute.
- Write tasks as actions: start with a verb such as write, design, test, review, contact, publish, or analyse.
- Use comments inside the tool to keep decisions close to the task.
- Set a short weekly review meeting or asynchronous update.
- Create a shared definition of Done so the team knows when a task is truly completed.
- Keep a separate space for ideas so the main task board stays focused.
- Review overdue tasks without blaming people: look for unclear priorities, unrealistic deadlines, or missing resources.

6. Practical Exercises

6.1 Create your project management system

1. Choose one project management tool from the toolkit.
2. Create a project board or workspace for your startup idea.
3. Add at least three categories, such as Product, Marketing, Business Planning, or Admin.
4. Add at least five tasks with owners, deadlines, and statuses.
5. Review the board with your team and improve unclear tasks.

6.2 Break down one startup goal

Choose one goal and divide it into smaller tasks. Example: "Launch landing page" can become: write text, design layout, add sign-up form, test on mobile, publish, and share link.

6.3 Build a mini Gantt chart

1. Choose a 4-week startup goal, such as testing an AI prototype.
2. List the tasks needed to reach the goal.
3. Mark which week each task should happen.
4. Identify dependencies: which tasks must be completed before others can start?
5. Add one final milestone at the end.

6.4 Weekly Reflection

Question	Answer
What did we complete this week?	
What is still pending?	
What is blocked or unclear?	

Practical Tips for Entrepreneurs

1. Start simple and improve your system over time.
2. Focus on consistency, not perfection.
3. Use milestones to keep long-term work visible.
4. Use Gantt charts when tasks have dependencies or fixed deadlines.
5. Use Agile habits when your idea still needs testing and user feedback.
6. Make the project board part of the team routine, not a separate admin task.