Preface

Many managers find themselves trying to figure out how to meet the demands of the multiple projects, roles, and responsibilities that compete for their attention. It's not something most have been trained to do. Thus this book.

We've designed it to help you to meet the challenges, both technical and psychological, of being responsible for many things that are being done by several people. This is especially the case in today's knowledge-driven workplace, where many of us face a wide divergence of types and sizes of projects.

While books and tools abound for managing large group projects and also for improving personal productivity, the marketplace currently offers surprisingly little help for the manager of a small workgroup faced with a wide range of responsibilities. Often today's manager is juggler—responsible for keeping numerous balls in the air and never disappointing the audience. Those balls are often small and medium-sized projects that need to be completed on time and on spec so the manager can then get on with the next projects. All this is combined with the need to fulfill other ongoing responsibilities. How you do this effectively is not addressed in business school. But now there is help because that is precisely the topic of this book.

Managing Multiple Projects will help you improve individual and group skills as you cope with competing demands for your attention and effort.

The approaches offered here are based on our extensive experience helping managers and small workgroups in a variety of settings. Our strategies have helped our clients to overcome overload and frustration and to move on to enjoyable and sus-

tainable productivity. These strategies, which draw upon our backgrounds in systems engineering and psychology, can help you, too.

This is not a "one size fits all" approach, but rather a systematic overview of a variety of tools and techniques. This is not a time management book or a guide to getting organized, nor is it an introduction to conventional project management methodology, nor a review of supervision and delegation techniques. Rather, it is a combination of all these drawn together to examine an under-appreciated aspect of managerial activity— *effectively balancing team efforts to achieve multiple objectives reliably and without undue stress.*

We encourage you to read and think carefully, to draw upon the strategies presented here, and to adapt them to your unique situation. It's not easy to keep several projects on course and successfully completing them. But there are proven ways to do that, and you'll learn about those in this book. As you proceed, we would be very interested in hearing about your experiences, and we encourage you to contact us through our Web site at **www.ducks-in-a-row.com**, or youcan also e-mail us at **multiproj@ducks-in-a-row.com**.

Special Features

The idea behind the books in the Briefcase Series is to give you practical information written in a friendly person-to-person style. The chapters are short, deal with tactical issues, and include lots of examples. They also feature numerous sidebars designed to give you different types of specific information. Here's a description of these sidebars and how they're used in this book.

These boxes are designed to give you tips and tactics that will help you more effectively implement the methods described in this book.

Smart Managing

These boxes provide warnings for where things could go wrong when you're trying to organize your workplace to manage multiple projects and responsibilities.

These boxes highlight insider tips for taking advantage of the practices we describe.

Every subject has its special jargon and terms. These boxes provide definitions of these concepts.

It's always important to have examples of what others have done, either well or not so well. Find these stories in these boxes.

This identifies boxes where you'll find specific procedures you can follow to take advantage of the book's advice.

How can you make sure you won't make a mistake when managing? You can't, but these boxes will give you practical advice on how to minimize the possibility.

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About the Authors

Michael Tobis, Ph.D. (systems engineer) and **Irene Tobis**, Ph.D. (psychologist) are partners in the consulting firm Ducks-in-a-Row® Organizing Consultants, a company whose consultations focus on individual and small workgroup operations.

By combining their disparate perspectives and backgrounds, this husband/wife team brings unique insights to its work in individual and group productivity. The give-and-take between Michael's systems engineering approach and Irene's psychological insights has been instrumental in many of Ducks-in-a-Row's successes.

Michael brings an information theory outlook to work process design. With his background in systems engineering, Michael finds questions of prioritization and scheduling particularly interesting.

Irene's background as a psychologist with a focus in stress management underlies her professional activities in workflow consultation. She designs methods tailored to individual skills, resources, styles, and preferences. Her first goal is to get people past feeling overwhelmed. She then proceeds to help clients build skills toward greater productivity and satisfaction.