Like the other diagrammatic techniques introduced in this section, Gantt charts are relatively easy to draw by hand, but this doesn’t offer you the same level of flexibility during monitoring that you would get from a software package. Various programmes are available to assist project managers in scheduling and control. Moreover, once the data have been entered, a programme helps you to work on ‘what if’ scenarios, showing what might happen if a key stage is delayed or speeded up. This is more difficult if you are working manually. Computer software also allows you to move easily from one level of detail to another.

Many programmes are designed to help produce a project plan. These are often quite powerful and complex, which may be problematic for a manager who is not experienced in their use. At the early stages of a project, it is usually best to start planning on paper and to use a simple programme, perhaps a spreadsheet. Once the outline plans have been made, for someone who has learned to use them, computer programmes provide a very flexible way of managing the project. For those whose work will often include project management it is a good idea to develop skills and familiarity with some of the available software. Some organisations use a project management protocol for all of their projects to ensure that there is a similar approach to project management and to enable a central record of projects to be available to managers.

'Some managers use modern PC-based software as if it absolves them of the need to manage. They expect that by overloading it with detail the answers to complex questions will miraculously appear. Computers can help: by rapidly processing data, they provide quick answers to questions.' (Anderson et al., 1990)