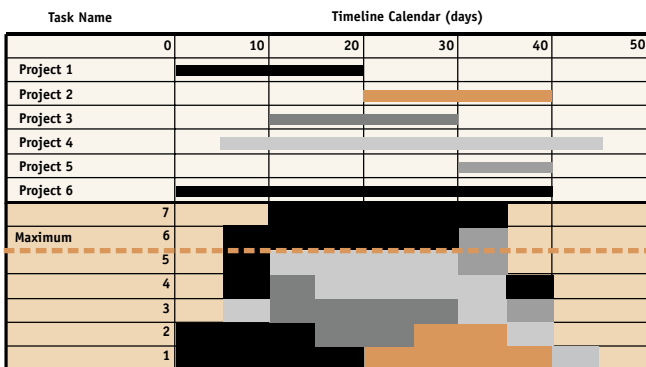


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THOUGHT

Resource management is easier if people believe the estimates of when they'll be needed

Is a schedule 'worth the computer it is generated by' if it doesn't take into account the resources needed to achieve it? Of course the answer to this question, in theory, is a resounding NO. So if the answer is a resounding NO why are most schedules that pop out of Microsoft Project™ or another such easy to use software package completely bereft of any consideration of resources? The answer is quite simple. It's very difficult and time-consuming to find out what resources are needed to work on a task and then gain commitment to their release and as result proper resource planning doesn't get done. In some instances it's just as difficult to convince stakeholders in the project that it is even necessary to try to do resource planning - some people don't see the point.



We seem to have spent much of our time recently talking about the difficulties in persuading clients to take the process of resource allocation and resource optimisation (in time-limited or resource limited situations) seriously. Or where the client knows it is important, and they understand that their project management plans, and schedules in particular, are unlikely to be realistic if resources

have not been assigned to the work, they just find it too difficult to see how things might be different.

On reflection there seem to be a number of underlying causes that lead to this observation:

- *To some degree it is a feature of the organisation structure. Project or Task-Force organisations, or strong matrix organisations find it easier to manage resource allocations to projects than weaker matrix organisations where there is relatively more organisational power in the line function. This is obvious when stated, but the problem exists that many organisations are using project management extensively yet remain organised in a largely functional way and find it immensely difficult to commit resources to project work in advance. We understand why as business as usual supported by the line is often considered to be more important than projects.*
- *People don't like to be 'planned' - they like to be in charge of their own personal time-plan. This may be because it is difficult for some people to let someone else be accountable for deciding how they will spend their time, or may be because some people prefer to be 'heroes' and crisis manage - it's more exciting. Further, some people would avoid having plans too far ahead of time as this sets expectations of others and allows them to be measured, sometimes against the wrong thing. If you are focused on delivering your project, you need some degree of flexibility to do what you can when you can. Yet more people may believe that as Sir John Harvey Jones said 'the great thing about not planning is that failure comes as total surprise and isn't preceded by weeks or months of worry and anxiety' or words to that effect.*

- *In a portfolio situation, with many small projects being undertaken simultaneously, people understand the negative effects of multi-tasking, student syndrome and 'not' using a critical chain approach to schedule around the 'drum' resource - they understand the theory, but the leap in faith and change to attitudes and practices is too much, so little happens.*

If we were being fatalist about the situation we could say that ultimately project planning comes down to people believing that resource allocation and resource optimisation is the right thing to do and then DOING IT. Organisations can teach the theory of resource management until the 'cows come home' but the only thing that will change practice in organisations is people believing that the best way to bring deliverables in on time, to budget and to specification is to have a resource optimised plan to start with.

Once again then, and we shouldn't be surprised, effective project management comes down to beliefs and behaviours rather than tools and techniques. There is nothing in any software package, or any project management body of knowledge or method that will persuade people that their schedules needs to be resource optimised - only an expectation that this will happen.

What is needed is for organisations to:

- *Decide whether, or not, they want to have plans that are resourced and therefore have a good chance of delivering, and*
- *Face up to the consequences of their decision, i.e:*
 - *Organise to make resource allocation to projects easier, or*
 - *Accept that if resources are not allocated that plans are more uncertain and therefore there is a greater chance of being late or over budget in order to achieve the planned scope and quality.*

Of course, people will be much more likely to be prepared to commit resources to projects if they believe that they will actually be required at the planned time, and for the planned duration. Poor scope planning and inaccurate estimating all add to the challenge.

The summary of this situation and our experience in recent times is one that requires education, particularly of junior people who are learning their craft and perhaps attending training courses. It goes something like this...

- 1 *Baseline schedules are 'worth the computer they were generated by' if the scope is fully defined, estimates have taken account of experience wherever possible and resources have been assigned to activities and optimised to match the situation whether that be time-limited or resource limited.*
- 2 *Baseline schedules are merely indicative or a scenario that might happen if barriers to doing point 1. above cannot be overcome. Many great organisations engaged in many projects find resource allocation and resource optimisation too hard. If yours is one of them, just be aware of the additional risk you are carrying.*

Good luck!

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