MITIGATE RISK – ENSURE YOUR PROJECT PLAN FOLLOWS THESE SIMPLE BEST PRACTICES

By Patrick d'Astous, Ph.D., PMP

Project audits are a necessary evil for project managers and project management offices alike. Project audits are used to answer two questions:

- **Is the project delivering the expected result?** Evaluation of the project's health (cost, time, scope, risks) and must be performed at every milestone occurrences.
- **Are project management best practices being followed to mitigate risks?** Issues related to the project organization, management and the process used. It should occur as often as possible.

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Process slips are the most common project management mistakes. Inadequate use of best practices increases the risk project planning details will fall through the cracks and that projects will have to be re-planned.

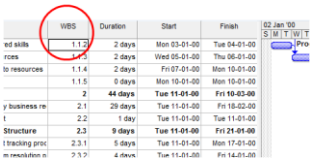
What are best practices?

A best practice is a technique believed to be more effective at delivering a particular outcome when applied to a particular condition or circumstance. The Project Management Institute (PMI) proposes to use "best practices" as a mean to correct any deficiencies to reduce cost of quality and an increase in sponsor and customer acceptance of the project's product.

Scheduling best practices

Project schedules always change and get reprioritised according to new situations. What makes a project schedule better? I believe it is the repeated use of best practices: a well thought project plan, built on generally accepted practices, should reflect more precisely the project manager's plan and therefore reduce project management process related risks. Here is a non exhaustive list of SIMPLE scheduling practices:

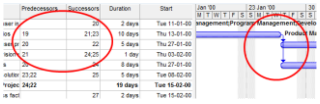
- ### Activity code / WBS



Your planning must derive from some analysis of the work to be performed during the project. In order to structure these activities, you should use a numerical or alphanumerical value to categorize them.

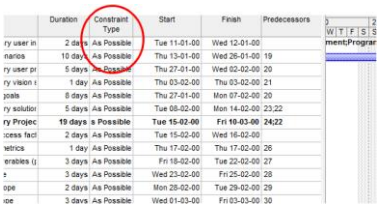
- ## Milestones

A milestone is an event in time to indicate an important decision or the completion of a key project phase. It therefore has no duration and no resource assigned to it. It goes without saying that the project start and finish dates are important events. They should appear as milestones in your schedule.



- ## Relationships

All scheduling elements (i.e. activities and milestones), except the project start and finish milestones, must have relationships with at least one predecessor and one successor tasks/milestones.



- ## Constraints

Scheduling constraints (FNLT, FNET, Fon, etc.) identify project fixed dates. Use scheduling constraints sparingly as they reduce scheduling options and optimization opportunities.

- ## Project scheduling vs activity scheduling

Make sure you use the same type of scheduling for project and activities or there may be a conflict. If you schedule the project from its start date, make sure activities are set to start as soon as possible. If you schedule the project from its finish date, make sure activities are set to start as late as possible.

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The Last Word
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