

Chasing the Schedule

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Have you ever wondered if you are managing the schedule or if the schedule is managing you? There are too many projects where the schedule becomes obsolete early on and is eventually dropped. Why is that? Is it because of ineffective project management tools? Is it because of ineffective project managers? Is it because projects are constantly changing, thus impossible to manage? I submit to you that the main problem with schedule chasing is that most project plans never take into account all of the important activities required to achieve a milestone. So why not detail all of those activities, you may ask? There is a fine line between not enough detail and too much detail in a project plan. I have seen project plans that are 20-30 lines that are unmanageable due to their lack of detail, but I have also seen project plans that are 2,000 lines that are equally unmanageable due to their granularity. It required entire PMOs just to manage the updates. So how do you avoid both of these problems and effectively manage the schedule?

My advice is to always look at the milestones that need to be achieved, and manage to those milestones. That is your 10,000 foot level of whether or not the project is on time. Then you need to identify the dependencies to complete those milestones successfully. This brings you down an additional level, but the project plan still remains manageable. A PM should be spending his or her time ensuring that the project team has the proper tools and a clear path in order to complete those dependent activities. They should be working on nothing else. Issues that block the team's ability to complete those activities should be prioritized and other issues dealt with at a later date.

I realize that this is not rocket science, but too many projects focus on the number of tasks to be completed, the percentage complete, the number of resources, etc., but some of those tasks do not always relate directly to the milestones to be achieved. As soon as you lose view of the project milestones, you will lose focus on the activities that should be the highest priority and your project schedule will suffer.

Yes, it is that simple!