

Project Time Management

See Chapter 6 in the PMBOK® Guide.

The whole chapter is excellent. If you follow the WBS on Page 66 and do the five processes in the order suggested, you will save a great deal of iteration, time and frustration.

1. Activity Definition
2. Activity Sequencing
3. Activity Duration Estimating
4. Schedule Development
5. Schedule Control

Comments:

1. Use a strong verb and noun to define your activities in Step 1 and keep descriptions short. Scope statements, notes, cross-references, etc. should be put in the notes field for each activity, not in the activity description.
2. Use post-it notes with the whole senior team to come up with the Level 1 (Summary) schedule. Keep it simple. If you work top down, you can put in the detail later. Think logic and duration, NOT dates! See details in our PMMP Checklist – Planning, Point 1.
3. Stick to this approach. Do not work with person-hours. Durations for activities should be less than the reporting period. If you plan to report weekly, no activity at the lowest level in the WBS should be longer than 5 days. If you plan to report every four hours on a shut-down project no activity at the lowest level in the WBS should be longer than 4 hours. See our PMMP Checklist – Planning, Point 4.
4. This is the fun part. Ensure that you have a well defined, practical critical path. Use discretionary as well as mandatory logic. Use the Total Float (TF) sort to check for missing logic on activities with excessive float. Then, use the corrected Total Float to resource level. Remember that you don't have a realistic schedule if the resource demands are not realistic. Your Planned Value will also be hopelessly unrealistic and embarrassing. Save your Baseline schedule at the end of Step 4.
5. Schedule control should now be relatively easy. Update your schedule regularly. "Manage by exception" just the handful of activities that go wrong rather than the thousands that go well. Catch up activities on the critical path that are behind schedule by assigning more or better resources. Often you can borrow resources from activities that have large amounts of total float. Use Earned Value. See the Schedule Control section in our PMMP Checklist for further details.

Find a project management software package that will fit your needs. Such software is the ultimate time management tool. The new tools make this section easy and rewarding by comparison to just a few years ago. If you keep your project on schedule, it will generally stay on budget or the budget was unrealistic to start with. However, don't cheat yourself by using the tools just to manage time. With a little more work you can leverage the new tools to help you with resources, cost, risk, communications, etc.