

Best Practice versus Normal (typical)

Best	Normal
<p>Get full team involvement in planning and tracking their project:</p> <p>a) All team members are involved in developing & scrubbing the schedule. The schedule is a realistic representation of the work need to be done, even if it reflects a project duration past the target date. The team is bought-in to the schedule because it is their own schedule, made for their own use as a management tool.</p>	<p>The schedule is developed by the program manager or a the lead technical person on the project. Once created, the manager attempts to “sell” the schedule to the team. For the most part the schedule “fits” within the target time frame in order not to upset customers or management, but the team knows it will take longer. They lose interest because they know that their input is not listened to. <i>Conclusion: planning and tracking a project is a waste of time.</i></p>
<p>b) The full team is involved in exploring alternative ways of accelerating the schedule, continuously throughout the program.</p>	<p>Only the program manager or lead technical person know what is in the schedule and they rarely use it to find ways of accelerating the schedule, because it only slightly reflects what is actually going on in the program, hence it is of little value to the “troops on the ground.” It does have value though as a reporting tool to senior management since they don’t really know what is going on at the project level (on the ground). The managers at the project level figure they will sort of the project and get it done on time regardless of what the schedule say. Of course this is a rear outcome from no planning.</p>
<p>Plan near-term detail & long term macro (start with top down macro plan):</p> <p>a) The initial plan was defined at the macro level (i.e. about 50 activities from the start to the end of the program). This macro plan is used to define the high-level architecture of the schedule.</p>	<p>The program plan is created from the bottom up by collected multiple team or functional schedules. Somehow the program manager is expected to “integrate” this into a master schedule. Since the interface points were never defined, the pieces rarely fit together when integrated. The system lacks a “high-level” architecture that would have defined these interface/hand-off points. Without a macro plan it is very hard for people to see the structure of the program and the critical touch-points that impact the schedule.</p>

<p>b) The near-term (<1 month) schedule is broken down into 1-5 day duration activities. After the near-term activities are expressed at the macro level (i.e. +20 day durations).</p>	<p>Detail scheduling is seen as time consuming and confusing. Most schedules are high level and remain so for the duration of the program. Detail schedules translate to “micro management” and people don’t like this. Alternatively, the schedule is decomposed into microscopic detail for the total duration of the program. These managers believe that detail equals accuracy. All they end up with at the end of the day is a mess of information that only they understand.</p>
<p>c) Long duration activities are continually decomposed into 1-5 day durations as they fall inside the one month near-term window. This is done weekly during the refresh planning sessions with the team.</p>	<p>The schedule stays at the high level and only vaguely reflects what is going on at the detail level of the program. It is made once and is not updated.</p>
<p>Daily refresh planning (update, breakdown, pull-in) -- with complete team: The schedule is updated one or more times per week with "actual" data and the team collects together to look for opportunities to pull the near term schedule in each week in order to close the gap. Most teams do this “refresh planning” every day for 15-20 minutes.</p>	<p>Schedules are rarely updated with actual data if ever. Typically updates to the schedule are only done right before major program reviews or when a customer, investor, or a senior manager asks “what is the status of the program.” Alternatively, updates are done on a regular basis but these take the form of “everything is on schedule” updates, until a major milestone is missed when teams admit there are problems. Of course by then the time has been lost. A new schedule is then created going forward, but the pattern repeats itself on the major milestone. <i>Conclusion: planning and tracking a project is a waste of time.</i></p>

Use the schedule as the driver, not just a reporting tool:

The schedule used as the project driver, not only as a reporting tool. The team uses it to manage future work. The information in the schedule is used to report progress to customers and senior management without “filtering” so that information reporting requires no “overhead” i.e. lost of time reporting out.

The schedule is only used for external (to the team) reporting. It is not up to date and does not reflect what is actually happening on the program, but since the consumers of this information are too far above the program to understand what they are reading, all are satisfied. In large companies this is formalized in PLM systems (product life cycle management), further reinforcing the “garbage-in” theory, but it makes it official. When there is a big slip in the schedule it comes as a giant surprise to all concerned, except the engineers working on the program. The schedule does not drive work because it does not reflect what people are working on. Team members default to spreadsheets, powerpoint, and calendar management techniques.

Make schedules that are real, show the gap between target date and the "real" end date, and use the gap to create urgency early rather than later & Track schedule trends so they can see if they are moving towards or away from the target date, this creates before-the-fact behavior:

The team is managing the schedule trends (i.e. the gap between expected dates and the real schedule in order to record schedule pull-ins and push-outs of the critical path).

There is little if any trending information. Since each time there is a slip in the schedule it is reworked, it becomes hard to see the “foot prints in the sands of time.” People don’t want to see trends since they don’t want to acknowledge the slips, so the information is not shared if it is known at all. Since most project end dates are fixed, trending information is not possible from a schedule. Trends are only visible over a long time frame when management realizes the team missed the delivery time for the product and a major market window was missed.