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eTaskMaker™ **White Paper**

Refining the Project Planning Process

Project planning lays the foundation for your project management success. Quality project planning enables project managers to derive useful information for making decisions to achieve safety, time and budget goals. Poor project planning incapacitates project management from using any analytical process to achieve the same goals. It is the "garbage in, garbage out" axiom at work. Therefore, the planning stage for any project should be given as much attention as possible.

Manual Project Planning

Project planning in many industries is still a "start from scratch", labor intensive effort for every new project. Planners analyze each logical work element by defining the necessary steps (tasks), estimating their duration and resource requirements and laying out a logic network for sequencing (scheduling) them. Given sufficient time, experienced personnel can produce the highest quality plans with the manual planning process. Unfortunately, business pressures and time constraints do not always allow planners the luxury of manually planning to the best of their abilities.

Project Planning with Project Templates

With the advent of computers and project management software, re-useable project files (project templates) have become a valuable tool for the project planner. Project templates increase planner productivity and help standardize estimates from project to project. The bulk of the data entry, estimating and scheduling effort is already done. Planners can focus on customizing previous (historical) efforts.

However, the use of project templates does have some pitfalls. An organization needs to be careful to allow planners adequate time to review and customize project templates or suffer from "Cut and Paste syndrome" (CPS). CPS inevitably leads to errors such as including the wrong (old) steps, forgetting necessary new steps and overlooking schedule logic and/or manhour estimates that are not customized to the current situation.

Project Planning with Estimating Modules

Dynamic estimating modules incorporate the benefits of project templates while solving their potential pitfalls. Dynamic estimating modules can be thought of as large, flexible project templates that incorporate many different scenarios. Estimates and resource requirements are stored as estimating formulas instead of fixed amounts. Schedule logic is "super-networked" to allow flexibility in including or excluding ranges of tasks while maintaining the logic network integrity.

To use dynamic estimating modules, planners enter the required parameters into the project estimating software. The appropriate task lists, durations, resource assignments and predecessor schedule logic are extracted (and calculated) from the estimating modules in accordance with the supplied parameters and exported into the main project file.

Evolution of the Project Planning Process

Over time the benefit of using dynamic estimating modules will multiply. Since estimating formulas and schedule logic are captured within the estimating modules, there will be no drop-off in quality when new or inexperienced

planners arrive on the job. Dynamic estimating modules will allow larger companies the means to standardize planning and estimating using their best practices across the enterprise. Dynamic estimating modules are the next evolution in the refinement of the project planning process.

[eTaskMaker project estimating software](#) employs dynamic estimating modules.

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