

# Critical path method scheduling

**Success—it all depends on the schedule, and the schedule depends on you**



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The original project schedule is one aspect of the construction process that is generally agreed upon as important, but rarely executed properly. All parties involved in the project tend to agree that an accurate and realistic original schedule is critical to the success of the project. However, the information required to generate a useful schedule is often either not provided or is not accurate.

Although the schedule can be a powerful and useful tool for controlling and improving the progress of a project, it is seldom given the attention it requires. Ideally, the critical path method can be used to plan, schedule, and help control the project; but like most things it is important to realize that the finalized schedule is only as good as the information used to create it.

Here are some considerations that will help make scheduling more precise, and more helpful.

**Communication tool**

An original schedule is a vital form of communication. It provides information regarding the planned progress of the project, timeframes and milestones for completion of critical segments of work, an overall structure to the progression and sequence of work to be performed, as well as a baseline for comparison of the



project's actual progress to how it was planned. A schedule should represent the scope of work for all of the trades involved in a project. Performed correctly, a good schedule helps all of the parties involved in the project perform more efficiently, avoid potential impacts, and allocate resources appropriately to meet project requirements and deadlines.

**Graphic information**

One of the greatest hindrances to the development of a useful schedule is a lack of accurate information. The more specific and accurate the information about the project that is provided for the schedule, the more useful the

schedule will be. Precedence activities should be determined and a logical sequence established to decide the most economical and efficient occurrence of activities to complete the project within the stated parameters.

The original schedule should reflect the planned work on the project, and updates should indicate actual progress. Differences between the work being performed and the work planned should be noted and incorporated into the schedule update in order to give an accurate representation of the project's progress. When performed correctly, a schedule can be an invaluable roadmap for the project's

execution, and can help keep trades from negatively impacting each other.

**Legal document**

There is another reason that the information provided for a schedule should be as accurate as possible. Based on the contract specifications, the original schedule is often a legal document. Once generated and distributed, the original schedule and the information it contains may be admissible in a court of law.

It is important to realize that although circumstances such as weather conditions, change orders, unforeseen

material delays, and other external forces can impact the schedule, parties that provided schedule information and those that developed the schedule can be held accountable for meeting those timeframes. It is also important to realize that to change contract milestones, a formal change order must be agreed to by the parties involved. If a party has any concerns regarding the schedule it is important to address those issues as soon as they arise and to document them accordingly.

Barring extenuating circumstances, project participants are

expected to meet the dates laid out in the schedule. They can be held accountable for making those dates, and in the case of a delay, the impact their delays have on others.

**Summary**

Every project should have an accurate schedule. A good schedule provides a roadmap for the construction process and insures that participants know what is occurring and what is expected. All of the parties involved on the project are responsible for making sure the schedule is both correct and useful.

Those producing the

schedule need to be honest and realistic about the information they use to develop it, and the trades affected by the schedule dates need to communicate whether the sequence and durations of their activities are correct and pragmatic. Making sure that there is a good schedule is in everyone's interest and will benefit the entire project. **BXM**

*Thomas J. Williams is vice president of sales and marketing at VN Services, a project support services company that works with contractors and subcontractors, attorneys and architects, engineering and design firms on projects of all sizes.*

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