

Dynamic Scheduling

Diagrammatic representations of activities or events plotted against a time axis has been around since the mid eighteenth-century¹. For the first 200 years, static bar charts were the norm; dynamic schedules were only developed in the late 1950s. Unfortunately despite the many advantages offered by a well constructed dynamic schedule, by the mid 1990s most schedules had reverted to static displays².

A schedule consists of series activities to create the project's deliverables, dependencies between the activities (either inferred or as part of the model) and perhaps some hard dates. The way the schedule is created determines if the schedule is rigid or dynamic. If you enter the activities as 'fixed bars' in a Gantt Chart view (the default way of working in Microsoft Project and a number of other tools) fixed dates are created and you will end up with a rigid schedule; a Bar Chart or a Gantt Chart³. Skilled schedulers know the core value of a CPM schedule lays in its ability to dynamically model data.

Dynamic CPM Schedules⁴

A properly developed CPM schedule is a 'dynamic schedule'. However, a schedule is only dynamic if it can be easily kept up-to-date when you are busy during project execution – this is not just a fashionable term, it is critical to effective project management. So whilst by definition a CPM schedule is a dynamic model, this can only be achieved if the schedule meets the following requirements:

- All the relationships between the tasks that may impact the flow of the work are built into the model⁵. These relationships are called 'dependencies'.
- The number of hard dates (constrained dates) in your schedule are minimised and represent 'real' constraints such as contracted completion dates.

Creating a logically interconnected CPM schedule takes more time and effort than creating a simple static Bar Chart (or Gantt Chart). Therefore, the legitimate question to ask is; why is this important, and what is the payback?

Projects are dynamic, many changes occur in every project. If the schedule is to remain useful (ie, realistic), every time a change happens, you need to change your schedule to reflect the new reality. This is usually managed as part of a planned status/update cycle once a week, or once a month depending on the size of the project⁶.

Static Bar Charts require a significant effort to update – every change needs to be manually flowed through the whole schedule. For this reason skilled schedulers⁷ normally only use Bar

¹ For more on the History of Scheduling see: *A Brief History of Scheduling*:
http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/Resources_Papers_042.html

² Weaver. P. (1995) *Barcharts and Networks – a world of difference*. AIPM National Conference, Adelaide.

³ These are essentially the same it just depends which side of the Atlantic you are based.

⁴ For more on creating a CPM schedule see: *A Guide to Scheduling Good Practice*:
<http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/Planning.html>

⁵ For more on dependencies see: *Links, Lags & Ladders*: http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/Planning.html#Core_Papers

⁶ For more on updating, see 'Managing for Success - The power of regular updates' by P. Weaver:
www.mosaicprojects.com.au/Resources_Papers_002.html

⁷ For more on this see: *The Roles and Attributes of a Scheduler* at
http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/PDF/Attributes_of_a_Scheduler.pdf

Charts for short term 'Level 5' schedules⁸ to plan and coordinate work in a small part of a project for the next one or two weeks. At the end of each period, the schedule is simply replaced with a new one.

Network logic within the overall project schedule tends to stay basically the same during the entire project, update the activities impacted by a change and the consequences flow realistically throughout the balance of the logic network; do the logic once well, and your schedule maintenance becomes relatively easy!

Potential Gains from Dynamic Schedules

Eric Uyttewaal PMP, in his book *Dynamic Scheduling With Microsoft® Office Project 2003*, offers the following evaluation of maintaining a 'dynamic' -v- 'static' schedule:

Let's see if we can approximately quantify how much time you gain with applying the principle of dynamic scheduling and how much time you have to invest to make the model dynamic. Imagine a schedule with 100 tasks. It will take approximately 8 hours of effort to discuss, identify and set all the dependencies and make the model dynamic.

How many changes occur? This is the hard question. We do know for sure that each task needs to be updated at least once, and about 30% of them twice. This already results in 130 changes to the schedule, if you enter them all individually. Other changes that typically happen in projects are:

- Clients change their mind on requirements
- Deliverables are dropped; others are added
- Activities that were overlooked are inserted
- Activities that cannot be done are dropped
- Resources get sick or are reassigned
- Resources are interrupted with higher priorities

Let's be conservative and say that these things cause 50 more changes, to a total of 180 changes for a 100 task schedule.

Entering 180 changes in a dynamic model would take you about 8 hours, since you only need to revise one (or two) fields for each change.

Entering 180 changes in a static model will require you to review the rest of the schedule every time. Therefore, you have to review and adjust on average 50 tasks in a static schedule with every change. If adjusting 50 tasks takes you about 2 hours for each change, the total time spent to keep the schedule alive will be $180 \times 2 = 360$ hours.

Working with a static schedule becomes a fulltime job and does not allow project managers to help their team members any longer. What you will see in practice therefore is that people who work with static schedules get smart and enter 5 changes at a time and only then review the rest of their schedule. In other words, they update their schedule only $180 / 5 = 36$ times instead of 180 times.

Notice that the schedule is not up-to-date all the time any longer. Even in this case, they will spend at least $36 \times 2 = 72$ hours on their schedule.

The difference in effort spent on a static schedule versus a dynamic schedule is at least: $72 - (8 + 8) = 56$ hours for a 100 task schedule, which is the gain you can expect from applying the principle of dynamic scheduling.

The expected gains calculated by Uyttewaal from applying the principle of dynamic scheduling to a 100 activity Microsoft Project schedule is 56 Hours. Whilst we do not fully concur with many of the items in his 'list of changes', the principle argued is very sound and if routine status/updating is being used the number of changes in a well maintained schedule are likely to be greater (rather than fewer) as the actual progress on tasks is managed along with the changes.

⁸ For more on this see: *Schedule Levels* at http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/PDF/Schedule_Levels.pdf

Other key benefits of a dynamic schedule include:

- It is much easier it is to develop scenarios with a dynamic model as opposed to a static model.
- Every time the project slips during a 'status update', you will have to develop solutions to minimise the effect of the slippage; the dynamic model will be much more helpful than a static model.
- The schedule creation process forces the project team to work through the project and develop a logical roadmap for the efficient execution of the work. This thinking process can save a fortune once the actual work starts by anticipating and avoiding production issues.
- You create the schedule model (including dependencies) during the planning phase of the project when you have less time pressures than during the execution phase.

Creating a realistic and achievable schedule is a skilled art. Most project managers have neither the time (they should be managing the project) nor the inclination to become skilled schedulers. This should not be an issue if the 'performing organisation' responsible for the overall governance of the project develops an efficient PMO⁹. A skilled scheduler can easily support five or six medium sized projects and is best positioned in the PMO as a project support service¹⁰. On major projects the scheduler becomes an important part of the overall project management team.

To achieve the maximum benefit from 'dynamic scheduling' organisations will need to invest in training and potentially certification¹¹ to ensure that their schedulers and project managers apply the principle of dynamic scheduling properly and that people adjust their behaviours and habits to create 'good' schedules¹² and reap all of the potential rewards.

The papers in this series:

- A Guide to Scheduling Good Practice: http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/PDF/Good_Scheduling_Practice.pdf
- Attributes of a Scheduler: http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/PDF/Attributes_of_a_Scheduler.pdf
- Dynamic Scheduling: http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/PDF/Dynamic_Scheduling.pdf
- Links, Lags & Ladders: http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/PDF/Links_Lags_Ladders.pdf
- Schedule Float: http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/PDF/Schedule_Float.pdf
- Schedule Levels: http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/PDF/Schedule_Levels.pdf

Additional information; see Mosaic's Scheduling Home page at: <http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/Planning.html>

⁹ For more on project governance and PMO's view a range of papers at:

- Project Governance papers: http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/Resources_Papers.html#Governance
- PMOs: http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/Resources_Papers.html#Proj_Off

¹⁰ The 'value proposition' of an effective scheduler is outlined in : *The Roles and Attributes of a Scheduler* at http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/PDF/Attributes_of_a_Scheduler.pdf

¹¹ For more on training for schedulers see:

- PMI's Scheduling Credential: <http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/Training-Planning.html>
- Mosaic's 5-STEPS Training: <http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/Training-PMGen%205-STEPS.html>

¹² From more on creating a 'good schedule' see: *A Guide to Scheduling Good Practice*: <http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/Planning.html>