Agile vs. Traditional Project Scheduling

This month we will continue our comparison between Agile and Traditional Project Management by looking at scheduling. Determining the schedule of your project (and keeping it) is vital for success. We've all had projects that take longer than expected to finish; however, that should be the exception, not the norm. Regardless of which project management methodology you administer, it's necessary to keep your project on track.

Agile Project Management follows a progressive elaboration approach to estimate the length. While you must estimate the work involved initially to determine how big the project could possibly be, you realize that the beginning is when you know the least about the project. In an Agile framework, you will constantly refine your estimates as the project progresses and more information is known. These estimates are in the form of release plans and iteration plans.

A release plan helps the whole team decide how much must be done and how long it will take to be successful. It is comprised of a group of iterations that culminates in the completion of a major project deliverable. It is created at the start of the project and is updated throughout the project, usually at the start of each iteration. Release plans convey expectations on what is to happen on the project and when it will occur. Each release plan will determine the conditions of satisfaction; i.e. if it will be date driven or functionality driven. It serves as a guidepost toward which the project team can progress.

An iteration plan, on the other hand, looks in more detail at the specific work of a single iteration. Typically, an iteration only lasts for 1-4 weeks, and the plan is created at the start of each iteration. Work is decomposed into tasks, and each task is estimated in terms of the number of ideal hours the task will take to complete. Tasks are not given to team members during iteration planning; instead tasks are given when the iteration begins.

In each of these plans, it is important to include a buffer into the estimation. A buffer is a margin for error around an estimate. There is always uncertainty in a project. Emergencies come up, people get sick, or the weather could wreck havoc. Buffers help protect the project against the impact of the uncertainties.

Now let's switch gears and look at scheduling in a Traditional Project Management environment. In Traditional Project Management, the project schedule is determined based on information in the schedule management plan. The schedule management plan identifies a scheduling method and scheduling tool, sets the format, and establishes criteria for developing and controlling the project

> *There is not a worse thief than one who steals. . . time by persistently being late.*
> Tom Campbell, M.D.

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important to monitor the project's progress. This allows you to recognize any divergence from the set schedule and to take appropriate action to minimize risk.

Whether you choose the fluid scheduling approach of Agile Project Management or the set approach of Traditional Project Management, no one can argue that establishing a schedule is vital to the success of your project.

Some information taken from PMI-ACP® Exam Prep by Mike Griffiths and PMBOK® Guide - 5th edition.

schedule. There are several steps involved in developing the schedule:

1. Plan Schedule Management
2. Define Activities
3. Sequence Activities
4. Estimate Activity Resources
5. Estimate Activity Durations
6. Develop Schedule
7. Control Schedule

While the purpose of this *Messenger* isn't to go into detail on each of these process, we'll do a very brief overview.

In Traditional Project Management, the **entire** schedule is developed before the project begins. You start by developing the Schedule Management Plan. This provides clear direction on how the schedule will be managed. During the Define Activities step, you will break down work packages into activities. This will give you activity and milestones lists. After you have a list of all the necessary activities for the project, you will logically sequence them. Once you have put each activity in a logical sequence, you will estimate how resources needed to complete the project. As soon as you know when each resource is available, you can estimate the duration of each activity.

You are now able to develop your schedule! You will use all the estimates you've established to set completion dates for each activity. Once the schedule is in place and the project begins, it is

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