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Moving from the Gantt Chart to Optimal Resource Management

The simplicity of the Gantt Chart has made it a popular method for Project Managers. It is essentially just a scheduling tool, which makes it a low investment of time, skill and cost. The requisite Work Breakdown Structure should already have an organizing principle guiding the deliverables and key milestones, so that developing a Gantt Chart for the project can be as straightforward as fleshing out that backbone.

However, the simplicity of this process relies on assumptions that may be untrue, which can result in missed scopes. For example, we cannot always presuppose that a task that "generally" takes a week will be completed by its deadline if you ask for it to be done in that week timeframe. If some other manager has also tasked that same resource for that same week, or if that resource is less experienced in the skill(s) required to complete the task, then the deadline may be missed. And if that particular task is part of the critical path, then this might delay the entire project.

Fundamental Resource Managers, on the other hand, take all of this into consideration to create a more reliable output. They:

- **Focus** on a known task
- **Consider** what skills are needed to fulfill the task
- **Conduct** an inventory of available resources possessing the skills to fulfill the required roles of that task.

Ultimately, the Resource Manager gauges the effort, i.e. how much labor will need to be applied in order to complete a task. This involves defining roles, naming specific resources whose skill-set fit those roles, and determining what the assigned resources' skill levels are. There is a hierarchy of skill, as those who are more experienced will generally require less labor. All of these considerations mean that project teams with different make-ups will require different amounts of effort to fulfill a certain task, and it's the job of Resource Management to determine what that effort is.

While this has its advantages, at the end of the day, Resource Management requires several investments that aren't required when you are simply using the Gantt Chart. Every factor that the manager relies on is just another piece of data that needs to be tracked and analyzed. Or in other words, the more data, the more rigor. Project Managers themselves are resources with useful skills, so an organization must decide if their best application is for tracking information that may otherwise be assumed. Adding technology to the mix is yet another investment in cost, in time and in skills, since technology often requires skills that come from outside of the project team.

In short, everyone wants the benefits of Resource Management, but many are unwilling to buy into the investments necessary to achieve it

Ultimately, as is the case with most business decisions, it becomes a question of ROI. How much is the added information worth? Is this added level of rigor a valuable use of the Project Manager's labor? Are the deadlines important enough for the organization to preclude any room for error?

Once an organization decides the increased credibility in their schedules is worth the investment, a few questions need to be answered:

1. What does our organization want the change to look like?
2. What system would we have to put in place to make that ideal come to fruition?
3. How do we enforce that system?

Brandywine West - Executive Center ▼ 1521 Concord Pike, Suite 301 ▼ **Wilmington, Delaware 19803**

Phone: (302) 477-9711 ▼ **Fax: 302-358-2992**

www.projectassistants.com

This is a process of Vision, Implementation and Adoption (the VIA Methodology).

First, the organization needs to know where it is trying to go. What is the desired state? Answering this should lead to a roadmap to that future state and develop a strategy for how to arrive there.

The next step is to translate this strategy into rules and regulations that can ensure that the proposed changes will occur. These rules must be implemented within the project processes. As a couple of examples, the company may need to develop a metric such that actual effort is compared to estimates or the company may implement a regular tracking process for all data specific to Resource Management.

Finally, the most important and most frequently abandoned step, is to adopt a system of governance to enforce these changes. When projects go awry, effort is misestimated, scopes are missed, and alarms are ringing, what is to be done to reinforce the system? Does the project need to be cancelled? Does tracking get even more rigorous when estimates are still unreliable? And so forth.

In order to bridge the chasm between the reality of an organization's management and its desired state of optimally managing resources, there is a process of change that needs to occur. This involves investments of time, skill, thought, and costs that must be deemed worthy, else the project will not be seen through to the end. If the company decides to increase the rigor in their organization, they need to follow through on an effective methodology—planning, implementing and adopting the essentials for moving toward the end-product.

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