

## Sidebox: Planning gone wild

As Schwartz noted, managers “prefer the illusion of certainty to understanding of risks and realities”. Yet pursuit of this illusion leads to counter productive results and top-heavy, high-ceremony development systems.

While techniques like *Critical Path Analysis* can be useful in identifying dependencies and foreseeing problems, when carried to the extreme it becomes goal-displacement. We find managers obsessing about Microsoft Project plan charts, re-drawing them, changing activities, re-scheduling, adding resource, removing resource, questioning activities and the estimates behind them.

Putting a manager in the corner with MS Project may be a useful way to keep them out of your hair for a while but so is giving them a piece of paper with “P.T.O.” on both sides. Eventually the manager steps away from MS Project and comes to asks you why you estimated this activity at a week, or why the estimate said one day and you took five. People quickly forget the meaning of the word “estimate.”

Frequently estimates relate to how long it will take an individual to do a task. Overrun because you helped Jane with her work and suddenly all the talk of “Teamwork” is forgotten - even if next week Jane repays the favour and you both complete work early.

Project planning can be a way to drive a wedge between people, forcing them to focus on their own tasks rather than the overall goal. Of course, sometimes you don't need to wedge people apart.

Absent architects separate themselves from projects and teams. In some companies, once an individual reaches a certain level it is believed they can wonder in for a few weeks, draw up the blue-prints and move on, perhaps returning every now and then to check the plans are being following.

Since those implementing the plans had no hand in drawing them up their learning curve will be steeper and longer, nor will they be particularly motivated to see the plans come to success. Indeed, as part of their learning process they will probably conduct their own planning process of sorts and may well produce a final product that looks nothing like the blue-print, although, the documentation may say it does.