

## Keep IT Projects on Track With Work Management

Excerpt from *Your Turn, Contract Professional*, May, 2001, by Tom Westerkamp

*How do we change the negative perceptions of late and over-budget projects? We could start by delivering what we promise*

*Successful IT work management requires a formal planning function and accurate work measurement.*

Recent studies show that 75% of IT projects in the U.S. are delivered late and over-budget often as much as 200%. There's plenty of blame to go around--not just among contractors but clients as well.

**Contractors.** Inaccurate estimates of the project work content, resources required, and lack of a well-articulated service agreement are certain to fuel the flames of discontent.

**Clients.** Poor understanding and documentation of business processes, inaccurate perception of the contractor's role and lack of follow-through when it's time for clients to hold their end up inflate both time and cost. A lot of "I said, you said" occurs at the eleventh hour when the clock is running down and everyone knows the project is not going to come in on time.

Delivering what we said is a realistic goal, essential for positive, long-term client relationships. It happens if we: (1) Define the project clearly, in detail, and (2) measure work content accurately.

**Define the project.** Inaccurate perception of the parties going in to a project can be laid at the feet of vague, too-general, incomplete task descriptions. This is an invitation to failure. Almost always the result is bugs that bite you during testing when time is short. "Never time to do it right, but always time to do it over" applies with unerring accuracy.

Clients juggle a lot of projects concurrently. Some have no idea of the total backlog of work. Compounded by vague service agreements, they underestimate and commit to impossible delivery of input to the contractor.

The alert contractor helps the client--questions closely and defines in detail the clients' tasks and delivery dates. One planner per 20-30 staff works well. Such an organizational improvement (for both contractor and customer) can turn problems into more profits and faster, better, cheaper customer service. Training in project planning is absolutely essential. Beware of GUI-heavy project software that uses ten times the disk space without the control of compact, faster tools.

If you measure your project work content casually, you will be inaccurate and inconsistent. Confidence will be low because everyone will be thinking "That can't be right. It's the same work as project so-and-so with half as much time to do it". Measure the work content accurately. There are some excellent, proven engineered work measurement tools available today. First, break the project down into small, separate tasks. If there is a roadblock in one of these small tasks, you will detect and correct it

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before it affects the overall project completion time. Second, apply accurate completion times to each of the small, detailed tasks. Engineered standards, should-take times, and estimates, did-take times, are very different. Engineered standards dramatically improve-- by 20% to 30%--project times, cost and customer service.

In the late 1800's, Frederick Taylor said "the best productivity results when each individual has a definite job to do, in a definite way and a definite time". This work management principle has yet to be applied widely to IT processes. Some say, "We don't have time. You don't have time *not* to. Work management differentiates your service. Using it, your client-contractor team will deliver on the promise.

### Bio Sketch

Tom Westerkamp is a consultant, author, and speaker. He is founder and CEO of Productivity Network, Inc, a productivity improvement consulting firm. He has assisted clients in over fifty productivity improvement training, development and installation consulting programs; speaks at client seminars and public conferences; authored two books and over 80 articles and software programs. He is Contributing Editor for Maintenance Solutions magazine and a contributor to Maynard's Industrial Engineering Handbook, McGraw-Hill. His phone is 800-828-6826, or [tawest@pninc.com](mailto:tawest@pninc.com)

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