PHASES, TASKS & MILESTONES -- WHAT IT ALL MEANS

by Dave Gilman

Lately there has been an awful lot pressure on development to supply information about components, phases, tasks, sub-tasks, milestones, development milestones...

Ever wonder what it's all about, if it's all worth while?

Well the Project Management group thinks it is. Also, our motivation is probably simpler than you suspect.

The injection of DeMarcoism that we all received last year would have us believe that an independent metrics group is needed to accomplish anything. How can we expect to make progress without maintaining data bases of information about past projects, tracking everyone's EQF, computing and corralating the standard deviation of the estimate versus the baseline versus the optimal...

Our goals are simpler.

First we define a component as a logical grouping of some functionality (e.g. doscalls, loader, engine). Then we need a way to compare the progress of components so we define a number of common tasks or phases that are (in theory) applied to all components (e.g. design, pseudo code, integration, function test). Given this simple partitioning we can communicate to upper management that, for example, the loader is being integrated, doscalls is in function test and all other components are in code review. Since these tasks are common it is much easier for upper management to keep track of a project's progress.

Now if we were to follow this simple model we would (and did) rapidly find ourselves in trouble. This model says that everything needs to be completed before anything can be put together (very realistic - one delta the day before system test begins...). In order to inject a bit of reality, we define a number of intermediate milestones referred to as Development Milestones (DM): A DM is a functional (versus phase) description of progress. An example would be, load and execute 32-bit apps. These DMs allow us to monitor that work is being done in the order needed, to make visible, useful progress towards putting a system together.

The last step is to have developers tell us how they're doing. This is the feedback step which is what keeps a schedule dynamic.

The Base V1.3 group has (and will) put up with a number of iterations of this process. I appreciate their patience! The next steps are to apply this methodology for the development of all line items. After that, testing...

So, as I said, the goals are simple. Try and keep track of everything (who's doing what) in a consistent manner, update estimates with actuals (i.e. keep the schedule realistic) and keep weekends as planned activities!

If anyone wants more information about the types of schedule/modeling issues that we're trying to solve, come and speak with me.
ENQUIRING MINDS WANT TO KNOW

Information from Esther Dekker
For those of you who were wondering

The Hawaii trip will take place November 4th - 9th.

We will be leaving from Seattle EARLY Friday morning the 4th, using United and Northwest Orient Airlines. Our return to Seattle is set for midmorning on Wednesday, the 9th.

It is possible to extend your stay if you wish (and have managers permission). We will be staying at the Maui Westin, and they have made available to those extending their stay, the corporate rate of $150.00 (plus tax) per night for three additional nights.

Remember if you are extending your stay or wish to make additional travel arrangements, Azumano Travel has special desk set up to handle your requests. Marty Voruez is the person assigned to our account and she can be reached at (800) 777-2018.
(If you will be extending your stay, please let me know also, as it will affect which airline you will be traveling on. Most people extending their time on Maui, will need to fly on Northwest Orient Airlines. Please let me know as soon as possible, the airlines need a passenger list by October 3rd.)

We will (hopefully) be in Hawaii during the Presidential election. I have absentee ballot applications in my office and if you plan on voting in the election, please stop by and pick one up.

That's it for now folks, look for more juicy details in next weeks edition.

ALOHA!!
THE WAITING GAME THAT MICROSOFT CAN'T LOSE

Its new Operating System/2 is too hot for most desktops to handle—but that will change.

In April, 1987, Microsoft Corp. unveiled the future. At the same time that IBM announced its new line of desktop computers, called Personal System/2, the No. 1 seller of personal-computer software introduced OS/2, a new operating-system software package for IBM PCs and their clones. Combined with powerful new microprocessors, the software promised to make desktop computers nearly as effective as mainframes for complicated computing tasks. At $325 a copy, OS/2 was expected to sell faster than ice in July. Microsoft Chairman William H. Gates III predicted that by late 1989, OS/2 would "dominate" its field.

Sixteen months later, OS/2 still looks like a product of the future. Of the 6.6 million IBM PC-compatible machines sold this year that will be capable of using OS/2, only 10.6% will, according to market researcher Dataquest Inc. The rest will use MS-DOS, Microsoft's original operating system, the software that controls a computer's basic functions. Although Microsoft still sees a bright future for OS/2, it has pushed back the deadline for dominance to 1991. A few skeptics even have begun to suggest that OS/2 may never capture the world of desktop computing. Jeffrey Tarter, publisher of industry newsletter Softletter, argues that MS-DOS is powerful enough already. "The broad market will turn its back on OS/2," he predicts.

LITTLE INCENTIVE. The chances are that Tarter is wrong. For one thing, Microsoft promises to have unending patience until OS/2 catches on. Beyond that, it is busily trying to enhance OS/2's appeal by developing important new products that work with it, such as a package of communications software designed for networks of personal computers. Still, the major software houses developing applications programs to go with OS/2, such as spreadsheet, word processing, or data-base software, are still a year or so from delivering products that fully exploit OS/2's power. Not until these programs are available will customers have a big incentive to buy OS/2.

In the meantime, there is considerable customer resistance. Corporations, which are expected to be the biggest buyers of OS/2, still aren't sold on its benefits. Part of the product's allure is its ability to perform so-called multitasking, a feature that lets a computer handle up to a dozen jobs at once. For instance, an executive could use a spreadsheet and monitor the stock market simultaneously. But "not many human beings can concentrate on that many things at once," says Ruben Collazo, office automation coordinator at Mitsubishi International Corp. in New York. For now, Collazo says, he plans to stick with MS-DOS.

Other factors have muted another selling point for OS/2: its advanced graphics that mimic Apple Computer Inc.'s extremely popular Macintosh. The graphics version of OS/2, called Presentation Manager, won't be out until next month. And Microsoft was several months late in providing outside programmers with development tools to design programs that go with Presentation Manager.

For now, however, OS/2's biggest obstacle may be cost: It's more than twice as expensive as MS-DOS. More important, it requires a speedy microprocessor and lots of internal memory. MS-DOS, written for an old family of microprocessors with little built-in memory, only lets applications programs use 640,000 bytes, or characters. That constrains a program's complexity and sophistication. OS/2 makes available virtually unlimited memory, enabling a computer to run more advanced applications programs.

To do that, however, OS/2 requires a PC with nearly four times the memory needed for MS-DOS. Most computers have one megabyte of memory, chips that store a million characters of information. A computer running OS/2 needs four megabytes. Adding that much memory costs about $2,000 per PC, a major expenditure for a company that has thousands of machines. Moreover, partly because of that huge memory requirement, most manufacturers still sell MS-DOS, not OS/2, with their new machines.

Microsoft and IBM both are convinced
IBM HAS SEEN THE FUTURE— AND IT'S STILL THE FUTURE

Trading in futures is a risky business—in the commodities pits or the computer industry. IBM took a calculated risk that it could bolster its sagging lead in office PCs by selling customers on a promise. The Personal System/2 and its companion software OS/2 would be the cornerstones of the next generation of personal computers.

They'd be as easy to use as an Apple Macintosh, and a lot more useful in networks of PCs, mainframes, and minicomputers.

So far, however, the vision has been difficult to sell. By May, IBM says, it had sold 2 million PS/2s. But the company's market share has been slipping for a year—and in July, IBM's sales of PS/2s were down 15% compared with the same period last year. IBM faces a tough battle against Big Blue's major competitors, including Apple Computer Inc., with its Macintosh; Compaq Computer Corp., with its business-line products; and Digital Equipment Corp., with its MicroVax II, a minicomputer.

IBM can point to its success in the throughput market, where its System/360 computers have long dominated. But the PS/2 is a speculative punt, a calculated risk that it could bolster its customers on a promise. Next year, IBM plans to begin shipping a new version of OS/2 that will allow multitasking, making it easier to move programs back and forth between applications. The new version of OS/2 will also start to be sold separately, with IBM no longer bundling it with hardware.

IBM is banking on the increasing popularity of extremely powerful personal computers, such as the PS/2, the "microchannel architecture," and the "point-and-click" mouse. The microchannel is a technology for attaching far more powerful communications and graphics circuit cards than older PCs could handle. But few microchannel cards have been introduced that make PS/2s do anything very different from what older PCs do.

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