



Managing Scope Creep* and Communicating Changes to Key Stakeholders with Microsoft Office Project 2007

Summary

According to Project Managers, most project failures are a result of a breakdown in communication. They report that key stakeholders who continue to change project parameters or make new change requests after the project start put ultimate success of their projects at risk. In fact, it is not change but the lack of change control that usually causes a project to fail. This paper discusses change control and the use of Microsoft Office Project 2007 to better manage *scope creep* during the implementation of a project. Tips and techniques to communicate the impact the changes have on the triple constraint of cost, time and scope are examined. New ways to create views that immediately show the impact of change are also described.

Introduction

Project Managers list the key reasons for project failure as:

- ✓ Project goals are poorly defined, and outcomes are not identified in specific and measurable terms.
- ✓ Project plans lack sufficient detail, leading to insufficient time allocation and inadequate financial support and/or other resources.
- ✓ Key stakeholders do not “buy-in”- agree to provide adequate support.
- ✓ A risk analysis is not performed.
- ✓ The project scope expands uncontrollably- scope creep. (Lack of Change Control Management)

Clearly defining and communicating scope during the planning stage—before a project begins—and then managing and communicating changes during implementation will greatly improve a project’s chances of success. *In fact In the Chaos in 2005, Standish Group report stated that 56% of projects have cost overruns and 84% of projects have time overruns.*

* In project management, scope creep refers to uncontrolled changes in a project's scope. It usually occurs when the scope of a project is not properly defined, documented, or controlled.

Scope planning includes the process of developing a written scope statement as the basis for future project decisions including the criteria used to determine if the project or phase has been completed successfully. The scope statement forms the basis for an agreement between the project team and the project customer/client by identifying both the project objectives and the major project deliverables. The creation of a scope statement is a key component in getting buy-in from stakeholders.

In life, as in projects, change is inevitable. "Inevitable" may be too strong a word to describe change in a project, but change to some degree is highly likely. It is not necessarily change that makes a project fail, but the lack of good change control process and tools. Controlling processes are managed by the Project Manager who is responsible for leading and managing changes, driving issues, and communicating effectively to all stakeholders during the implementation of a project.

Managing Change

A process to manage project change is essential. Below is a typical four step process that outlines the change management of a successful project:

1. Scope with SMART Goals

Specific

Goals should be specific so that everyone is aware of exactly what is to be achieved.

Measurable

Goals must be measurable so that all stakeholders know when goals have been reached.

Attainable

Goals should be examined to determine if they are attainable during the project process.

Relevant

The Stakeholder(s) and/or the Project Manager must determine which strategic initiative their project will map to and how the project goal is relevant to the organization.

Time Dimensioned

Goals must be documented with a specific time constraint so that the goal can be realized in a reasonable timeframe.

2. Establish Process for Collecting and Approving Changes

Capture/Determine:

SMART description of the change

Impact on scope, schedule, resources, and costs

Budget availability

Impact on the project's goal

Consequences of making or not making the change (Risk Analysis)

3. Approve & Incorporate into a Revised Plan

4. Communicate & Log Changes

The Impact of Change and the Triple Constraint

The goal of any project manager is to deliver the project within scope, on time and within budget. These three factors are known as the triple constraint and managing them well will have a significant effect on quality. The impact on the Triple Constraint can be predicted by using Microsoft Project 2007. Microsoft Office Project 2007 is designed to automatically calculate and recalculate the plan based on new or revised information about scope, time and resources. In turn, it is easy to graphically show the effect of changes and effectively take corrective actions.



Planning

One of the key project management techniques that should be applied for scope management is the construction of a work breakdown structure (WBS) which define the phases, tasks and milestones of a project in a hierachal format. Once the WBS is defined it can be entered into Microsoft Office Project 2007 which will drive both the schedule and the budget.

Developing templates with a predefined WBS representing a typically recurring project will make it easier for planners to build schedules quickly. The WBS is displayed in Microsoft Office Project 2007 in the Gantt chart in an outline format where major pieces (or phases) become summary tasks with detail tasks indented beneath their respective phase or summary task.

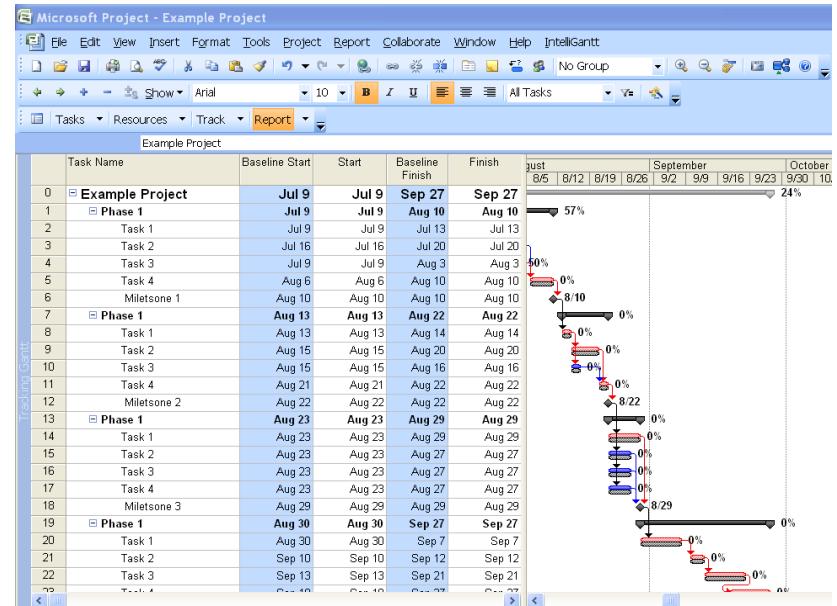
Every change request will affect one or more of the components of the triple constraint. In Microsoft Office Project 2007 this includes: the task name column where the WBS (scope) resides; duration estimates and dependencies (which drive the schedule - time); or cost (resource hours and/or dollars). These original variables can be captured by setting a baseline and variances can therefore be easily calculated and displayed.

To build a plan in Microsoft Office Project 2007 follow these steps:

1. Enter WBS (phases, tasks & milestones) into task name column.
2. Outline (indent/outdent) tasks to reflect WBS structure of the phases, tasks and milestones.

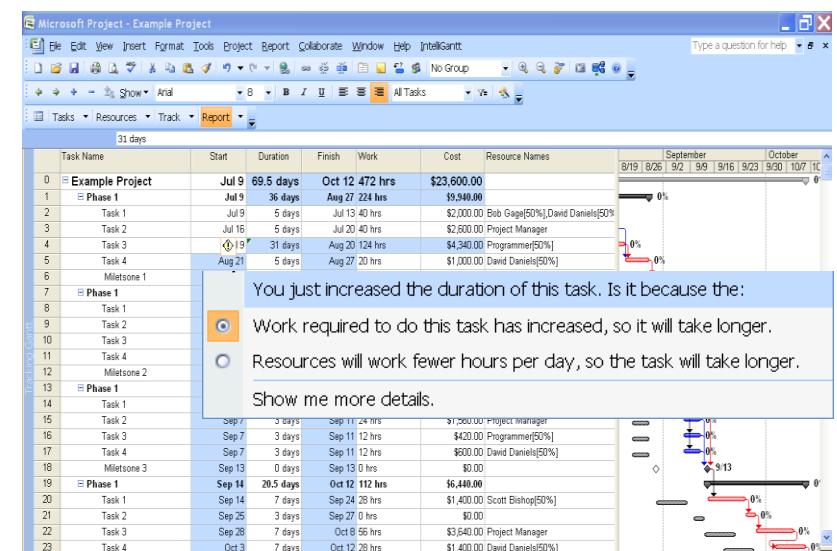
3. Estimate duration (or work for work-based schedules).
4. Set dependencies.
5. Assign resources (and costs if applicable).

Once the plan is prepared and the appropriate feedback is obtained for approval, the baseline should be set to keep track of changes.



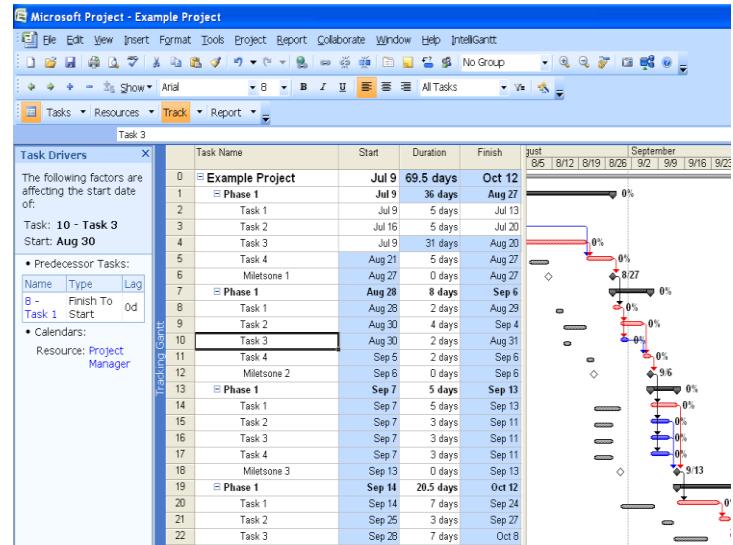
The above view shows the baseline bars in grey and the critical path in red. This view is called the Tracking Gantt View and is located in the View menu. If any changes occur, the gray bars will remain in place while the top bars will adjust to reflect the changes and the new plan. For example, if Task 3 took longer than expected due to customer requests or changes in the scope, it is possible to adjust the duration and instantly view and communicate the changes.

This illustration shows the smart tag, which assists in determining the causes of the change, such as more work required due to increase in scope on that task. Also in this illustration, the impact of the changes is highlighted in blue. All tasks that are impacted by the change are highlighted in the project plan.



It is possible to reverse the most recent series of changes by undoing changes to views, data, and options with Multiple Level Undo's. This functionality allows a project manager to change one of the constraints and to see the impact on the others. If the result is not desirable, it is possible to undo actions or sets of actions. For example, if the scope expands, one adds the phases, tasks, milestones, dependencies, and required resources. One can then continue changing and undoing these items—tinkering with the variable—until the best result is obtained.

As changes are made, it becomes possible to identify factors affecting task schedules. Task drivers show which factors affect the start date of a task. Examples of possible drivers are predecessors, project start date, constraints, and calendar exceptions.



Communicate the Impact of Change

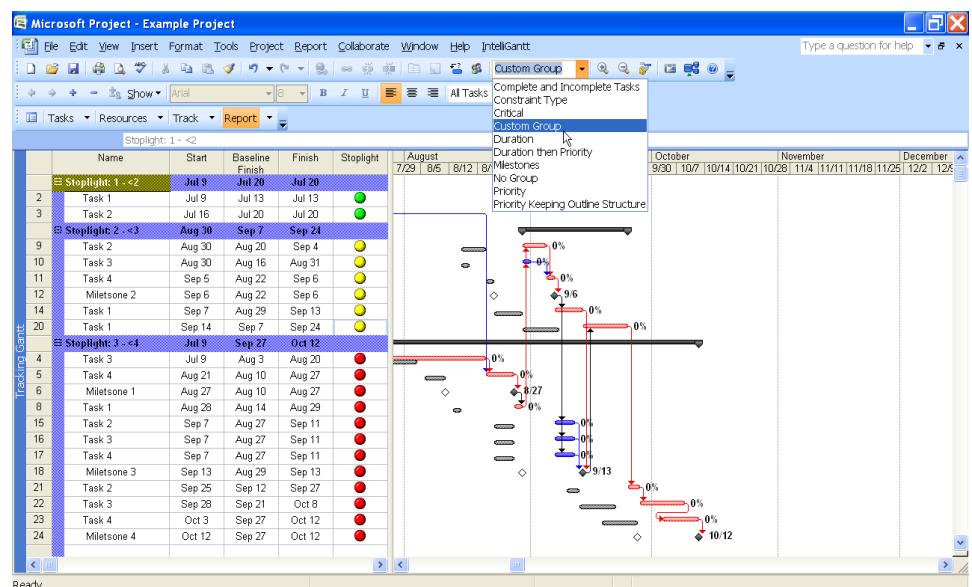
Not all stakeholders need to look at the same information. Project Managers can take advantage of the various filters and group functions to segment the changed data or reorganize the data to present more effective data to different groups such as project team members, project customers, functional managers, senior executives, and external vendors.

For example, if a key stakeholder wants an update weekly but wants to see only task name, start date, finish date, and variance, it is possible to create custom tables.

Once a table has been defined, filters can be applied to further control the data that is communicated to different stakeholders. Filters effectively hide tasks that are not needed and can be applied and cleared at anytime. For example, you can run a filter based on slipped or late tasks to quickly focus on problem areas. If a stakeholder wants to focus in on the changed critical tasks, key milestones, and tasks for a specific resource or date range, a filter can be created to provide only that information.

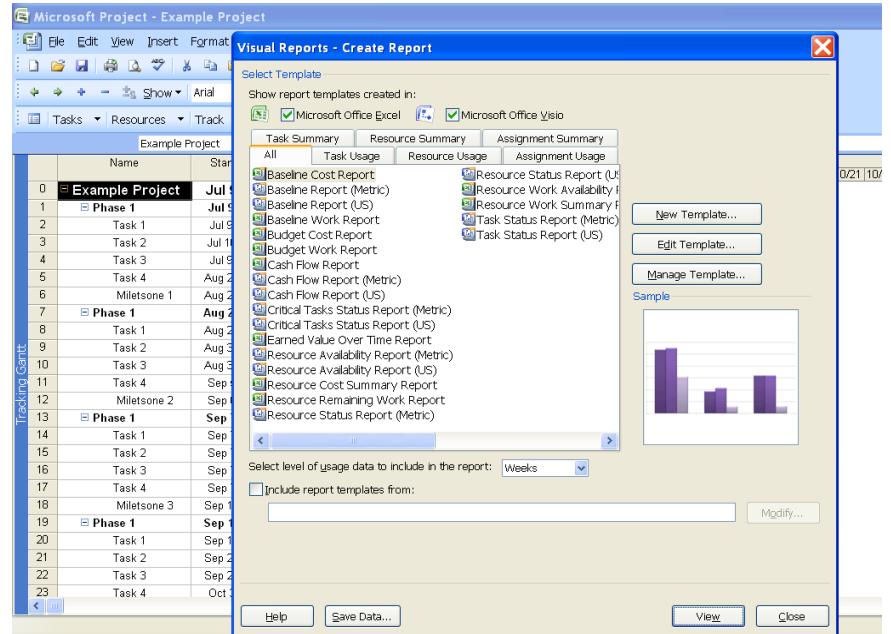
Microsoft Office Project 2007 already comes with a variety of prebuilt filters specifically designed to deal with impact of change and scope creep.

Tasks can also be grouped on any data fields in Microsoft Office Project 2007. By selecting the group button on the



toolbar Microsoft Office Project 2007 will reorganize the tasks accordingly. This will allow project managers to be more effective in analyzing and communicating the impact of change.

There are also many predefined reports within the new Visual Reports feature in Microsoft Project 2007. Many of these reports have been designed to show status and variance to help communicate the impact of change. These reports can be easily generated in Microsoft Office Excel and Microsoft Office Visio.



The cell shading background feature allows project managers to highlight cells in order to convey additional meaning. In addition, visually effective reports with calendar enhancements and 3-D Gantt bars can easily be created to develop even more visually effective reports.

Conclusion

Change is not the reason projects fail, but the lack of change control usually is. Microsoft Office Project 2007 can help manage scope creep during the implementation of a project and to communicate the impact of these changes. Microsoft Office Project 2007 comes equipped with important, easy to use tools to help project managers ensure successful change management. This includes powerful planning and communication tools such as custom views that immediately show the impact of change complete with tables, filters and groups. These tools are designed to be powerful yet easy to use in Microsoft Office Project 2007 and enable project managers become more effective when managing change and scope creep.

About Author:

Keith Wilson is an executive and senior consultant with the Project Management Practice Inc.: www.pmppractice.com