

The Project That Never Ends

Applying IT Asset Management Solutions to the Project Management Process

Project management focuses on the steps necessary to implement a change in an organization. The traditional approach to project management includes:

- Development of a work-breakdown structure
- Analysis of dependencies among activities and events
- Development of a project schedule
- Identification and allocation of resources
- Post-project review

These components eventually become part of an articulated plan that is represented in a PERT (Program Evaluation Review Technique) diagram or a CPM (Critical Path Method) diagram. There are numerous software applications that assist with the structure of project management regardless of the nature of the project. These applications facilitate completing discrete projects on time and on budget.

IT Asset Management: The Project that Never Ends

IT asset management is often “under construction,” with the principles of project management in frequent use by IT asset managers. Improvements designed to deliver savings, reduce risk and improve asset financial performance require the involvement of multiple departments, systems and the gathering of disparate data and processes. However, use of project management principles is only a small portion of the real application that happens daily through IT asset management. The robust repository created by the IT lifecycle management is a project management tool. These rich data sources can be applied in the same way that PERT and CPM software packages are used to control smaller programs. The processes developed for lifecycle management are in fact the project management steps in daily use by IT professionals.

Consider the nature of IT lifecycle management. The “project” of managing an asset begins with the identification and acquisition of the item and continues through receipt, deployment, use and maintenance of the asset. Disposing of the asset is followed by an analysis of the asset type, to be used

as input to the next round of purchases. All of these activities and events can be mapped out on a timeline, along with dependencies, sub-activities, milestones and a critical path. The process and logic are identical to the application of project management techniques, except that the process is far longer and requires an ongoing management process. IT asset management is the project that never ends.

Activities and Dependencies

Identifying the key activities and establishing the dependencies between activities are essential to understanding the project and insuring progress that is efficient and timely. Solutions that offer IT lifecycle management are designed to insure that the activities of the lifecycle process are both followed and institutionalized. For example, the purchasing process has activities to:

- Identify the asset to be acquired
- Compare prices
- Establish a list of approved products
- Request the purchase
- Authorize the request
- Create the purchase order
- Place the order
- Receive the asset
- Accept the asset
- Authorize payment

These activities must occur in a specific order (e.g. the PO request must precede the payment) and certain events trigger other activities (e.g. PO approval triggers PO issuance). In some cases, multiple activities must occur in parallel to create an event (e.g. PO request, pricing comparisons and selection of an approved product all occur before the PO is approved). An IT lifecycle management solution automates these activities and the workflow engine controls the order in which they are carried out, ensuring that all required activities are completed before a dependant activity occurs.

The work-flow engine in a fully functional repository solution mirrors the IT asset lifecycle management “project” and assists managers with

each step of the process. However, instead of mapping activities and events on a chart, the software actually helps manage, track and create the activities and events themselves. It *performs* what charts merely *describe*.

Timelines

The start and end points of a discrete project, such as building a house or installing a server farm, are easily identified. The lifecycle of any *individual* asset also has a clear beginning and end point. As a result, a lifecycle management solution can be used to manage discrete projects. However, the lifecycle of a group of IT assets does not have a discrete end and a lifecycle management solution must be able to manage an evolving project such as controlling the overall project for an organization's IT infrastructure.

The IT manager can be compared to the owner of a construction company with multiple buildings in different phases of construction at the same time. Just as some buildings will be near completion, others may be just starting, and still more may be somewhere in between, the IT manager is responsible for an array of assets that are in various stages of their lifecycle. The IT lifecycle management solution enables the IT manager to make decisions regarding the broad array of deployed assets; such as determining how many devices need to have the OS upgraded, while managing the inflow of new assets and the disposal of others. The IT professional can manage the 'project' at various levels using the same tool and have information available from the organizational level to the discrete device level.

Cost Control

Cost control is essential to successful project management. Project planning tools not only plan the project and calculate a completion date, but also drive costs down through optimization of the timelines and resources. The project planning tool establishes the shortest feasible time to complete the work and then allocates the resources in order to eliminate waste or over-purchasing. Similar functionality in IT asset lifecycle solutions helps IT professionals improve vendor management, avoid over-spending, prevent excess software licensing and insure proper lease management.

By combining the workflow engine with a powerful relational database, the lifecycle management solution enables the IT staff to develop optimizations in time, resources as well as through direct cost avoidance. Examples include preventing

the acquisition of unauthorized or "one-off" devices or software, "harvesting" software licenses that become available as a result of past over-purchasing or organizational restructuring and monitoring the lease status of individual assets or the status of devices leased in the same year. Using the information from a single solution, costs can be managed for any asset at any point in its lifecycle.

Evaluating Against Plan

PERT and CPM diagrams provide the project manager with information as to where the project is against plan. The consequences of a change to the schedule are quickly assessed by checking the availability of resources and what activities are yet to be started or accomplished. Execution against plan for IT assets is the constant surveillance of the status of a particular asset or set of assets. If an asset has been received but not deployed, the consequence to a planned upgrade are easily assessed through the IT lifecycle solution's alerts and reports. One of the greatest benefits of an IT asset lifecycle solution is the breadth of information that feeds both the day to day management and the strategic decision making for the organization. Details of each asset tracked from the point of purchase to disposal as well as summarized information on every category of asset are essential to analysis and modeling. Analysis of the costs and benefits to virtually any change in the IT landscape can be analyzed including what-if scenarios. For example, the following Vista upgrade questions are answered through analysis of lifecycle data:

- What will a conversion to Microsoft Vista entail?
- How many computers will we need to upgrade, dispose of or replace?
- Is our other software compatible?

Decision support is no longer limited to vendor claims or industry case studies. Just as the project management diagrams can be used to predict the effects of changes to the plan, decisions for IT assets can be made on real intelligence. The discipline of post-project analysis and evaluation is an every day activity with an IT asset management solution.

Project Management within IT Asset Management

There is no question that effective project management is critical for any given project to be completed on time and on budget with a high level of

quality. The same philosophy applies to the crucial and ongoing “project” of managing an organization’s IT assets. IT asset management lifecycle solutions are actually comprehensive IT planning tools, supporting all of the project management steps. Whether it is a discrete activity, such as licensing a specific software package, or the ongoing effort of monitoring and insuring the health of the IT infrastructure, the information provided by an IT asset management solution is critical to the “project goal” of utilizing assets to their maximum potential within the organization. Organizations can save time, money and improve the quality of the IT services by understanding the project management nature of IT asset lifecycle management processes and solutions.

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