

P6 Tricks of the Trade

I must admit that using the current version of P3 for the last, oh, 15 years, had made me reluctant to try the new versions released by Primavera (now an Oracle company), especially because of well documented early problems with schedule dates calculation and that the new mix of features offered by the various P3e/c, P5, etc.. did not match the ones offered in P3.

Adding less urgency for a change was the fact that, even today, the construction industry still embraces P3/Suretrak as its main construction scheduling software tools. Having invested its training dollars for the last ten years into developing in-house abilities, it is a difficult step for contractors to start the process anew. In addition, P3 has a well established scheduling consultant corps ready to assist in the development of various schedules as needed to meet most clients' schedule specifications (still written around P3 as the preferred tool). Thus, a dilemma is created.

This does not mean large construction program managers are not using P5 or P6 these days. These applications' ability to manage and update large schedules are infinitely superior to P3's especially with their built-in web functionality. It is not uncommon nowadays to find school districts, manufacturing and refinery clients well established in such uses and directly benefiting from their ability to provide access into the database via the web, thus allowing users from various projects' locations to access and update the schedule data.

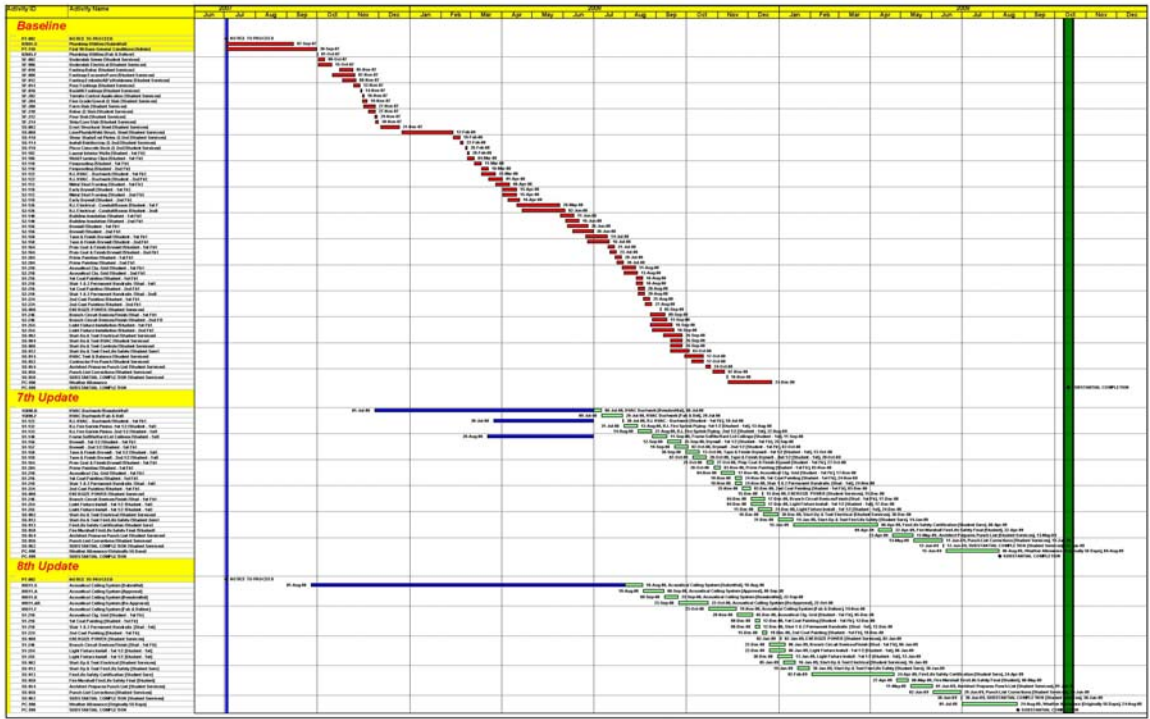
Furthermore, with computer technologies evolving towards 32-bit and 64-bit machines, the old 16-bit applications, P3 among them, will soon become so obsolete that it will force the rest of the industry to finally take that step forward and begin the steep learning curve needed to learn to use these new softwares.

I started my own personal climb in late 2007... I admit the early, and numerous, frustrations that resulted from that process caused many relapses back to the comfortable confines of P3, but I ended up finding many valuable aspects to P6 that cannot be as easily recreated in P3. For the purpose of this article, I call them P6 tricks.

Most of these tricks revolve around the ability to open several updates of the schedule along with the baseline at the same time.

Trick 1 – Track your project's critical path (s)

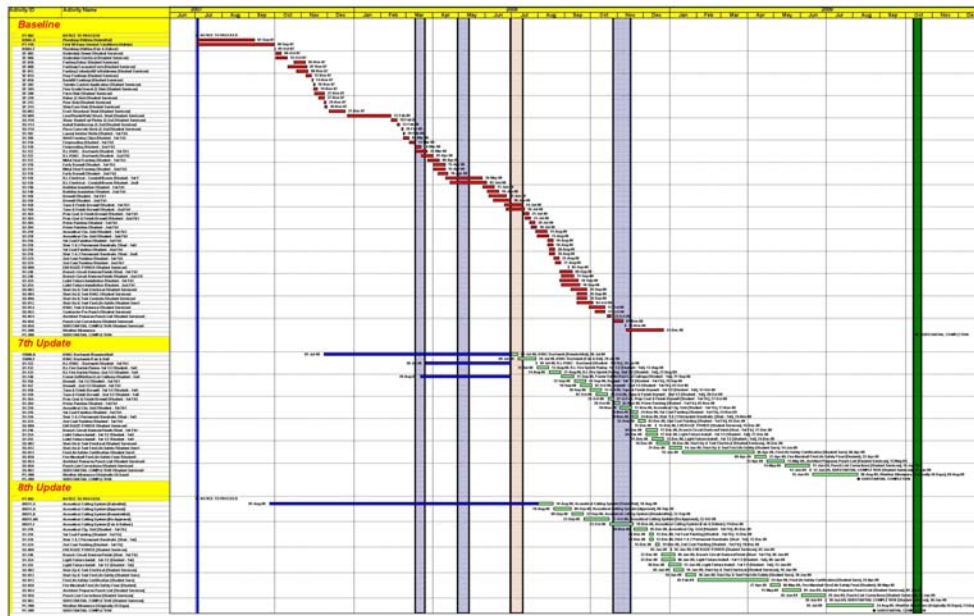
For instance, should you want to look at the critical path of your projects as it evolves, define a new global code to track the critical path activities in the baseline and in each update (as the project evolves the critical path number changes and needs coding to track) and when you want to see what the critical path has done over several updates and compare it to the baseline, you filter activities based that code and you have your comparison right in front of you. This is different from running an update's critical path with targets because if the update's critical path changes from the baseline, the target activities will not represent the baseline's critical path... This trick is particularly useful to immediately detect if your **future** critical path has changed, especially when there are no change orders affecting it.



The chart above shows a project with healthy amount of float, which gets used up over the updates, but with the green bar as part of the layout, this conveys to the targeted audience that despite large delays due to submittals, the project remains on schedule.

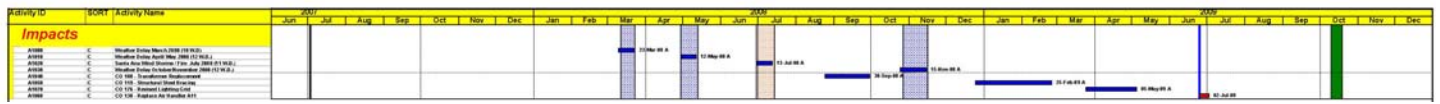
Trick 2 – Track your project’s critical event (s) : Inclement Weather / Wind-related delays, Completion etc.

Memory is fickle and although inclement weather in the form of precipitations, wind delays, etc are well dealt nowadays in well-written owners’ specifications, record-keeping allows a better understanding of the project progress, or lack thereof, hence the following chart with blue showing inclement weather, orange showing wind affecting your project and green the original completion date. These could be done in previous versions as well, but here, one layout can be used when dealing with such events throughout the life of the project...

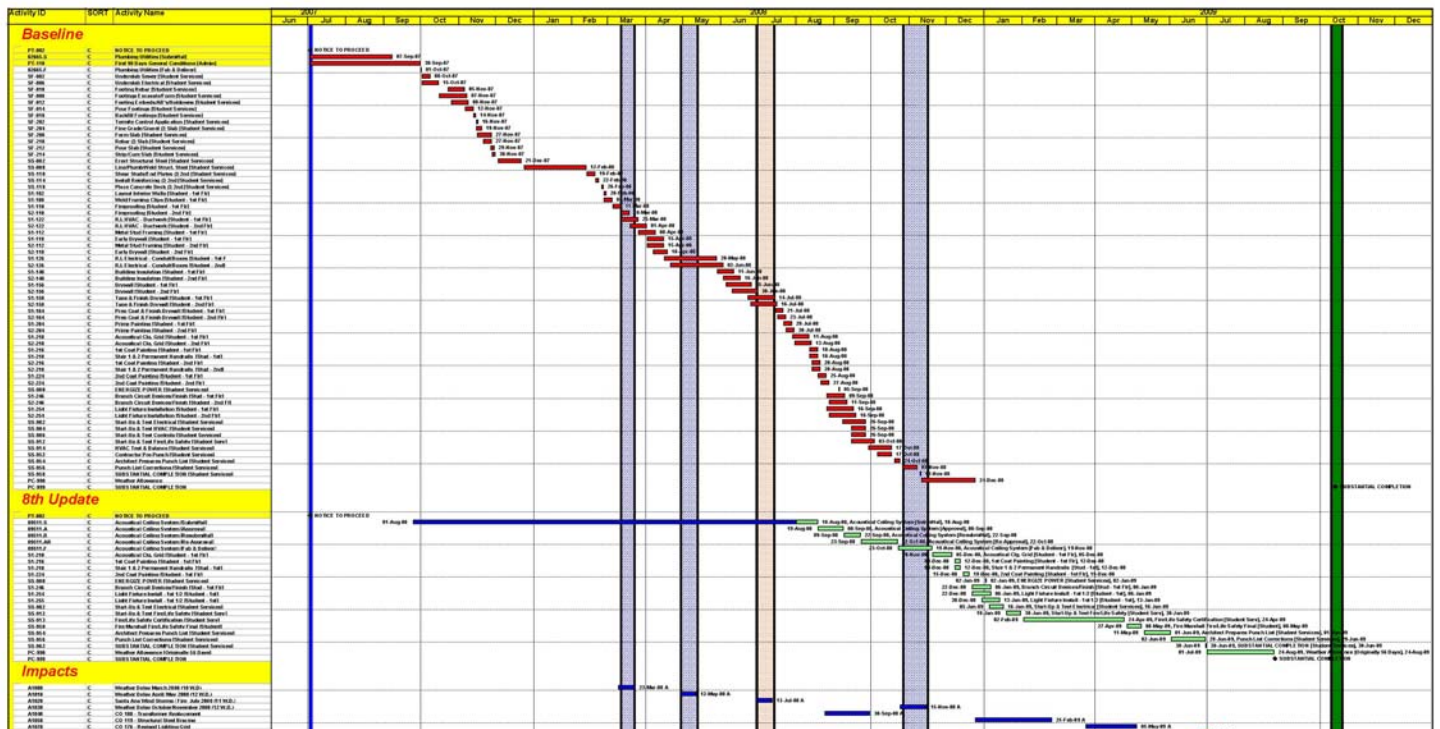


Trick 3 – Track change orders granting delays throughout the life of the project

Depending on the level of competence of your project scheduler, he may be prudently tracking all the agreed upon change orders and impacts to the project on a contemporaneous basis, leading to something like this:



P6 facilitates inclusion of such info into a global analysis with the baseline, the latest update and all the impacts together in one document shown below:



What this chart is, in an early draft version of course, is a quick “as-planned vs as-built” analysis of the project with all the pieces on the puzzle in one document. It most likely will need more work, but this highlights P6 ability to facilitate the analysis by pulling and processing data from the various iterations of the same schedule along with other files created along the way to document the life of the project. And it integrates these files into the analysis easily and seamlessly, and in the end, that is one of the key reasons I am using P6 more and more...

That's probably enough damage for one session...

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