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The State of CPM Schedules

Your cover story, Critics Can't Find the Logic in Many of Today's CPM Schedules, paints a disheartening picture of the current state of CPM schedules (ENR 5/26 p. 30). It's only 46 years since Morgan Walker and I first worked out CPM for duPont and yet project people are still falling into some of the same scheduling traps warned against during CPM's childhood. The use of features like "leads and lags," "multiple calendars" and "assigned constraints" do provide some levels of schedule flexibility. In practice, their use too often leads to inconsistent schedules and misleading views of project condition.

In the early days of CPM, computing capability was at a premium. Rooting out inconsistencies in scheduling data had to be left completely to the planner. In practice, this meant deliberately limiting the use of the "flexibility" features. Today, the desktop computer I'm using to compose this letter has far more capability than the UNIVAC we used for our first CPM calculations. Thus, there is no reason why the computer cannot be programmed to tell me that my scheduling input is inconsistent and why.

Your article seems to imply that Primavera's software is missing an essential data "debugging" feature. Since that software also appears to be an effective monopoly at this time, critics might look to investing in a stand-alone data "debugging" program to test Primavera input data files. The existence of such a program just might convince Primavera to produce their own. Something should be done to elevate the general professional character of today's project schedules.

JAMES E. KELLEY JR.
Elkins Park, Pa.

I have personally been involved with CPM scheduling since the late 1960s and James O'Brien and his activity on arrow technique (ADM) is a good example of someone still holding on to the Model-T technology. It's time to change.

We were arguing with him and his firm as far back as the early 1970's that the days of circles and arrows were passe. I, too, feel that the science of scheduling has changed immensely and the younger generation is leading toward developing instruction sheets rather than project measuring tools. Most users do not understand the forward and backward pass to establish early and late dates.

Times have changed, however, and veteran consultants also need to change. If we cannot accept the new generation of fancy colored schedules and the software that produces them, we need to step aside. The Project Management Institute (PMI) needs to "update" its thinking to the 21st Century.

DAVID F. ARNOLD
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Your recent cover story focused attention on the need to promote excellence in scheduling, the mission of the new PMI College of Scheduling. Our members and directors are both candid and passionate and the views expressed at the restaurant for your story were our individual views and not those of the college. It will not promote any particular diagramming technique or software design. It will promote better use of the available tools by working with practitioners, software developers, top management, government and academia. Better planning, scheduling and execution of our projects is too important to not get actively involved in trying to improve things. We're holding our first international seminar in Montreal next April 25-27 and we'd like everyone interested in better scheduling to be there.

STUART OCKMAN
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In response to your editorial about critical path scheduling, the real issue here is one of professionalism, morality and ethics. If CPM scheduling is now to be