
Meglan, Meglan & Company, Limited

CONSTRUCTION

Claims Topics

Schedules: Why Use Activity 'Numbers' When You Can Use Words?

Since the late 1950s and early 1960s, construction experts and construction schedulers have been creating critical path method (CPM) schedules with *numbered activities or nodes* and an accompanying *activity description* for each number.

The practice began as a matter of absolute necessity and practicality because the computer of the '50s and '60s (before Sputnik and U.S. space program advancements in microprocessors) couldn't deal with letters (alpha characters), just numbers (numeric characters), or so we were told. That's not quite true. The old computers were alpha-numeric "smart." They just weren't very fast in handling alpha characters when it came to sorting and selecting. Consequently, everything was assigned a number rather than a series of letters (words or data).

The beginning activity in a construction schedule was identified as 1 or 100 or 1000, and it was understood that such a number designated the first or *starting* activity. In the 1980s, at the beginning of the microprocessor revolution, some ingenious scheduler started naming the first activity "Start" instead of 1, 100, or 1000. Obviously, there was no need for an activity

description. The computer understood it; the scheduler understood it; and, more importantly, so did *everyone* else.

That same scheduler then went on with a similar creative genius streak and named the activity for Excavate Building as "Excav Bldg." Pour Footers was named "Pour Ftrs." Place Walls was named "Place Wls," and so on. But there was not one single numbered activity in the entire CPM schedule. And, because they weren't necessary, there were no activity descriptions printed on the schedule. Instead, the number became a word, an abbreviation, or two words or abbreviations that clearly stated each activity.

Meglan, Meglan & Company, Limited, has done some fairly complex schedules that used the word or abbreviation systems instead of numbers — and they worked. They were easily understood by superintendents, foremen, carpenters, ironworkers, laborers, etc., which eliminated expensive time spent in translation.

If your company uses modified bar charts schedules and is still *numbering* the bars on the chart, try using words. You'll be amazed how fast and easy a sched-

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ule is read and understood when its activities are identified with words instead of numbers. There are some excellent computer software programs on the market today that can help you with these scheduling tasks.

As a final suggestion, if the scheduling activity is Pour Floor Number 1, try using “Pour Flr #1” for an activity “number.” An activity description that follows a

number like that is redundant. If there are three buildings on the project, identified as Buildings A, B, and C, then name the scheduling activity of Pour Floor Number 1 of A Building as “Pour Flr #1A” or “Pour Flr #A1” (your choice).

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