

In addition to the aforementioned examples, Dave presented several more instances that made his seminar truly advanced, lifting our chapter's advanced topic program to new heights.

A million thanks to you, Dave, for taking the time to compile and present your findings of your professional expertise. The many examples from your own practice and your elucidating answers to the questions from the audience made your presentation a delight to witness. Come again, soon.

George D. Meier, Ph.D., PMP

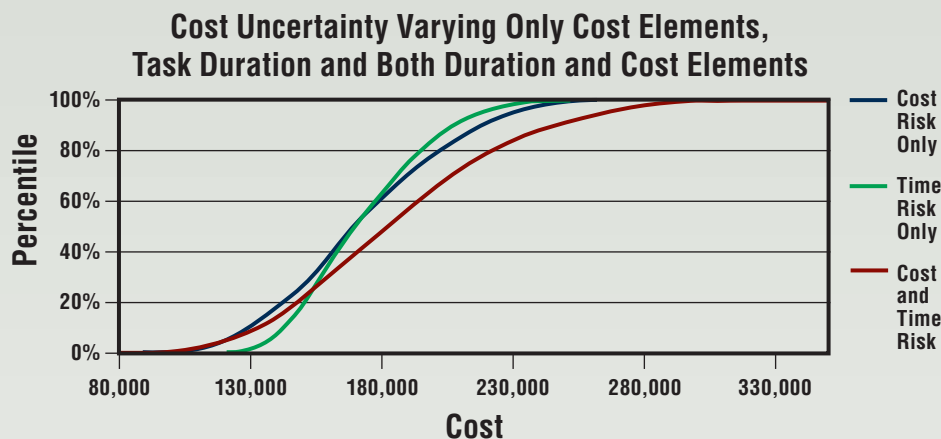


Figure 8: Varying both cost and time elements in the risk analysis provides a more accurate picture of cost risk. For instance, the 80 percent likely project cost is \$196K for schedule risk analyzed alone, \$202K for cost risk analyzed alone, and \$224K for the combined analysis of schedule and cost risk.

Managing Straws

By Craig D. Wilson, PMP

Long before the proverbial last straw broke the camel's back, that poor camel had ceased being effective. And I'll bet that, given the heavy load, he may have originally been one of the top performers in the caravan. But the reward for a job well done is often more work; so, overburdened and stumbling, he not only ceases being the top performer he once was, but impacts the performance of the whole caravan as he trudges on still trying to perform up to expectations.

When managing a portfolio of projects, you are faced with determining how to spread the project load across your team. You must take into consideration not only technical and soft skills, but "strength of back." You know that there are some members of your team upon whom you can depend: the 20 percent who seem to perform 80 percent of the work. But, unless you are incredibly fortunate, you will also have team members who are average and probably some less-than-average performers.

Time and time again, I've seen top performers stretched to the breaking point as they are assigned to most, if not all, of the complex and difficult projects. On top of this, they are also the ones most likely to be called in to rescue weaker members of the team on their projects or called in the wee hours of the morning to address production problems.

Now the interesting thing about top performers is that they often don't complain or push back on the assignments. They

continue to push on and, being top performers, they may still out-perform other members of the team.

The question is, are they continuing to perform to the best of their abilities? More importantly, is the overall team performance the best that it could be? By the way, you often don't know that the non-complaining top performers are unhappy until the day they drop their resignation letter on your desk. Then it's YOUR back that is broken as you try to re-build the team! I've seen managers lose their jobs because once the top performer left the team, the manager's inability to effectively manage the rest of the team was exposed for all to see.

There are several factors that you may wish to consider when planning resource assignments as part of the project portfolio planning effort.

- The average worker has no more than about 1,800 hours a year of assignable time. The remainder is taken up with holidays, sick leave, vacations, and training. When you add general administrative tasks like staff and company meetings, the actual time spent working is almost certainly far less. This works out to no more than 16 to 18 working days per month on average. However, vacations and training are not "averaged," and you will have months, especially in the summer and at the end of the year, where your work force may be significantly reduced.
- Factor in the time for any staff member who will be involved in supporting production issues. This should be based upon a percentage of their availability and may be different for team members with different skill sets. Remember that as new systems are added to your production set, more support time will be required.
- When assigning top performers, assign part of their time to mentoring and coaching team members on other projects. Make this a proactive effort rather than expecting them to fix problems on other projects after they have occurred.

Dealing with staff assignments is only part of project portfolio management. Other activities include strategic planning, project selection, budgeting, and portfolio reporting and tracking. However, dealing with human resource issues is constant and ongoing. Of all the portfolio management activities, this will take the most of your management time.

Craig D. Wilson, PMP is an IT management consultant with extensive PMO and project portfolio management experience. Craig can be reached at craigdwilson@matincor.com or (949) 388-3559. Further information, including a basic staff planning model, is available at www.matincor.com.