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WHAT IS NEW IN MICROSOFT PROJECT 2010?

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Microsoft has announced the latest release of its project scheduling software, MS Project. The software is expected to be on the market with all the Office 2010 package on the month of May. The Beta version is available at the Microsoft Website and is free access until November 2010¹ in Spanish, English, French, German, Chinese, Japanese, and Russian. Office 2010 is not required for installing the software, in fact the beta version works pretty well even with Office 2003.

According to Mr. Cris Capossela, Business Senior VP at Microsoft, this is the best release of Project in 10 years. Mr. Capossela bases his opinión on the new functions for easier usage, the integration with portfolio management and with software such as Sharepoint².

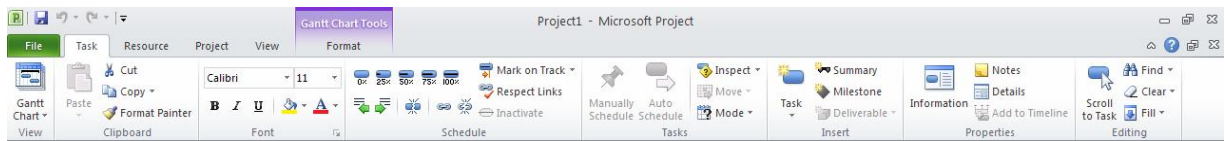
Although we cannot deny that MS Project is not an easy tool for managing large projects, it is our daily usage tool for planning and scheduling as it is for thousands of users in the world. So we received with great expectation the announcement of a new released. We expected to find improvements to some problems that are maintained in MS Project and also new tools. In the following lines we share what we found as a novelty in Project Professional 2010:

Changes in the menu

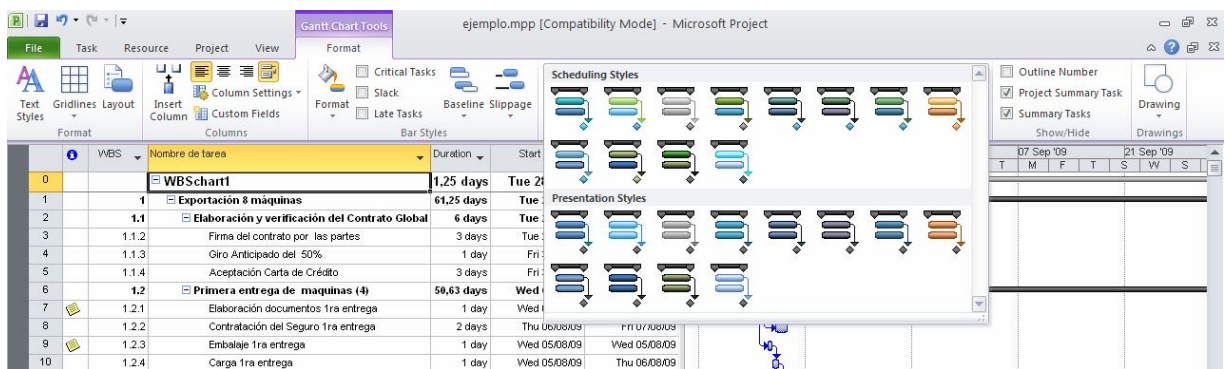
The first change to notice is the new menu similar to those in all MS Office 2007, this is ribbon menu. Although this menu has grouped functions as a means to ease users work, it really takes time to get familiar with the new placement of commands. Those planning on switch from Project 2007 to Project 2010 should take some low-speed time to find all functions in their new place. Many commands are not visible per default and should be added from the options menu.

¹ Microsoft Project Website <http://www.microsoft.com/project/2010/en/us/default.aspx>

² MPUG Website
<http://www.mpug.com/News/Pages/TheProject2010InterviewwithChrisCapossela.aspx>



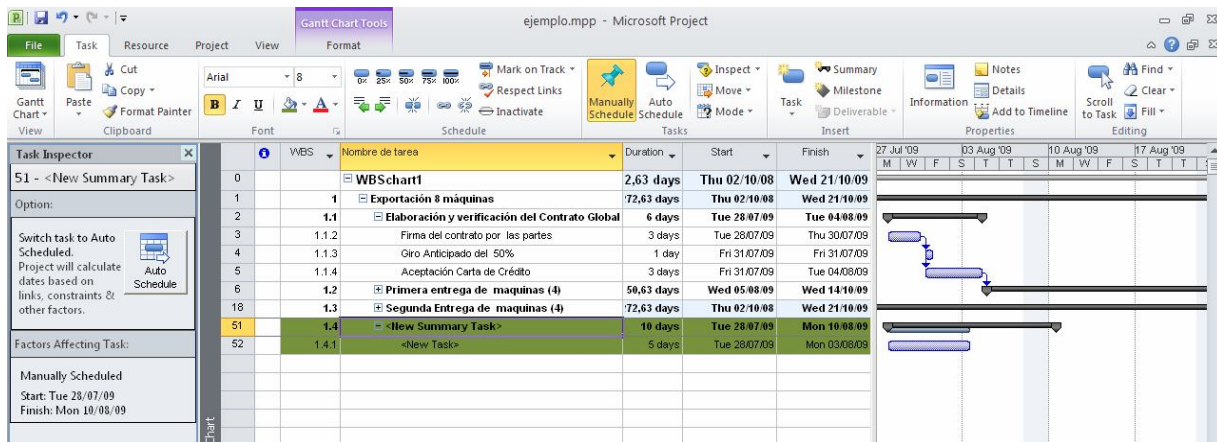
Once frustration of not finding what you need is overcome, it is clear that the menu is much friendlier. We specially highlight the new format menu which is much more dynamic than those in the previous releases and really helps when giving format to the Gantt Chart. It is especially useful for showing the different baselines of the project and also to represent slacks.



Planning at Summary Tasks level

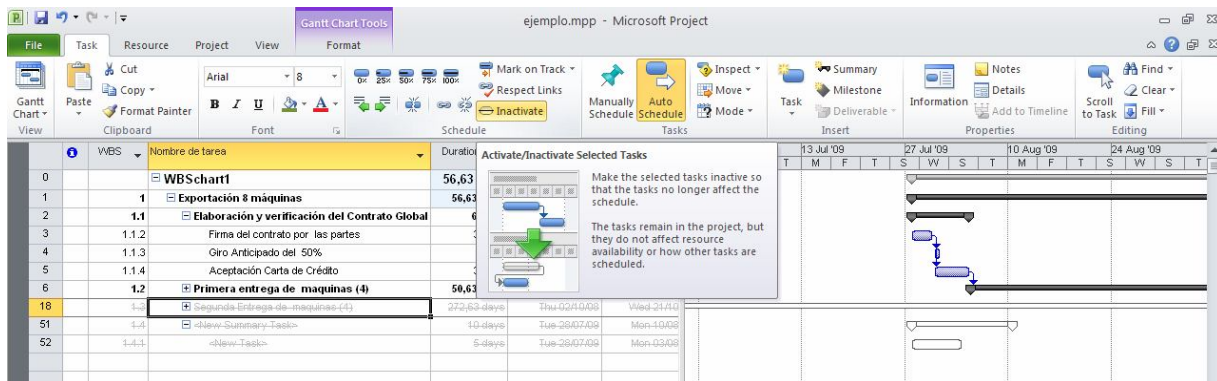
While planning on a rolling-wave mode, it is common to find the need to assign duration to the summary task until the detailed tasks planning is approved. Previous releases of MS Project always scheduled the summary task in an automatic mode, making impossible to make this progressive analysis of durations. MS Project 2010 allows choosing between manually scheduled or auto scheduled for summary tasks. If a summary task is manually scheduled, its duration may be different from the value resulting from the duration of its detailed tasks. For using this option the “task mode” column should be inserted.

The task Inspector allows understanding the causes for a task date and all factors affecting each task.



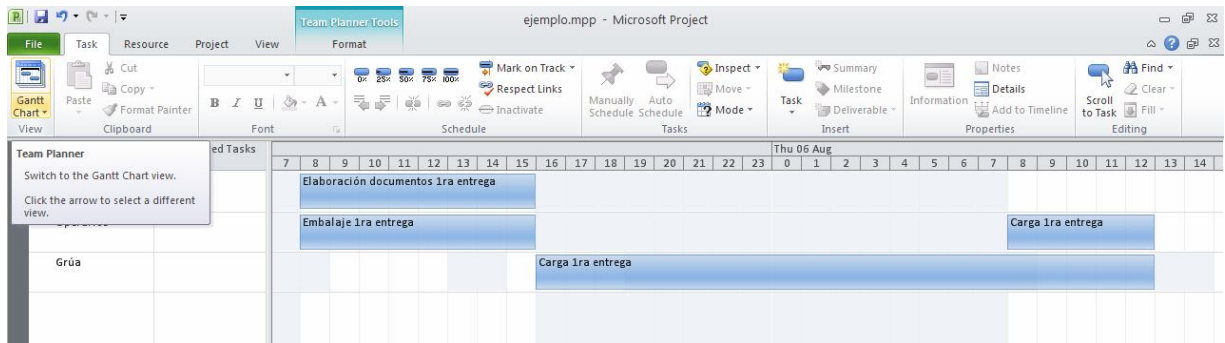
Inactivate Tasks

It is common that while the project moves forward, the execution of some tasks is not certain. In the previous Project releases it was required to delete these tasks to avoid affecting the calculations of durations and critical path. MS Project 2010 offers a new tool that allows to inactivate tasks, this means that the tasks can be kept in the project with their predecessors and successors and all properties but do not affect in any way the scheduling of the project. If the task is again included in the project it may be activated and becomes again part of the schedule. For inactivating a task the user should go Task Information and select “Inactivate”



Resource Planning

MS Project 2010 offers a new view called “Team planner” in which all resources assignments are shown on a baseline. This view is very useful for communication assignments to the team or for resource levelling analysis.



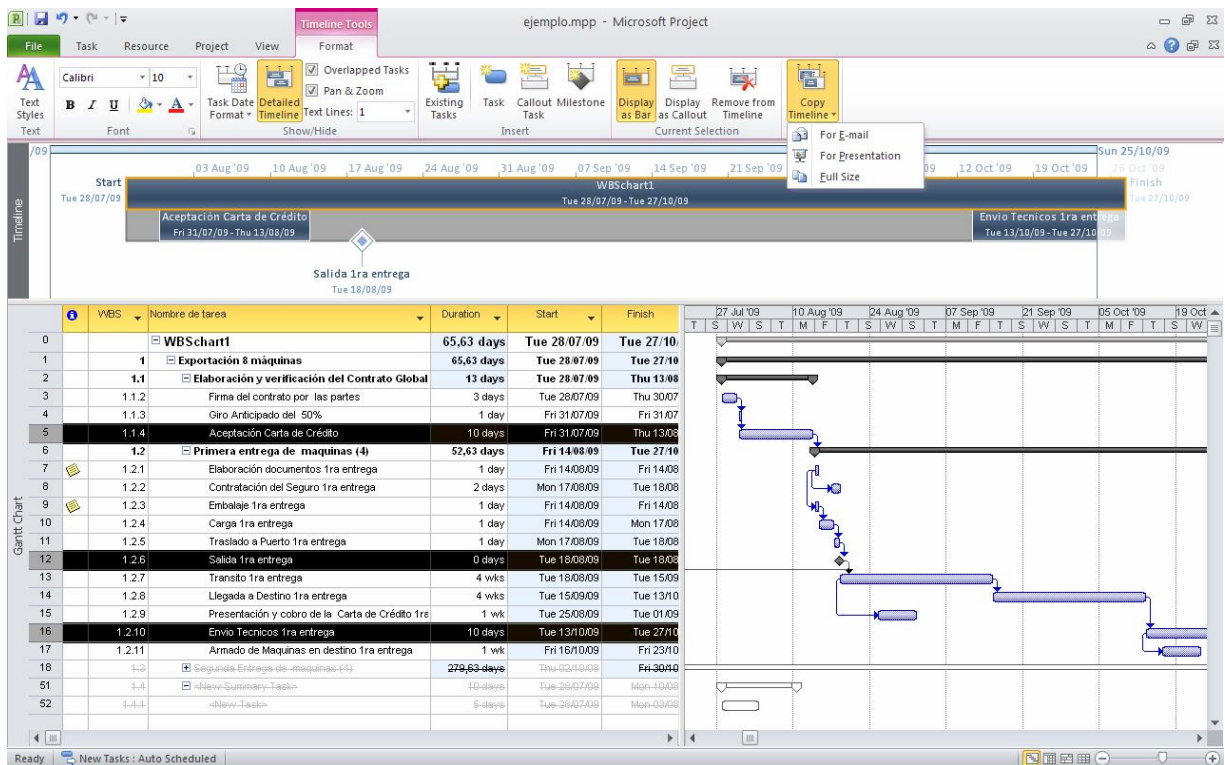
Easily copying the WBS list from a MS Word document

It is very common that the Work Breakdown structure with the tasks of the project is defined first in less specific software such as Word and then the WBS list is used for Project. Previous versions allowed copy and paste of the tasks list but Project did not maintain the WBS levels defined in word with tabulations. MS Project allows preparing a WBS in word and then copying it to Project and the WBS levels structure is maintained.

Timeline for showing the desired information

MS Project 2010 offers a new tool called the Timeline in which the tasks that need to be communicated may be shown. It is not required to maintain the WBS structure for showing the tasks, any task of milestone can be added to the timeline. This function results very useful for efficient project communication by allowing to easily creating a personalized summary of the project for each specific stakeholder. The timeline can be copied to an email, a PowerPoint presentation or to a word document.

This new function is what we find more interesting on MS Project 2010.



What is missing in MS Project 2010?

As frequent users and also trainers in MS Project we always expect improvements in areas that in our criteria make difficult the use of Project for both new users and experts that forget details for a moment.

We would like to find that the “options” from the calendar menu to be calculated automatically based on the data of the standard calendar. It is surprising that after setting the project calendar with some amount of working hours the software does not read this data and maintains independent values on the field “hours per day”. A different amount of “hours per day” might be included for each new schedule which will ease the usage of more schedules in the same project.

Our conclusions on MS Project 2010

The software presents valuable improvements; we specially highlight the format menu that easily gives format to the Gant Chart, the inactivation of tasks, and the timeline report. The functioning logic does not change (it does not improves or get worst) and a great amount of patient is required to learn the new placement of all commands in the ribbon menu. But there is no doubt Microsoft has made a great effort to improve the software that already presented important improvement in the 2007 release. So more than everything we celebrate the importance that Microsoft gives to the continuous development of this tool that result essential for the Project Management Profession.

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Ms. **Ana Maria Rodriguez** is founder and manager of ERA Project Management, offering consulting services to the Engineering and Construction Industry in Rosario, Argentina, and is an adjunct professor of project management at the Universidad Nacional de Rosario. Colombian by birth, Ms. Rodriguez graduated with a Civil Engineering Degree from Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Bogota and from the University of Texas at Austin, USA with a Masters Degree in Construction Engineering and Project Management (MSE). Ms Rodriguez has implemented Project Management best practices and managed projects both in the government sector and in the engineering and construction private sector. Ms. Rodriguez is part of the Board of Directors of PMI Buenos Aires Argentina Chapter (PMIBA) and leads the development of PMI in Rosario. Additional information about Ms. Rodriguez can be found at www.pmforum.org/pm_forum_team. Ms. Rodriguez welcomes contact at arodriguezdev@gmail.com also at www.erapm.com.ar

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Santiago Sereno is an Electronic Engineer from the Universidad Nacional de Rosario. Scheduler at ERA Project Management. Mr. Sereno has been in charge of planning and control in important projects for the petrochemical, steel, paper and automobile industries always using MS Project. He has been also part of the scheduling of important building construction projects. Santiago has offered in-company training on the software at important companies. Mr. Sereno welcomes contact at santiago.sereno@erapm.com.ar