Triple Constraint of Project Management

PJM530 - Project Schedule & Cost Control

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Triple Constraint basically demonstrates the key attributes that must be handled effectively for successful completion and closure of any project. The key attributes of the triple constraint are,

* Scope
* Time
* Cost

The project manager must be fully cognizant of the fact that scope, time and cost are fully inter-related and that the triple constraint dictates any adjustment to any of those items must affect the other. In many cases, a project manager may be somewhat aloof about adding scope to a project or accepting a budget cut without taking the effort to determine what the consequences of that change will be. Denial of the potential repercussions of adjustments to the scope, time or cost of a project is only going to lead to issues down the road and may also cause the project to fail.

**Time** - This refers to the actual time required to produce a deliverable. Which in this case, would be the end result of the project. Naturally, the amount of time required to produce the deliverable will be directly related to the amount of requirements that are part of the end result (scope) along with the amount of resources allocated to the project (cost).

**Cost** - This is the estimation of the amount of money that will be required to complete the project. Cost itself encompasses various things, such as: resources, labor rates for contractors, risk estimates, bills of materials, et cetera. All aspects of the project that have a monetary component are made part of the overall cost structure.

**Scope** - These are the functional elements that, when completed, make up the end deliverable for the project. The scope itself is generally identified up front so as to give the project the best chance of success. Note that the common success measure for the scope aspect of a project is its inherent quality upon delivery.

Usually, triple constraint will be represented as a triangle with scope, time and cost on the three sides. The major take-away from the Triple Constraint, being that it is a triangle, is that one cannot adjust or alter one side of it without in effect, altering the other sides. So for example, if there is a request for a scope change mid-way through the execution of the project, the other two attributes (cost and time) will be affected in some manner. How much or how little is dictated by the nature and complexity of the scope change. As an added example, if the schedule appears to be tight and the project manager determines that the scoped requirements cannot be accomplished within the allotted time, both cost and time are affected.

A project manager must make sure that they stay on top of all the key attributes of the triple constraint will make the likelihood of project success that much higher. So being cognizant of any fluctuations to the key attributes, whether they be unexpected or requested. Never assume that other attributes can be left unchanged if one attribute is known to be changing or fluctuating.

The triple constraint is one of the most well-known and well-respected mechanisms for signifying the interaction of the key attributes of a project. By being fully aware of its function and implications is an important aspect of the project manager’s role and responsibility. The triple constraint is meant to be a asset to the project manager’s arsenal and should not be viewed as a hindrance.