

Pitchmark Ltd

Estimating rules

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Amendment History

Version	Author	Date	Description of changes
1/00	P Crompton	01-Oct-1996	First issue

1. INTRODUCTION

Estimating the amount of time tasks will take on a project is an important task. To help make the process a more accurate one the following rules may help...

2. ESTIMATION RULES

2.1 Estimators are not parrots

Manager “How long do you think that’s going to take? Two weeks?”

You “Yes - I suppose so - two weeks”

Moral There might be a ‘right’ answer, but it must not get in the way of the estimating.

2.2 Estimating is different from bargaining or negotiating

Manager “What involved in the reporting phase?”

You “Four print programs at one week each...”

Manager “It doesn’t take that long to write a straight forward print program !!”

You “O - well - lets say four days each...”

Moral Justify your estimate.

2.3 Estimating is different from dividing the time between now (Today) and then (when the project must be completed) into phases.

Manager “We’ve got to complete this new project by march.
How much effort is involved?”

You “It’ll take three months to do the analysis and then ...”

Moral Dates are often fix in peoples minds by your initial view. Make sure its right!

2.4 If one phase of a project slips, so will all the subsequent phases.

Manager “The analysis phase has slipped by two weeks.
Do you think we’ll catch up during the design?”

You “Well...We might be able to catch up”

Moral Ignore this rule if you have a proven track record of pulling rabbits out of hats at the last minute.

2.5 An estimate is not a wildly optimistic quote.

- Manager “We need this system to be operational in three months time”
- You “I haven’t read the spec yet, but we should be able to get it sorted by then.
- Moral “You get a realistic estimate by breaking the tasks down into small constituent parts. Each part should be about five days at the most, for all tasks to be completed over the next two to three months. Each of these small tasks should be estimated individually and the values for each added together. Remember there is no such thing as a man month.

2.6 An estimate should always be given in terms of effort, NOT elapsed time.

- Manager “What’s involved?”
- You “We’ve got to do x, y, and z, it’ll take about 4 weeks”.
- Moral Without taking into account other commitments you cannot give elapsed time estimates. Remember your estimates will be turned into firm delivery dates by the manager. Give your estimate in effort, and let the manager workout the elapsed time.

2.7 Most people are consistently pessimistic or optimistic in their estimates.

- Manager “How long is that going to take?”
- You “I’ll have it finish by Friday.”
- Manager (Thinks) “I’d better add a week onto that”.
- Moral If you don’t give feedback to an estimator their estimates will never get any better.

2.8 Estimates are the product of careful thought, and not the numbers produced from thin air to make the manager go away.

- Manager “What do you think?”
- You “I’m a bit tied up at the moment ...”
- Manager “I just need a ball park figure ...”
- You “O .. say 2 months”
- Moral This type of estimate have the nasty habit of being pared down and then inserted into a fixed price contract. The results are inevitable.

2.9 *It is impossible to deliver intangible products*

Manager “How long will it take to understand the spec?”

You “ May be I can read it at the end of the week...”

Moral Activities must have a physical deliverable. A better request from the manager might have been “How long will it take to produce an entity model from the spec.

Estimates produced jointly by the project manager and people actively working on the project, using the above rules, are true estimates.

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