You can finally get the answers as to why technical projects are prone to delays compared to other management methods.

"Men and months are interchangeable commodities only when a task can be partitioned among many workers with no communication among them"
-Frederick P. Brooks

This quote is true regardless of if you are digging a foundation; it is not true regarding systems programs.

In this newsletter, I'd like to focus on 4 main aspects of "The Mythical Man Month" and how it relates directly to the GIS industry, but before I do, I'd like to give you a glimpse into a day in the life of a GIS specialist so you can better understand this concept!

As a GIS specialist, I focus on completing special data-sharing requests within legal parameters in ArcGIS to rapidly facilitate its crucial uses by end users.

I also resolve geospatial data problems and streamline GIS workflows with co-workers to enhance efficiency and ensure total team success. Manipulate geospatial data in very specific ways to derive the final dataset that contains answers needed to solve core business problems, save man-hours and refine processes.

One key aspect of my day-to-day duties is to research and obtain source data necessary to accurately develop geographic and analytical data

Now that you have a glimpse behind the scenes it is crucial to reveal the psyche of how I choose to handle the technical aspect of each project.

The best way to manage a technical project is to be realistic about the timeframe. Allow enough time, which accounts for unexpected challenges and setbacks.

Also, people can be added to a project, but only to the degree that it is truly manageable; otherwise, it just creates more chaos to deal with, which ends up consuming more project time.

"What if the project is delayed?

"There are four common options for reconciling a delayed project:"

Keep the timelines the same and be optimistic. Assume that the first part of the estimation was wrong, resulting in a delay, and the remaining estimation should be fine. Add people accordingly.

1. Keep the timelines the same and be pessimistic. Assume that the first part of the estimation was wrong, resulting in delay, the remaining estimation is also underestimated by the same factor. Add people accordingly.
2. Reschedule. Take no small slips. Allow enough time so that further rescheduling is not required.
3. Reduce scope. Either you do it or see it silently trim itself by half-cooked design and implementation.

Common sense would say that options 1 and 2 are not wise however, options 3 and 4 would be best.

Having spent over 14 + years in the GIS industry, I've seen this time and time again when handling a big data project.

How does this relate to The Mythical Man Month concept?

As previously described, tons of bodies are thrown at the project with no context or thought applied to the consequences and effects of doing so.

The result is tons of money spent and low-quality data produced.

Realistically adding more manpower to a late project makes the deliverability much later vs being delivered on time which causes even more challenges.

Why do some think that The Mythical Man Month is a myth?

- Complex tasks cannot be perfectly divided into discrete tasks that can be accomplished efficiently solo. They require more manpower.
- As workers are added to a project, their communication and coordination efforts increase exponentially to drive success.
- As workers are added to a project, the amount of time needed for training new team members increases.

These principles were so revolutionary and catalytic within the sphere of a project management philosophy that Frederick P. Brooks helped IBM get to the point where the company was outperforming Oracle and, thus, was able to buy out Oracle, where Brooks had originally gotten his start as a software engineer.

The main point: Throwing more bodies at a project will not work!

What are your thoughts regarding The Mythical Man Month?

Do you think The Mythical Man Month is a myth or a reality, and how can it be applied to your particular field?

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