

Bill's Building Blocks

Planning, Scheduling, and Execution

I don't know about you, but this has happen to me the past three years. Along about May, I have nothing special planned on my calendar through the end of the year. Then in June someone asks to schedule a one-time commitment, perhaps a speaking engagement or a special luncheon, on my calendar for a specific date in the fall. Almost immediately, someone else wants my commitment for exactly the same day! With 200 days open time on the calendar two events want to be scheduled on top of each other. Clearly, I can only execute on one of them and have to decline the other. What are the differences among planning, scheduling, and execution? And, why should you care?

The APICS Dictionary defines planning as "the process of setting goals for the organization and choosing ways to use the organization's resources to achieve the goals." If you are the organization, then the organization's resources are your own skills, your time, and your money. The more skills, available time, and financial resources that you have, the more alternative opportunities you will have. On the flip side with limited skills, severe time constraints, and limited financial resources planning becomes especially critical to be able to achieve your goals. Planning has the longest timeframe.

The APICS Dictionary goes on to define scheduling as "the act of creating a schedule, such as a shipping schedule, master production schedule, maintenance schedule, or supplier schedule." While this reads like a bit of a circular definition, creating a schedule really means getting down to brass tacks. You are specifying exactly the month, day, hour, location, process, machinery, material, and people to accomplish a task. Where planning determines that it might be possible, scheduling allocates specific resources in time and space. Scheduling has a shorter timeframe.

Surprisingly, the APICS Dictionary does not define execution per se, but defines executing processes as "the processes performed to complete a project plan to accomplish the objectives set forth in the project scope." I don't hear people using the word "execute" much in conversation anymore. Maybe this is because it used to be a favorite shop floor term around such topics as the dispatch list and input/output control, but there is less and less manufacturing in our local area. Execution means getting the job done even though the resources, time, or space may need to be slightly adjusted. Execution has an immediate timeframe.

Interestingly all three take some work. When two opportunities are in conflict at the planning stage, there is a negotiation to back one off without upsetting a future relationship with the other. When two resources are in conflict at the scheduling stage, there is an adjustment to consume less of one resource without losing the priority of the total workflow. And when two jobs are in conflict at the execution stage, there is expediting to slightly adjust the parameters of one job without missing promised delivery dates.

Plan -> Schedule -> Execute. This is both the way you achieve your own goals and the way work gets done in a supply chain. Alternative possibilities -> Committing to a specific opportunity -> Delivering on that opportunity. This could be personal as in presenting at a professional development meeting or supply chain related as in delivering product for a customer order.

©2017 William T. Walker, CFPIM, CIRM, CSCP, CLTD has 40plus years of practitioner experience, authored *Supply Chain Construction* and *Supply Chain Architecture*, and teaches Supply Chain Engineering at NYU Tandon School of Engineering. He is a 35plus year chapter member and APICS E&R Foundation past president. e-Mail Bill at: wt_walker@verizon.net