On the Subject of Better Progress Measurement[1]

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

20 June 2024

Ref: (1) Ozoux, J. L. (2024). Better progress measurement is the secret to successful projects - and a crucial objective for IT in project-driven organisations, PM World Journal, Vol. XIII, Issue V, May. Available online at https://pmworldlibrary.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/pmwj141-May2024-Ozoux-better-progress-measurement-is-the-secret-2.pdf
and
(2) Smith, K. F. (2024). On the Subject of Better Progress Measurement, Letter to the Editor, PM World Journal, Vol. XIII, Issue VI, June. https://pmworldlibrary.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/pmwj142-Jun2024-Smith-on-better-progress-measurement-Letter-to-Editor.pdf

Dear David,

I think that a key set of definitions is missing from Jean Luc Ozoux's article 'Better Progress Measurement is the secret to Successful Projects . . .' and Dr Kenneth Smith's follow-up letter to the Editor.

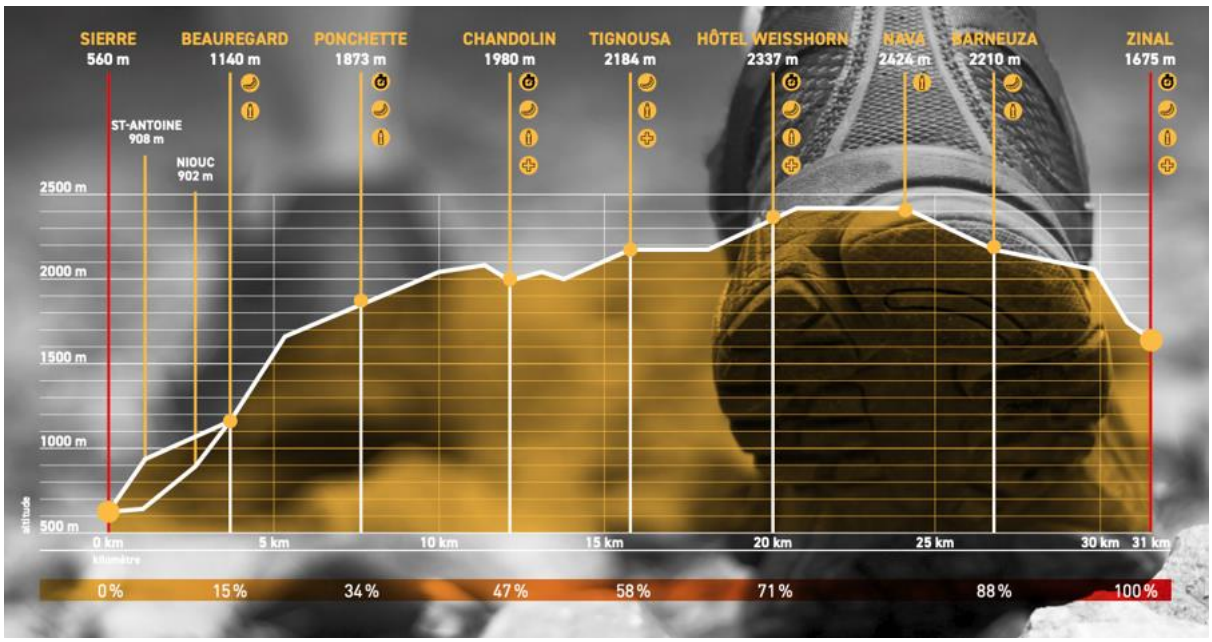
To use Professor C.E.M. Joad's catchphrase on The Brains Trust: "it depends what you mean by …". In this case, it depends what you mean by "progress".

In a general sense, progress measurement aims to quantify at successive intervals how close you are getting to the stated goal. So, the next definition needed is "how do you measure distance"? This where the different options such as weighted or unweighted milestones becomes relevant.

There is a potential problem that is avoided by adopting weighted milestones: in the case of unweighted milestones, if the project manager chooses for whatever good or bad reason to define more early milestones in the project than later ones, and if each of these early milestones is therefore easier than the later ones to achieve, the reports on initial progress using the unweighted approach will be falsely optimistic.

As an example of the value of weighted milestones, in a road race, as shown below, the participants are generally more interested in the percentage of effort involved in each segment of the course (weighted milestones in brown) and less concerned with the actual length of each segment (unweighted milestones in white).

[1] How to cite this work: Piney, C. (2024). On the Subject of Better Progress Measurement, Letter to the Editor, *PM World Journal*, Vol. XIII, Issue VII, July.



In his article, I understand that Jean Luc Ozoux bases his weighting of each milestone on the investment (in whatever units are relevant) required to achieve it. Progress in this case is therefore linked to expected financial expenditure – not the most motivating of objectives, in my opinion.

I have to declare an interest as I have proposed an "Earned Benefit-Value Method" in which the weights reflect the potential contributions of completed activities to the overall intended benefit of the project (pmwj69-Apr2018-Piney-value-of-benefits-series-article-3.pdf). This approach answers my initial question on "what you mean by progress": in this case, progress corresponds to your (hopefully increasing) level of confidence in delivering the corresponding benefits.

It is also interesting to note that most practitioners, including the two authors mentioned, measure what has been accomplished ("earned value") as opposed to what remains to be done. This approach might be seen as using "sunk costs" as a metric for financial governance. The alternative is to focus on what remains to be done. The choice between the two approaches comes down to deciding whether you want to know how far you have gone from the start rather than tracking how close you are to reaching the stated goal.

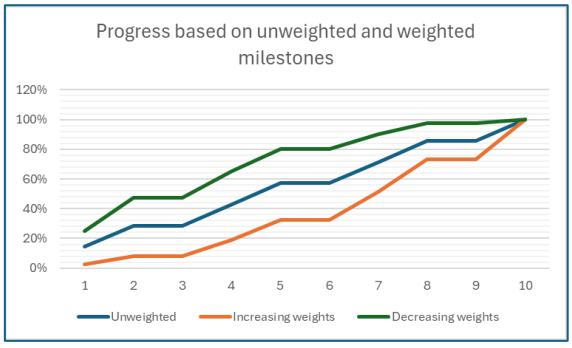
I realize that the previous comment is somewhat simplistic as past performance is required for calculating a "performance index" and this index is certainly useful for predicting future progress. However, striding blindly into the future with your eyes focussed firmly on the past is not a formula for success.

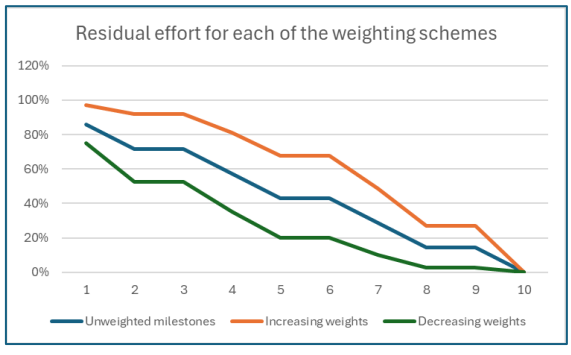
The main point of discussion, however, is the role of metrics for measuring progress and, from this point of view, the conclusion in Kenneth Smith's article really amazed me: "the only difference in progress assessment is the shape of the performance curve." If the

shape of the performance curves is largely immaterial to progress assessment, why not flatter yourself by choosing a front-loaded shape (i.e., decreasing milestones) so as to falsely inflate early progress?

To illustrate my argument, I have expanded on Kenneth Smith's diagrams in order to show his unweighted approach along with the two weighting options I have mentioned. These diagrams, below, support my view that the decision on to way in which you assign the weights is crucial in providing a realistic view of progress. For example, after four of the ten milestones, in front-loaded case ("decreasing weights"), you reach 60% completion (as shown in the "progress" chart), whereas, for the back-loaded case ("increasing weights"), as shown on the residual effort chart, you still have 80% of the work left to do at the same point – a not insignificant difference!

Time and schedule of milestones	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Unweighted Milestone (UMS)	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1
Increasing Milestones (IMS)	1	2	0	4	5	0	7	8	0	10
Decreasing Milestones (DMS)	10	9	0	7	6	0	4	3	0	1
Time and schedule of milestones (cumulative)										
Cumulative UMS	1	2	2	3	4	4	5	6	6	7
Cumulative IMS	1	3	3	7	12	12	19	27	27	37
Cumulative DMS	10	19	19	26	32	32	36	39	39	40
Time and schedule of milestones (cumulative percentage)										
Cumulative percentage UMS	14%	29%	29%	43%	57%	57%	71%	86%	86%	100%
Cumulative percentage IMS	3%	8%	8%	19%	32%	32%	51%	73%	73%	100%
Cumulative percentage DMS	25%	48%	48%	65%	80%	80%	90%	98%	98%	100%
Time and schedule of milestones (residual effort)										
Remaining effort (unweighted)	86%	71%	71%	57%	43%	43%	29%	14%	14%	0%
Remaining effort (increasing weights)	97%	92%	92%	81%	68%	68%	49%	27%	27%	0%
Remaining effort (decreasing weights)	75%	53%	53%	35%	20%	20%	10%	3%	3%	0%





Best regards,

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