

viewpoint

COLLABORATIVE PROJECT MANAGEMENT

It takes a lot of information and collaboration to keep a vehicle program on track. But with multiple subsystem teams each



Joerg Guenther

following their own process, it is quite a challenge to know exactly how—or if—timing changes in one area will impact another. Typically, companies devote considerable staff time and meetings to the task of analyzing these ever-changing schedules to decide whether the overall program is really on time.

Now automakers and major suppliers are turning to ACTANO for automotive consulting expertise and RPlan software, which offer a fundamentally different approach to this challenge. ACTANO Inc. CEO Joerg Guenther explains.

What's wrong with the way vehicle programs are managed now?

The classic approach has one perfect high-level schedule, which often reflects a questionable reality. That's because the actual work is being done by many groups, often located around the world, each using disconnected processes based on its own specific needs. There are bound to be conflicts among these schedules. The traditional answer is to ignore these disconnects and use e-mail and telephones in attempt to maintain the perfect high-level schedule.

Our approach is to let the various areas "own" their separate schedules, yet be automatically alerted when external factors impact their timing. The concept is to maintain a flexible network of independent processes with key dependencies defined. This enables accurate oversight of the deliverables, timing and issues leading to collaboration and adapting to change without disrupting each area's activities.

It sounds simple, but this is a profound change in the way the auto industry manages complex programs. It's a system that acknowledges the realities of resource and timing conflicts.

What is RPlan and how does it work?

RPlan is a suite of project management tools utilizing a centralized database that is easily accessed via a Web browser. It adapts to and works with product development processes companies already have in place. The key difference between RPlan and conventional project tools is how it leverages the knowledge of all stakeholders and adapts to change. Areas maintain their own schedules but RPlan provides everyone with feedback about how changes in another team's schedule may impact their own.

RPlan shows everyone where their specific problems are but allows those problems to be resolved by people rather than pre-defined calculations. Managers can see a higher view of projects, deliverables and issues. It enables the heads of each team to focus on their own group's deliverables, but with the knowledge of external factors that may affect their team's schedule.

How did RPlan evolve?

ACTANO has succeeded at improving the execution of product development processes in the vehicle industries since 1989. Since then our RPlan product has continued to grow and evolve in response to customer requests and feedback. It has a modular construction, so customers can match it to their requirements. The same system can simultaneously provide the broad overview that program managers want and the detail that engineering groups need.

Our European automotive customers include BMW, Bosch, Daimler, Porsche and Volkswagen. Three years ago a major North American OEM chose us after evaluating a large number of vendors and subsequently moved all its active vehicle programs to RPlan simultaneously. This company began at the program management level and is now expanding into functional areas. RPlan provides the platform to standardize product development processes on a global scale.



How do you quantify results?

Our experience has proven that RPlan significantly reduces non-value added time and effort needed to collect data, identify conflicts and coordinate timing. Our customers confirm that it saves administrative time, simplifies the project management function and helps them integrate their suppliers into the product development process.

What are ACTANO's growth objectives?

As a result of our process consulting work and RPlan product sales in North America, we established ACTANO Inc. in Michigan in 2006. We are now building on our expertise and methodology to work with more OEMs and upper-tier suppliers. We also plan to pursue other industries that have a product development process similar to automotive, such as heavy trucks, specialty vehicles and aerospace. We already have customers in Europe that include Daimler Truck, Airbus, Europrop International and MTU Aero engines.

To learn more about ACTANO, please contact Bruce Robertson in Troy, Mich., at (248) 787-3329 or e-mail info@actano.com.