



WIP MODULE PROVIDES INTRODUCTION TO SHOP FLOOR SCHEDULING

For many subcontract precision engineering businesses, labour intensive production scheduling (typically using whiteboards or Excel spreadsheets) remains a very daunting task. Some finite scheduling software packages, capable of scheduling each stage of production to-the-minute, may seem desirable but are often more suited to production lines with high levels of repeat work as opposed to the needs of a subcontract manufacturing business managing many different orders for numerous customers.

PSL Datatrack addressed the problem many years ago with the introduction of its Sequential Scheduler module, with the knowledge that more and more companies were embarking on scheduling but giving up due to its complex nature. The module plans and controls the production flow for an entire factory, ensuring that jobs are correctly prioritised, and has gone on to be successfully used by many PSL Datatrack customers alongside other production planning modules.



What may not be so well-known is that PSL Datatrack also offers a lower-cost, entry level Work in Progress (WIP) module. Effectively a light version of the full scheduler, WIP appeals particularly to precision engineering companies taking the first step into more efficient management of the flow of new and repeat work. If they find that after a period of time they have outgrown the features in the module, it is easy to upgrade with no disruption to the shop floor. This is becoming an increasingly popular move, particularly for start-up subcontract businesses.

WIP's primary purpose is to provide overall capacity planning, control and tracking through all available resources. It splits production operations for a particular job into separate queues for each cost centre and reports on the outstanding operations in due date order. Users can make informed rescheduling decisions to meet delivery commitments and overcome any potential bottlenecks.

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How the production control system is updated becomes an important factor and highlights the necessity for integration with Shop Floor Data Collection (SFDC), which itself needs to be implemented in such a method that it is practical to use, whether making use of PCs or mobile devices on the shop floor.

PSL Datatrack's complementary SFDC module is an effective method of updating both the Sequential Scheduler and WIP modules. A range of options, including bar code scanning, are available to record information relating to production progress. This includes the time taken to set machines, produce components and the quantities successfully produced or scrapped. Effective utilisation of SFDC can help to judge if, or when, an upgrade to the full Sequential Scheduler from WIP should be considered.

Assuming SFDC has been dealt with, how involved should the scheduler be? For some businesses, they will want to define capacity, produce work-to-lists and Gantt charts, review jobs that are running behind schedule and adjust sequencing. For others, any time spent on scheduling will be a distraction from running machines.

This is just one of the many areas where PSL Datatrack's modular approach pays dividends for customers. As opposed to the full scheduler, which calculates shop floor capacity by looking in detail at working patterns (managed via a separate screen that enables various cost centre calendars to be defined), WIP requires less maintenance owing to no calendar definition.

After upgrading, the same SFDC processes will remain in place, providing consistent updates on machine capacity, production of work, jobs running behind schedule and many other areas of production.

PSL Datatrack offers the scheduling start point that is right for your business – there's no need to use a sledgehammer to crack a nut. When you are ready you can acquire additional modules, features and even Status Boards, which display live data from either the WIP module or its bigger brother, the Sequential Scheduler.