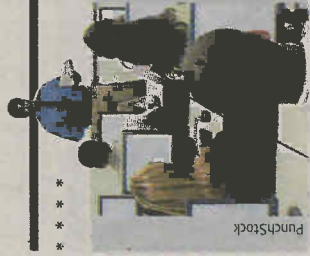


# MARKETPLACE

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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## CUBICLE CULTURE

**Rise of False Deadline  
Means Truly Urgent  
Often Gets Done Late**

**I**N MANY OFFICES, setting false deadlines has become as chronic as breaking them. Molecular biologist Christine Martens has had more than her share of deadlines set to an artificially early date. One of her former bosses set a do-or-die deadline of Thursday afternoon for a research summary report. After she met the deadline, she discovered he had taken off both Friday and the following Monday. "Nobody took his deadlines seriously after that," she says.

Another boss, anticipating lateness, routinely moved all deadlines up. "If there are no consequences to being late—because you aren't really late, because the deadline wasn't real—you'll be late again next time," Ms. Martens says. Making matters worse, that boss made everyone use project timeline software, a graphical representation of a project's progress. Ms. Martens updated it weekly but says, "Wasting time on timeline software didn't seem very productive to me, especially if all I had to do was move the little bars around to be in compli-



By Jared Sandberg

ance again."

False deadlines are just that: moving little bars around. There are certainly legitimate reasons to impose early deadlines. Some people have never met one they didn't bust, for example. And certain office archetypes, such as people whose work won't turn out right until the ninth iteration, can invite early deadlines that aren't necessarily false but seem that way.

Sometimes the difficulty of predicting work flow can make deadlines seem earlier in retrospect than they needed to be. "There are only two types of estimates: lucky and lousy," says Jim Johnson, chairman of Standish Group, a research advisory firm specializing in project measurement. His firm has found that in 2006, the North American software industry spent \$86 billion on software requirements that were never used. "People do impose things that are not needed," he says. Much of that

tions about the merchandise, rather than making decisions. After he left the room, his charges huddled and, like Kremlinologists, tried to deconstruct his remarks and re-interpret them as orders. As a result, they frequently fussed over trivial issues such as how the woven shirts should be folded, or whether the legs of the khaki pants should hang off the table. A larger sense of direction never became clear.

The second-guessing and arguing over minutiae have led to bland merchandise, driven away executives and added to the sense that Gap is stagnating, according to former employees. Gap's same-store sales, which are sales at stores open at least a year, have declined compared with a



Paul Pressler

**Gap Will Fashion Its Future Without Pressler**

year earlier in all but two of the last 24 months. Earlier this month, the company cut its earnings forecast for the fiscal year, for the third time in six months. The retailer said its management and the board are conducting "strategic reviews" of the Gap and Old Navy brands, which are both the company's largest labels and its worst performers. People familiar with the matter say Gap also is reviewing strategic alternatives, including a possible sale of the company, with the help of Goldman Sachs Group Inc.

Gap yesterday said Mr. Pressler, 50 years old, and the board mutually agreed that he should step down as CEO, as well as resign his seat on the board of the San Francisco-based apparel retailer. The company said it would seek a retail expert to lead it.

Mr. Pressler's emphasis on consumer research was considered well intentioned, but a deluge of data on Gap customers, competitors and con-

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**A Dollar Store's Rich Allure in India**

**A U.S. Franchise's Success  
Shows 'Made in America' Sells;  
Lessons for Wal-Mart's Entry?**

By ERIC BELLMAN  
Mumbai, India

**C**ORPORATE LAWYER Archana Singh travels to Europe every year and returns laden with fine Italian cheeses, French wines and single-malt Scottish whiskeys. At home in Mumbai, she likes shopping at the neighborhood "dollar store," which sells exotic products like the newest flavor of Pringles in red-white-and-blue decked aisles that make her feel she's on vacation in the U.S.

As Wal-Mart Stores Inc. and other retail giants prepare to enter India, an unexpected American rival—California's My Dollarstore Inc.—is already here and attracting the affluent middle-class customers Wal-Mart and others covet.

In the U.S., most of the so-



