

PROJECT MANAGEMENT IN THE REAL WORLD

18-19 MARCH 2010

COURSE FEEDBACK

**Professor Mike Holmes,
Head of the Graduate School
University of Central Lancashire**

The Project Management course was excellent. Although I have taught it myself, I got a lot from it and so did the other participants. Whilst it would be very good to use with students I believe that it would be really useful to use it with groups of staff both ECR and more mature. I believe that some of the problems that we have with poor completion rates is due to poor project management on the part of supervisors and students. This course was good in that it was interactive with the opportunity to work through case studies and to discuss issues and problems. It did not focus on Project management software which some courses do. Rather it was about trying to understand the whole process of project management and identifying the individual tasks and associated risks.

I would highly recommend it and will try to get Paul Lyden down again to do it for some of our ECRs.

**Nicola Williams
Business & Community Interaction Coordinator
University of Chester**

I have attended a couple of project management courses/ workshops before and I was very impressed with 'Project Management in the Real World'. The facilitator was very engaging and even the more reluctant members felt able to join in with the discussions. The style of the course worked well as we formed several project teams and actually used the methods and skills to plan and manage a real project. For me this worked better than just sitting listening and even we made a mistake, which most of us did, the reasoning was explained well and we didn't make the mistake again.

I have come across project management tools before but I feel that following this workshop I will actually be able to use these in my role. The only negative point would be that although Research projects were touched on it was advertised as being targeted at Research Office and PhD students so there could have been more emphasis on this, also it wasn't easy to see how the principles could be applied to day to day tasks and projects as the process is fairly lengthy.

Also the venue at UCLan was appropriate and the catering was excellent.
Overall I thought it was a very good course and I enjoyed it.

**Rajiv Ramdhany
Research Associate
Lancaster University**

Benefitting from a Software Engineering background, some project management concepts were known to me before the course. However, as a Research Associate working on EU-funded projects usually involving several academic partners, I have found insufficient attention paid to the management side of projects. Whilst emphasis is understandably laid on the research and technical aspects of the projects, unanticipated risks sometimes threaten the very contribution of the partner. Whether it is failure to hire the researchers with the appropriate profile/experience, failure to produce detailed specifications about the tasks, or even hold unrealistic expectations, the outcome of a project can be undermined and success severely compromised. My expectations before joining the course, therefore included real-world project management practice insight and guidelines that would make the translation of project management knowledge from theory to practice more effective.

The course covered the essential concepts of project management which included the following: project initiation, stakeholder identification and consultation, project scoping, goal setting, task identification, three-point estimates for time and resources, critical path analysis using a PERT chart, resource scheduling using Gantt charts, risk assessment and mitigation plans, and change control. The concepts were applied to a real-world scenario (a fictitious project about a bridge for the people of Lanark) and participants set to the task of planning the whole project. The exercises were accompanied by helpful advice and tips from the course trainer from his wealth of experience of managing several large projects throughout his managerial career. The knowledge, skill and verve of the trainer were appreciated by all participants as was his experience. The examples and props used were simple enough for classroom exercises but also judiciously chosen as to expose crucial mistakes made by project managers.

Academic research projects differ in both nature and purpose from commercial projects; they are more exploratory in nature and their outcome is often a solution to a problem rather than a commercial product. As these projects often venture in the academic unknown, the risks and outcomes are different from industrial projects. In this respect, I would have liked a project management course that was tailored to research projects where sometimes planning is difficult due to their exploratory nature. Still, I appreciated the course and believe it has a lot to deliver to project management novices.

Dr Xu (Suzie) Wang
Senior Research Associate
International Observatory on End of life Care
Lancaster University

It was an honour for me to be able to attend to the training on project management in the real world organised by Vitae Northwest. I benefited tremendously from participating in this well-organised, innovative and practical training session. I had attended a similar short course before, but this training distinguishes itself in providing a systematic way and decision making process to successfully manage a project.

The decision making process starts from evaluating an idea (inception). It is not rare that people think of an idea (the 'idea in the bath') and try to push it forward into a project. However, this idea needs to be critically evaluated to form a solid project (meeting stage, see Figure 1).

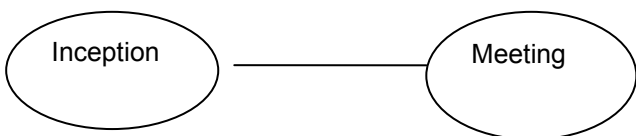
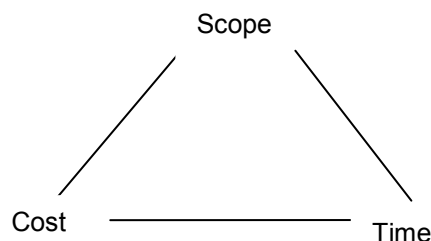
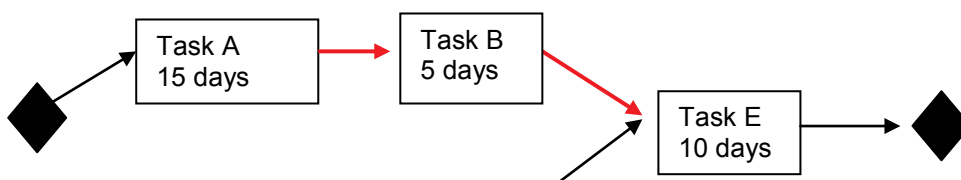


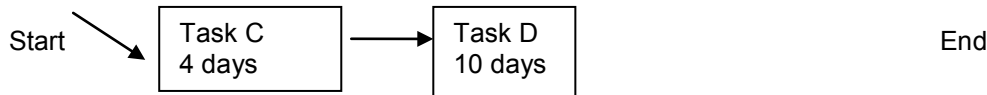
Figure 1

An important thinking tool at the meeting stage is the 'Scope/Cost/Time triangle' (See Figure 2), which helps set up the boundaries of the project. The project is defined by what you can do for the budget you have in the time allocated to the project. It is important to know that if you change any one of these fundamental parameters, at least one of the others must change.



Another point that I found important from the training is critical path analysis which involves evaluating all the paths needed to complete the project. We can take the diagram below as an example.





This diagram shows the relationship between the tasks. Task E depends on the completion of Task B and Task D. The longest path of the junction (in this case the junction of Task B and D) is the critical path which I draw in red. Identifying the critical path enables the project manager to evaluate each step in the path and if a change is going to happen, how the critical path will be influenced.

To sum up, I found this training very useful in that it offers a systematic way of evaluating, critically thinking and managing project in real life. I will recommend this training to other researchers.

Maria Romeo Velilla
Liverpool Active City Researcher - Families
Liverpool John Moores University

1. EXPECTATIONS

- (A) My main expectation was to learn new techniques, apart from the Gantt chart, to be able to manage and control a project.
- (B) I also expected to know how to manage different projects during same time scales.
- (C) My third expectation was in relation to how to approach/negotiate with your own line manager/boss when you think a project needs a longer timescale or more equipment/financial resources/human resources.

2. FEEDBACK

- A high number of contents were covered during the 2 days training. I consider that due to the appropriate approach, the contents were sufficiently covered.
- It was positive to have a theoretical approach followed by a more practical time for each content and technique. From my personal point of view, it was a good balance between theory and practice.
- I found very positive to dedicate a few hours to work on a case study as a team, in which we had to practice all the techniques learnt during the course.
- At the end of the case study, the trainer had to decide which one was the best project management team, after each team presented the realised work during the training. Then the trainer provided with a winner. However, the trainer did not provide with reasons supporting why this team won and why the rest did not win.
- The case study was a really good experience to go through and the trainer knew very well how to guide our learning process. This was very positive!!! The case study was based in building a bridge in 2 weeks for a visit by the Queen. The whole case study made us apply all the techniques learnt and made me reflex about how to approach day to day difficulties when you manage a project. However, I missed further reflective/reflexion time on these aspects. I think it would have been better to have the chance of discussing day to day issues that each trainee may have faced in the past. The trainer should have helped us to make parallelisms of these experiences with the proposed case study.

3. PERSONAL ACHIEVEMENTS

In relation to my first expectation (see A at section 1), I learned very useful techniques that are listed below:

- Steps in project management (Initiation, project initiation meeting, running the project);
- Stakeholders mapping.
- Stakeholders' requirements.
- The scope/ cost/ time triangle.
- Define deliverable and measures.
- Better ways of estimating duration of tasks.
- Calculate the critical path.
- Assign resources to tasks and calculate the project budget.
- I realised that it is very important to analyse the risks involved. However, it was not enough time to cover this content. This is an aspect that should be approached as a further level of the project management training.

- Change control: reporting to management and reacting to problems.

In addition, I realised that I have to keep working as I do it in relation to:

- Goal statement, which has to answer the questions who? what? why? where? when?
- Identify work units/tasks
- Establish relationships between tasks
- Create a Gantt chart

In relation to my second expectation (see B at section 1), this one was not covered. However, I delivered asked for this aspect to the trainer and the trainer suggested that Microsoft Project has an application that allows you to combine several projects. Therefore, now I know I have to learn how to use this application. Moreover, during the training several tips were provided me ideas of how to deal with this issue.

During the totality of the training several tips were explained in relation to how to deal with my boss/project manager from now on (see expectation C at section 1). So I feel much more confident of how to do it.

4. A FINAL COMMENT

“Academic staff are sometimes expected to know how to research and sometimes to know how to teach. However, academic staff are not always expected to know how to manage. This training should be the Bible of any academic who is in charge of a project, independent of its size”. Maria Romeo Veilla

Daniel Parnell
Everton Active Family Centre
Liverpool John Moores University

Having been on a number of project management and supervisory management courses in the past I was intrigued at the sight of this particular course. In this sense, the specific reference to ‘real world’ in the title suggests the content of the course will present something provocative, potentially illuminating the stark contrast from ‘academia’ and the ‘real’ world. Having engaged in collaborative action research for the past three years and having experienced a wide range of working practices from within academia and within the third, private and voluntary sector’s I found this particularly intriguing.

The content itself was completely new and I realised my background had been in management theories, tools and practices and not necessarily a specific project management technique. This has enlightened a new, perhaps more ‘clinical’ approach to my project management within my working practice, however as embraced within the course and emphasised by the course leader change or problems happen, prepare for it and be flexible.

Overall, the course has been useful and has directly impacted my working practice, specifically the allocation of deadlines and times to pieces of work and/or projects. I would suggest this course suitable for postgraduate students engaged in collaborative research projects. Additionally, I would be particularly keen to engage in further training and education with Fiscal and the extended learning opportunities they offer.

In summary, thank you for the opportunity to engage in such an informative and influential training experience.

Mingzhu Sun
School of Materials
University of Manchester

I found the two-day course on Project Management in the Real World very much enjoyable and extremely useful. Unlike what I thought, there was not much lecturing involved and Dr Lyden made the course interesting by putting the learning in a mock project. We were practically working through each step in project planning following his instructions. Personally, he is very much experienced and knowledgeable and his delivery style is both professional and focused. In addition, it was lots of fun.

Every term was clearly explained with vivid examples and the learning was based on team work and hands-on activities.

The course was very well structured and covered all the essential skills required for successful management, specifically the project planning part of the whole process. Importantly, these skills are directly applicable to

project management in day-to-day life. Before taking this course, I had no clear guidance to follow and couldn't do project management in such a professional way. All in all, I learned what I hoped to learn and I found this course definitely worth the time and effort. I would very much like to recommend it to my colleagues.

Dr Sasirekha Palaniswamy
Biomedical Text Mining Facilitator
National Centre for Text Mining & Manchester Biomedical Research Centre
University of Manchester

The course title 'Project Management in the real world stood out for me as I was eager to go on a Project Management course that discussed practical issues in Project management and how to overcome them. I went in with the expectation that the course will involve both training and hands on experience with case studies. The course exceeded my expectations and offered in depth training on both days. The course allowed me to gain both the theoretical understanding and practical skills to gain experience in Project management using case study. The course was quite intense with lots to take in at all times.

The trainer was very knowledgeable and experienced and there was a very smooth learning transition between different areas. He delivered the course excellently and was very helpful and approachable at all times. The delivery style, content and the practical experience of the trainer helped me to gain a good understanding of this subject area and has motivated me to adopt the right approach and use the appropriate tools during Project management.

Overall, it was an excellent course, delivered excellently and has enabled me to think about gaining a qualification in Project Management.

I can confidently recommend this course to anyone working in Project Management roles. I have certainly gained most out of this course and my team applied all the skills we learnt over the two days in the case study and we came out as the winning team, which was a bonus.

Geoff Butters
Manchester Metropolitan University

The course started with an initial introduction to projects, their success (or failure) rate, and the lack of good planning for managing the project. The concept "Project Initiation" was introduced, a process whereby instead of starting a project from the word "go", a period of "initiation" is undertaken before deciding whether the project is in fact viable - i.e. whether it is "go" or "no go".

That initiation period will involve establishing a few fundamental things. Firstly the relationship between three variable factors: the scope of the project, its cost and the time it will take. Often these are not planned, a project being given a fixed scope, fixed cost and fixed time, which it is impossible to work with. The three are dependent on each other, and whilst it is possible for one or two of them to be fixed, at least one must be variable: that way the variable ones can each be calculated by relating them to the other two. Secondly the outcomes of the project should be established: what is going to be done (i.e. is in scope) and what is not going to be done (i.e. is out of scope). Thirdly the stakeholders in a project or its outcomes must be considered: who are they, what they want from the project, what they don't want from the project, and are there likely to be any who object to what the project might be going to do. Finally, there needs to be a "risk analysis" to establish what risks there might be to the success of the project, and therefore what steps need to be taken to minimise that the risks.

At the end of that initiation stage it should be possible to answer the questions who, what, when, where, and why?

Who is involved or affected? What is the project intended to produce or result in? When is it to be done? Where is to be done? Why is it to be done?

The course went on to expand on these principles, introducing tools that can help the initiation process: relationship diagrams, network diagrams or PERT charts, Gantt charts and Critical Path Analysis. All of these were explained fully and in an easy to understand way, using an example project about building a bridge, which was set in a real environment so that the principles could be practised.

On the second day, small groups were formed to work together in planning a project, i.e. to undertake the initiation stage. Facts, figures, and other information were given from time to time by the course leader and the teams competed to produce the best project plan and budget to be presented to the project sponsor.

This was a very interesting, useful and informative exercise during which we were able to use the tools we had learnt about.

The course overall was very useful, very informative and very interesting. The style of Paul Lyden's presentation was excellent, making learning very easy and appealing. The timing over the two days was just right. I would definitely recommend this course to anyone who is involved, even remotely, in managing any sort of project: it was well worth doing!

Pal Vik
Research Fellow
University of Salford

The course

The course was held over two days and focused on the process of initiating a project

- *Day one:* The first day consisted mainly of the moderator presenting with some group exercises for participants. During the day the moderator talked about identifying stakeholders, establishing their requirements, setting objectives, breaking down and planning the tasks involved, and developing a network diagram to map the task relationships.
- *Day two:* After a brief presentation by the moderator on identifying and managing risk, most of the remainder of the second day was spent on group exercises. Each group was given a fictional project to initiate. As part of this, we had to develop a goal statement guiding the project, break down the project into tasks, draw a network diagram with the different tasks, identify risks and cost risk mitigation measures. At the end of the exercise we had to pitch to conduct the project and the moderator picked a project on the basis of how well planned the project was.

Expectations and feedback

I expected to learn some practical steps which could enhance the way in which I manage my projects. The course was very good and exceeded my expectations. It not only provided me with a set of tools to manage my projects, but it also provided me with advice on how to manage expectations from superiors as well as clients. The course was very interactive and offered numerous opportunities to test and apply the steps taught.

I was particularly impressed with the moderator. It was clear that he had a lot of experience in managing projects. This was very useful as he could illustrate the steps and points he made with examples. In addition he was a very skilled and effective trainer.

Impact on work practices

Many of the aspects covered in the course, I already used in my work prior to attending the course, such as breaking down project into tasks, and mapping tasks according to their duration and their relationship with each other. That said the course made me realise that I am not sufficiently systematic in my planning. I have now written down the steps for the project initiation stage which I will adhere to in the future.

In particular, attending the course made me realise that we spend too little time on identifying and managing risk. Although we discuss and consider risks in planning a project, we are not as systematic as we can be. For my next project, I will keep a record of and consider all possible risks. Where possible, I will cost risk mitigation measures into my projects.

There were also aspects covered that I do not apply, such as mapping stakeholders, establishing their requirements and involving them in developing a goal statement. I will strive to incorporate this aspect in planning my projects. For example, I will conduct a stakeholder mapping exercise with my supervisor and co-supervisor for my PhD.

I would welcome the opportunity for more project management training, especially in risk management and PRINCEII. As academics I think we too often dismiss project management skills, processes and tools as gimmicks, but ultimately these are tools which can help us deliver better research projects, maybe particularly in engaging stakeholders.