

# METHOD MADNESS A SIMPLE APPROACH TAKES YOU A VERY LONG WAY BEFORE YOU NEED SPECIALISTS WITH TRULY INDUSTRIAL STRENGTH EXPERTISE, SAYS SIMON HARRIS

"Just as driving a car is useful in daily life, so Project Management is a competency we use to drive business change," says Simon Harris, PMP, CGEIT, co-founder of PMWeb. "If I drive to the supermarket the goal is the groceries not the journey."

## Steps not jargon

The basic steps needed by a business manager or PM novice to deliver results are actually very simple, Harris says, and there are plenty of industrial strength extensions for the PM specialist when tackling bigger projects. "What we try and do in our training and consulting is two things. First to help the business managers see the 'project bit' in simple, accessible terms. Simple is obscured when using 'methods'. Secondly we show the PM professional the industrial strength techniques which 'method' stops short of explaining."

"Projects evolve as they go along," he says. "Reality dictates a foundation of (tested) assumptions and a balance between pre-planned and reactive. For the groceries, I plan to use my familiar route. If it's busy, I'll divert reactively and I start out with the intention that traffic lights will be handled reactively. The goal is the constant; the plan is not overly detailed, is based on assumptions and is recast as needed."

Difficulties, he illustrates start in jargon such as Stakeholder Analysis, Chartering (or PIDs) and Breakdown Structures. It is better to think of these as steps: First assess who matters, then what they want, then how to achieve it, and so on.

## Purpose not process

"Often the purpose gets lost in process. Managing stakeholders isn't about 'influence maps'. When I workshop 'what they want', I'm being inclusive and creating shared understanding to build motivation. I am also gauging how much smiling, debating and reaching agreement there is. That shows me how reactive we'll need to be and thus the level at which to set schedule or whether constraint are realistic." His training gives people simple ways to assess how easily decisions get made, so they can frame controls that fit their needs. "There are white papers on the web-site," he adds.

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## Scheduling plan B

An example of how standard guidance stops short of expert needs is project risk. "'Risk appetite' is a well known phrase," says Harris, "so how do you usefully express 'Risk Appetite'? Equally, everyone knows the phrase 'Plan B' but would they know how to describe it and Plan A together in a Gantt chart?" Harris asks. "While this is a technique for PM specialists, it is easy

to show the professional PM how to apply to their planning activities and again the basics are on our web site."

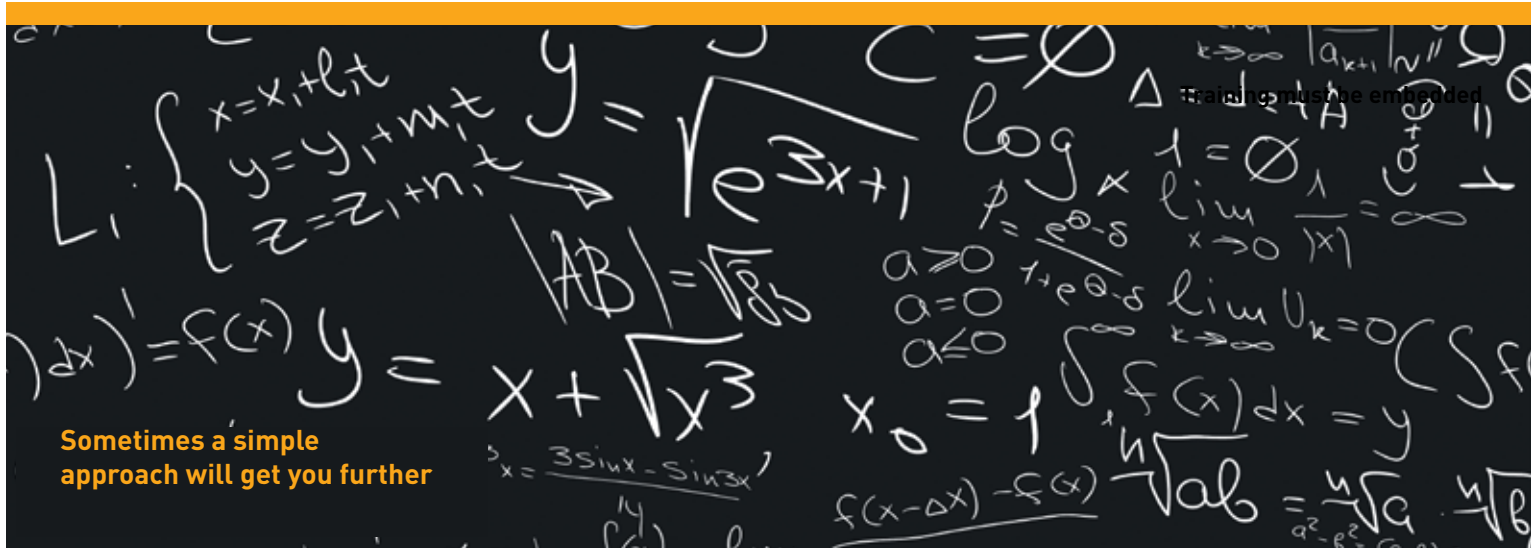
Since not all projects are 'supermarket trips' specialists are needed. They should be fluent in PM skills such as 3pt-estimating, Monte Carlo and Critical chain analysis. Often PM specialists have not moved these topics beyond the classroom. Like a surgeon who has only tied sutures in medical school Harris suggests, "It is because training is hard to transfer into use; transferring new knowledge needs to be an explicitly supported step."

## Nurturing competency

"It's actually about competency growth," he adds. "This crucial task belongs to line management to nurture competencies and culture. We support what organisations rarely do by helping with training preparation and post-training with embedding."

Business change improves with a small thought shift - from training to nurturing the development of skills. Lastly, he comments, "The best thought is to develop the competencies in the business people defining 'what we want' so that even when using specialist help the project is not 'done to them' but 'by them'."

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