

## Lucid Thought

Ruth Murray-Webster & Peter Simon  
*First published in Project Manager Today*



LUCID  
**63** } Outstanding Project Delivery  
THOUGHT

*“Here are all my brilliant qualifications...”*

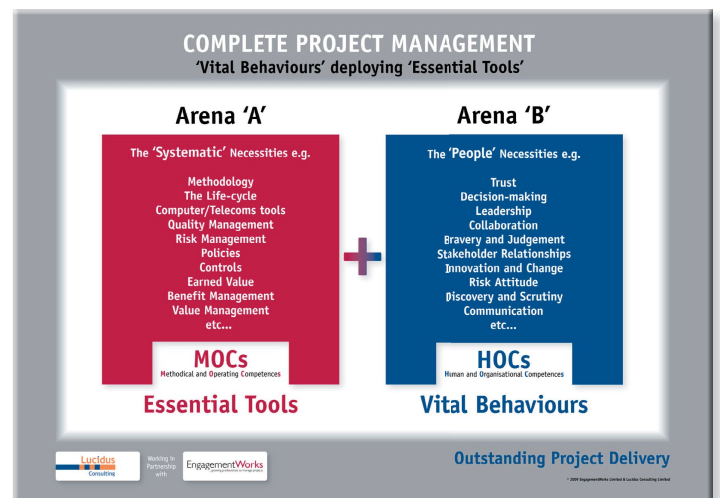
*“...and on the back of this postage stamp is all his experience!”*



In past Lucid Thoughts we have lamented the wide (and often blind) acceptance by stakeholders of predominantly knowledge-based qualifications for project managers as a means to develop project management skills. (see Lucid Thoughts 05 and 39 on our website). We have also proposed that capability assessment, such as that dealt with by the APM Practitioner Qualification, or competency assessment using a freely available framework such as GAPPS is much more relevant, e.g. in Lucid Thoughts 02 and 61.

In this economic climate, with a squeeze on capital in both public and private sectors, the urgency for project managers and the wider project team to have the capability to actually deliver the project given the inherent constraints and uncertainty, rather than just to know about project management has never been greater. Our thoughts this month are on whether there is a valid role for classroom based training and development as a means of nurturing outstanding project delivery capability; building on but going far beyond just knowing how to.

Our work in partnership with EngagementWorks, see also Lucid Thought 10, embraces the need for project managers to be able to work across the whole range of ‘MOCS’ and ‘HOCS’ as shown below. Knowledge and skills relating to each one of the systematic necessities and people necessities can be taught, but **what does it take to develop project managers to be able to ‘bring it all together’ to be able to deploy the right approach at the right time?**



Thinking about this question we reflected on the pioneering work of Malcolm Knowles in the field of adult learning. In summary Knowles outlined the following characteristics of adult learners and the implications for their learning. (The words in the table below are our own drawn from our understanding of Knowles' work).

Characteristics of adult learners	Implications for learning design and delivery
Autonomous and self-directed	Need to be facilitated by a 'guide on the side', not taught by a 'sage on the stage'.
Need to connect to life experiences	Examples must come from the floor, the lived experience, rather than as the facilitator's stories and experience.
Goal and relevancy orientated	Links to participant goals and responsibilities need to be made explicitly and continuously.
Practical and practice orientated	Need many opportunities to learn by doing with a design that is directly relevant to practice in reality.

Our reflections are that what it takes to develop people in a classroom to play their part in achieving outstanding project delivery back in the workplace is threefold:

Firstly, the development needs to be built around a completely **realistic** scenario – we'll call it a 'real case'. Such a case needs to be designed to provide common challenges in delivering projects from inception to closure, and every opportunity to try different ways to deal with those challenges.

Secondly, the learning needs to be truly **facilitated** by people who are not only great facilitators, but also great project managers: people who can challenge and draw on lived experiences from the real case and help the links to practice to be made.

Thirdly, the participants need to be provided with a learning environment where they have **autonomy** to direct their own learning, reflect on what the experience means for them, and what they need to take back to the workplace to hone performance in the future.

What doesn't work in building real capability rather than foundational knowledge is:

- **'Death by PowerPoint™'** without any chance to practice what has been learned in a safe but challenging environment.
- Lectures and tutor war-stories that are tangential to a participant's own development. It may be nice to hear how someone else overcame all the difficulties when leading their team to success but all that says is it can be done but doesn't help you to actually do it.
- Short exercises that do not link to the lived experience of delivering a project (rather than just planning it or executing part of the scope and life cycle). A short exercise and debrief cannot draw in close engagement with the project team and other stakeholders. It is imperative that conflicts and issues are allowed to arise naturally and then be responded to in as close to real-time as is possible.
- No significant time built in for work to allow participants to **'take the learning back to the business'**. Most courses conclude with a brief discussion relating to what you have learned followed by completion of a **'happy sheet'**. This does not allow learners to discuss the difficulties they might have in applying their new found capabilities or to document a personal action plan. It is essential that time is provided to do both of these.

From our perspective there is a valid role for classroom based development that deals with what is needed to combine the 'hard' and the 'soft' skills of project management. The alternative is for project managers to be told it is important and then being left to practice the combination on a live project without first trying it out. You wouldn't allow a surgeon, pilot or engineer to go straight from the theory to practice without first trying things out on a dummy, in a simulator or some other realistic model and we suggest we shouldn't do that for key projects either.

However, if classroom based development is to be effective then the points we've raised here need to be addressed. If you are thinking of developing yourself or others to enable the breakthrough from good to outstanding project delivery, then maybe this Lucid Thought will help you in deciding who may be able to help?

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