PROJECT

The voice of the project management community

APM Association for Project Management

APM PROJECT MANAGEMENT AWARDS

— 2024 —

Talent and innovation in the spotlight

PLUS
Grenfell Tower Lessons for the project profession seven years on
The Big Interview Donna Sinnick, Chief Delivery Officer, Babcock International Group

Competency matters

We're giving you lots to celebrate in our annual APM Project Management Awards showcase. Our 2024 winners cover a huge spectrum of sectors, from transformational railway building and making sure the UK's armed forces are well equipped, to education projects in the Middle East and establishing the UK's first Building Safety Regulator post-Grenfell.

Seven years on, the effects of that tragedy are being keenly felt. The various investigations into the Grenfell Tower fire of 2017 have revealed a damning mess of poor procurement, fragmented thinking, inadequately enforced regulations and lack of scrutiny. The causes of the fire that killed 72 people (including 18 children), and injured and traumatised hundreds more, have been analysed, but the lessons are still being considered. How do we make sure something like this never happens again?

"The project management failings have been well documented by the inquiry and they make for hard reading," said Gill Hancock, APM's Head of Technical Content. "But at the heart of the issue for the profession lies one simple concept: competency." A search of the inquiry report yields scores of results for "project manager". But in almost all cases of those mentioned, they had little or no specific project management training or experience. They were not competent.

Competency is critical to the future success of the project profession, and the heartbreaking Grenfell disaster shows the terrible consequences when it is lacking.

The end of the year is traditionally a time for reflection and optimistic plans for New Year resolutions and self-improvement. So, if you're feeling in that frame of mind, read our feature on how to be a great project leader by *Project*'s super-coach columnist Susanne Madsen (we recommend listening to her recent appearance on APM Podcast and reading her latest book, *How to Do the Inner Work*).

In fact, why don't you take a look at the APM Podcast collection? There, we dive into everything project-related, from how to have difficult conversations to how to be a better communicator (with the BBC's Ros Atkins). The latter is the 100th episode of the podcast, which is a real milestone for our very own project that started in lockdown as a way to document project professionals' work on the COVID front line.

It's inspiring stuff, so make sure you don't miss out!

Emma De Vita is Editor of *Project*

"**Competency is critical… and the heartbreaking Grenfell disaster shows the terrible consequences when it is lacking**"

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MICHAEL LISHMAN/SELLAFIELD LTD; TRISTRAM KENTON/RBO; ROBERTHARDING/ALAMY; BEN WRIGHT; CD/PROD.DB/ALAMY

"I like to see people picking up the gifts the team delivered... It's really nice to know we're part of their Christmas"

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TIMOTHY SCHENCK

A giant pigeon lands in NYC

Colombian artist Iván Argote's hyperrealist statue (called *Dinosaur* to reflect its *Tyrannosaurus rex* scale) is now perched on Manhattan's High Line Plinth, towering over the tiny people below. The 16ft-tall public artwork, made from aluminium, will keep its beady eye on New York City until spring 2026.

"I really want to have that feeling, like you know when sometimes you're on your own for two seconds, or you're having a sandwich in the street in between things, or just losing some time?" Argote told *Curbed*. "Then, you look down, and there's a pigeon there. Then, you have this kind of look at each other. I really want people to have that feeling. It's like: Ah, I've seen you, man. Here you are."

The High Line is a non-profit organisation and public park on the West Side of Manhattan, built on a former elevated rail line, and includes public art commissions. The statue's complex production process began with the aluminium-cast piece being created and painted by hand in Mexico, using car paint to cover 1,000 sq ft of surface. The sculpture was then moved by flatbed truck to New Jersey, where it was weatherproofed before being installed by crane.

Perspectives

How to have difficult conversations

It's one of the trickier aspects of a project professional's job, but get it right and you'll soon stop dreading difficult conversations. Mediation expert Marie Coombes of We Restore Calm and Sophie Paton of Make Happy offer their best advice

Q A

Q What advice would you give about having difficult conversations?

A Sophie: The number one thing that makes the biggest difference is just breathing. Our nervous system is being triggered in these conversations; our bodies are being pumped full of adrenaline, and it produces a response – whether it's avoidance, withdrawal or coming out fighting – whatever it might be. None of those are going to help you have a good conversation and help you achieve what you need to. Something to really help you regulate that is just breathing, because it's a two-way dialogue between that kind of nervous response and your brain. If you can start to just slow your breathing down, then that sends a really strong signal to your brain that, actually, you're safe. It starts to give you a bit of control and dampens that adrenal response.

Q How do you get a difficult conversation off to a good start?

A Marie: In terms of mindset, it's going into the conversation from a place of curiosity. It automatically changes the tone that you're using, because you're coming from a place of wanting to understand, rather than 'you've done this wrong; we've done this wrong'. Go in with an open
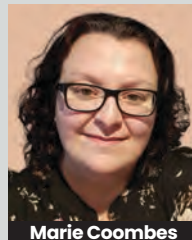
Sophie Paton   **Marie Coombes**

mind, and go in from a place of empathy. There are two words that are hugely important to me, and they are acceptance and agreement. You can accept what somebody's saying is their truth, but that doesn't mean you have to agree with it. Actually, what that can do as well is change the tone of a conversation, because it's about accepting somebody else's perspective and

understanding of a situation. But that doesn't mean you have to agree with it, because it's their perception and their understanding of the situation. All you can do is agree on how you move forward, and that's where the curiosity really comes into play.

Q How do you stop the blame game in conversations like these?

A Sophie: One thing that can be really useful is to set ground rules for any meeting or conversation you're having. So right at the beginning, often as a facilitator, you might have your own set of ground rules, For example: this is not going to be a discussion about personalities; and this is not going to be about individual accountability – it's

> There are two words that are hugely important to me, and they are acceptance and agreement

SHUTTERSTOCK

> My first ground rule in any facilitated conversation is to speak from the 'I'... 'I feel like this, because...', as opposed to 'you've made me feel like this'

about us taking accountability as a team. We always say you have to listen generously – whatever your ground rules might be – and then perhaps offer the group a chance to contribute a couple of their own. Then normally we have them written up so they're on a flip chart or on a screen in the room and you get the group to agree that we are all going to abide by these ground rules to ensure the success of this meeting or conversation. Inevitably it will flip back at some points into unhelpful behaviours from people in the group, but you can just remind them gently to go back to the ground rules that we agreed at the beginning of the conversation: 'Let's try and stick to them because they're going to help us get the outcome that we need.'

A Marie: My very first ground rule in any facilitated conversation is to speak from the 'I'. 'I feel like this, because...', as opposed to 'you've made me feel like this' or 'you're the person that's created this situation'. So, what we're trying to create by getting people to speak from the 'I' is a natural accountability and responsibility for how you're feeling, but it's also about not directing it personally at somebody else, because you're perfectly entitled to feel the way that you do. If you want to share something, you need to take ownership of how you're feeling. I've mediated some really testy conversations between managers and union representatives at a quite senior level and it's quite interesting seeing how quickly people do regress back into blaming each other.

Listen to Sophie and Marie discuss how to have difficult conversations on APM Podcast

5 lessons learned

Sue Kershaw

Former APM President, and Senior Vice President, Programme Management Executive, at AECOM

1 People make projects happen

It sounds obvious, but how many times has process bogged you down and systems not delivered for you? It is the project teams that provide the human energy and drive to make projects happen, and the adoption of artificial intelligence will make this even more important and give us more thinking time to make the right decisions.

2 Fixed deadlines do not always produce the best outcomes

I have seen both ends of this argument. The London 2012 deadline was fixed and immoveable: 19:30, 27 July 2012. This drove the right attitudes and swift decision-making needed to make it happen. Conversely, when a deadline is randomly imposed without any compelling reason, cost, quality and morale often go out of the window.

3 Collaboration is the only way to go

At last, the spirit of collaboration is with us to stay! Project 13 (an infrastructure delivery approach) set the guide rails, and the early adopters can evidence the success of this. It is not all about being warm and fuzzy; it's about respecting each other and having a common goal and agreed way to achieve it. Agreeing to disagree really helps along the way. What does good look like? More innovation, better decision-making, better efficiency and productivity, and happier teams.

4 Leadership is all about being the real you

If you are not empathetic, collaborative and authentic, you can't fake it. The pace at which we all work now leaves no room for old-school command-and-control behaviour. Be yourself, know your weaknesses and blind spots, and let others help you. Be that boss you always wanted to have when you started out. Always encourage others around you to grow, succeed and be better than you.

5 Lessons learned need to be captured progressively

After the project is complete, how it was delivered and what was learned fades to grey. Collecting lessons learned as you go through the life cycle, analysing them and sharing them – these are beneficial to all. Highly recommended is drawing lessons learned together from similar projects and reviewing them before you start yours.

Comment

Why it doesn't pay to multitask

CEO and author Efrat Goldratt-Ashlag reveals a major, invisible cause for project delays – and how to overcome it

People tend to believe that failure to hit deadlines is mostly caused by unforeseen delays during the project. But usually, delays arise from inherent obstacles that are embedded in the way we manage our projects' flow.

No matter how much we invest in planning, unexpected delays are bound to happen. When using critical chain project management (CCPM), the theory of constraints (TOC) approach for managing multi-projects, we use time buffers to protect against delays. These buffers should be closely monitored. Whenever someone asks for additional time from the project's buffer, they are granted it. But, to hold them accountable, they are also required to explain the reason.

Why multitasking doesn't pay

In large, multi-project organisations, the documentation of these delay reasons can amount to hundreds of incidents a year. Analysing this data reveals that uncertainty is often not the main reason for delays. The most frequent cause for a delay in a given project is that key people were working on other projects.

Consider three projects, each taking nine days to complete. If we work on them sequentially, we will finish the first project in nine days, the second in 18 days and the third in 27 days. But, in reality, most people have to multitask. For instance, what if, after completing only a third of the first project (three days), we are pressured to switch and start working on the second one, and after completing a third of this project, we switch to work on the third one? After nine days, we have only completed a third of each project; we end up with nothing ready to deliver.

We think that multitasking helps us make progress across multiple projects, and we're unaware of the heavy price we are paying in their lead time.

Dr Eliyahu Goldratt, the founder of TOC, used to say: "Multitasking is the biggest killer of time in projects." In most multi-project environments, this invisible element is the primary cause for delays. While it may seem that multitasking is unavoidable, if we want to significantly speed up project completion, we should control

Diligently managing full kits before starting a project is a powerful way to speed up flow

the number of active projects at any given time and minimise multitasking.

Controlling the number of projects we work on in parallel is not to be taken lightly. We have to make sure that we complete all active projects as fast as possible to protect our throughput. Unnecessary delays cannot be tolerated. Therefore, we need to identify other invisible elements that consume our buffers.

Begin with a full kit

Another common reason for delay is: 'we couldn't proceed because something essential was missing'. People may prepare all the materials but get stuck waiting for confirmation or authorisation. Or everything is ready

except for one resource that is tied up elsewhere, etc. To prevent such delays, we need to ensure we have 'full kits' before starting any major part of the project. This means verifying that we have all the materials, authorisations, resources and everything else we need in order to complete it.

If we are not diligent about maintaining full kits, we risk getting stuck mid-project, waiting for essential things. When such delays happen, to avoid standing idle, we start multitasking and the chaos returns. Diligently managing full kits before starting a project is a powerful way to speed up flow and ensure projects are completed on time.

Multitasking and lack of full kits are two of the common obstacles embedded in the way we manage projects that lead to significant delays, but they are not the only ones. Lack of synchronisation, lack of standardisation, rework and other field-specific reasons can also cause delays. These issues have nothing to do with uncertainty. In fact, we typically anticipate them.

CCPM is not for everyone; it requires discipline and a long-term commitment. However, if you are determined to accelerate your projects' flow and avoid missing due dates, it is a powerful way to manage your operation. By utilising buffer management, you can protect your projects from unforeseen delays, identify the invisible causes of delays and effectively address them.

Efrat Goldratt-Ashlag is CEO of Goldratt1 Ltd and author of *Goldratt's Rules of Flow*, which is referenced in *Senior Managers' and Project Managers' Guide to Critical Chain*, available at apm.org.uk. See page 54 for an exclusive extract.

SHUTTERSTOCK

Four techniques to stop burnout in its tracks

The Christmas break is an apt time to take stock of your stress levels

When Kelly Swingler first experienced burnout, she had no idea she was even stressed. "I had chronic back pain, headaches; I was being admitted to A&E. That went on for seven months... I didn't take a day off."

Swingler was a busy HR leader, juggling many conflicting demands. When she developed endometriosis and Crohn's disease and ended up having two operations in the space of 48 hours, she quit her job. But it wasn't until she was informed her replacement had died in her sleep while on a leadership residential that she recognised the huge impact burnout was having.

Burnout on the rise

Today, Swingler is a 'burnoutologist', TEDx speaker and author who works with organisations to prevent others from burning out. Her advice is in strong demand. Exact figures are hard to calculate, given burnout is not a medically diagnosed condition, but cases have undoubtedly risen steeply since the 1990s – with the World Health Organization officially recognising it as an occupational phenomenon in 2019, describing it as a "syndrome conceptualised as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed".

It's not just long hours

This definition might suggest workloads and excessive hours are the primary cause. But this is something of a "myth", says Craig Jackson, Professor of Occupational Health Psychology at Birmingham City University, with factors such as unfair treatment and poor recognition often at play. This was the case for Swingler. Her department constantly being treated as the poor relation was the overriding

driver in her breakdown, she reports. Jackson adds that burnout "is related to jobs but can also happen in other areas of life".

Competing project pressures

Nonetheless, it is the pressurised, multitasking nature of the world of project management that arguably presents a particular risk to its professionals. "You may be working

Signs to watch out for include irritability, tearfulness and changes in eating habits

on multiple projects... as such you may be 'giving your all' multiple times a day," points out Audrey Tang, Chartered Psychologist and author of *The Leader's Guide to Wellbeing*.

So how can project professionals and managers prevent this occurring?

1 Address the work itself

The most important preventative steps will involve making work 'good' in the first place. This won't just be about keeping an eye on workloads, says Jackson: "Effective steps involve organising work to make it productive, stimulating and challenging, but not too hard or impossible to do – and making the workplace less adversarial or less impossible to succeed in."

2 Make wellbeing a priority

Good sleep hygiene is essential, says Jackson. Employers should provide quality breaks and avoid long shifts and the use of too much overtime. It's all too common to overwork as deadlines loom, but this should be avoided as far as possible.

3 Take personal responsibility

Employees can't stay well without an environment that supports this. But, as individuals, we are ultimately accountable for our own wellbeing. Tang advises: "Timetable yourself into every day... Whether you use that time to meditate, take a class, read or simply have a cup of tea (while it's still hot)." Swingler advises people to "forget boundaries, create non-negotiables". She adds: "For every task that drains your energy and mood, do two things that energise you".

4 Watch for signs among others

Regular conversations will help managers spot the warning signs of burnout in colleagues, advises Neil Greenberg, psychiatrist at King's College London.

"It is important managers feel confident (through experience or training) having a mental health-focused conversation. There is lots of evidence that staff working for psychologically savvy managers have much better mental health and are more productive."

Signs to watch out for include: irritability, tearfulness, changes in eating habits, lapses in personal grooming, susceptibility to illness and even a slower walk. But remember: the symptoms vary, as do the causes.

Jenny Roper is a freelance journalist and editor

SEAN FLEMING/SHUTTERSTOCK

Will NISTA have the teeth to deliver government projects?

Tessa Neal considers how it can learn from the struggles of the IPA and NIC

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury confirmed plans for the National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority (NISTA), a merger of the Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA) and the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC). But can this new body succeed where others have struggled?

Will it have teeth?

NISTA will inherit the systemic barriers faced by the IPA and NIC, such as battling with competing voices on infrastructure across Whitehall; working with limited resources; dealing with skills shortages; rebuilding public trust; attempting to reduce bureaucracy; and challenging government's low risk appetite.

So, will NISTA truly be the game-changer the government needs or will it simply add another layer to an already complex system? Crucially, will it have the 'teeth' that the IPA and the NIC are lacking?

Success is conditional

We asked these questions of our network of seasoned project professionals. They believe that, properly implemented, NISTA can significantly enhance project delivery across the UK, but that officials must tread carefully and deliberately, addressing structural issues while setting clear priorities, implementing the following proposals to effectively lay the foundations for NISTA:

1 NISTA must be treated as a transformation programme with dedicated leadership, government must publicly name an experienced transformation specialist to do this, and this person must lead a steering group comprised of experts from the NIC and the IPA.

2 Focus on governance and ensure NISTA's objectives are clear. This will help to encourage ownership in projects and accountability.

3 Involve the skilled private sector in NISTA's creation. Government is focusing on improving its relationship with the private sector. Now is the perfect time to show government can take an active role as the convenor for infrastructure delivery.

Properly implemented, NISTA can significantly enhance project delivery across the UK

4 Review the shape and size of the Government Major Projects Portfolio to clarify strategic alignment over the next 12 months, ensuring NISTA is not trying to do too much.

5 Implement real-time, independent assurance mechanisms for better risk management.

6 Align NISTA's development with ongoing government reforms.

Smashing systemic barriers

Once NISTA is within its operational phase and has dealt with its teething problems, the government must spend the next few years acting to address the systemic barriers inherited from the NIC and the IPA, continuing to move against the short-termism that has hindered project delivery.

Government must build up its expertise, continuing to commit to the career paths set out by the IPA's project delivery capability framework and ensuring project experts are involved in the policy development stages of projects. When the financial outlook is less gloomy, cash should be injected into both NISTA and infrastructure spending budgets. After all, we can't hope to deliver good projects without high technical expertise, capacity and resources.

Trust must be prioritised. Government can learn a lot from Lord Maude's *Independent Review of Governance and Accountability in the Civil Service*. Officials should focus on cross-party collaboration and recognise that many projects' success is due to their benefits being designed for the country, not just the government. In the same vein, major decisions on projects, such as cancellations, must be scrutinised and contested by parliament.

Reform and reform again! Government and NISTA should continue to conduct consultations with stakeholders to understand what reforms are needed to improve processes and modernise these in line with the rapidly developing project landscape. We need to see flexible approaches to strengthen relations with businesses and stakeholders.

Finally, the government must be brave in its approach and empower NISTA to truly sink its teeth into project delivery.

Tessa Neal is Policy and Public Affairs Advisor at APM. For more information, read APM's guidance document on how to set up NISTA for success at bit.ly/4feXPmn

Cracking the project delivery nut

Sam Davey on projects' contribution to the Royal Ballet and Opera

On joining the Royal Ballet and Opera (RBO) in January 2023 as Head of Transformation, I was asked by Chief Executive Alex Beard to consider the learning we, in the world of project delivery, could take from the organisation's core business – making world-class ballet and opera for everyone. RBO is probably the busiest repertoire house in the world, juggling three or four shows a week on stage – plus two or three in the rehearsal rooms. The turnaround in the building is phenomenal, with teams of artists, creatives, technical and front-of-house staff working together to ensure that the curtain rises on time and as planned, day in and day out.

Bringing a creative vision to life

Production management at RBO is at all times focused on the effective management of risk. Kate Rooney, Head of Planning, is clear that it is about "balancing what is needed with what is achievable – with an unremitting focus on safety". Managing productions at RBO brings many unusual complexities; artists and directors are always developing new and spectacular ideas, many of which are technically and logistically highly challenging. But, as Will Harding, Deputy Director of Technical, Production and Costume, notes: "The production teams will always bring a creative mind to finding ways to facilitate the underlying creative vision – safely and within budget."

However, a creative mind also has to be a disciplined mind, and productions at RBO follow an over-arching and mandatory framework of production gates, which sets out the process from concept through to first night. This discipline is a vital part of RBO's

staging. During every show, all functions – from automated stage systems to complex programmed lighting and sound effects and the physical movement of props and scenery – are precisely timed and happen with movement and music cues. As RBO's Health and Safety Manager Alex Lucas says: "No one is allowed to do anything until the stage-management team green-light it – it's all operated a bit like air-traffic control."

A poor Cinderella?

When I compared this highly successful, well-disciplined and hugely collaborative way of working to the way our projects were being managed, I must admit that my assumption was that traditional project management at RBO was a bit of a Cinderella, taking a secondary role to the management and delivery of artistic productions. However, as my research continued,

Like Cinders, the work of project managers is being seen in a new light – and taking centre stage

it became clear that this was both too simplistic and too binary an assumption, and I developed hypotheses that I wished to put to the test.

First, projects start with the identification of a problem that needs to be solved – either something stops or changes, or they require the introduction of something new. This is not the case with our productions – they are RBO's raison d'être, so even if we are looking to put on a 'revolutionary' new opera or ballet, we are still operating within a familiar space, and indeed we have a clear mandate to innovate artistically.

Second, project teams are frequently dependent on RBO subject matter experts, who have a day job, whereas in a theatrical production, for the set-builder, costume maker, dancer or orchestra player, it is their day job. This means that projects are frequently calling on resources that may already be over-committed.

Third, whereas our creative programming is underpinned by a clear strategic vision and is part of a transparent, well-understood, long-term and corporately supported planning process, I found a number of projects within the portfolio that did not have this clarity of purpose and vision.

The right approach

The challenge is thus to try to recreate the conditions that so clearly contribute to success in production management – and translate them to project delivery. This has led to three clear learning points:

- The project prioritisation and approval process needed to align to strategic vision.
- The capacity and capabilities needed to deliver projects need to be identified and protected throughout the project life cycle.
- The effective management of change needs to be built into every project's DNA.

This approach is exemplified in one of the major projects: the upgrade of the stage elevator control system, which was undertaken in 2024 as part of RBO's technical estate renewal programme.

The six stage elevators are used daily for sets to be moved on and off stage and for key performance effects, such as the Christmas tree transformation in *The Nutcracker*. The old control system was installed in 1999 and was 10 years past its recommended life when it was decommissioned in August 2024. Replacing this system had become a vital organisational priority, but the complexity of delivery was huge

and highly time-sensitive, as there could be no down time during the artistic season.

The project team recognised that they needed to work with in-house subject matter experts to schedule the year-long project activities, fitting around the needs of the opera and ballet production schedules. Working collaboratively, they were then able to install and commission the new system in just under three weeks, ready to be used by the first production of the new season. Musa Halimeh, Programme Lead for the technical estate renewal programme, says: "We now adopt a single and consistent approach to all stage-related projects, being sensitive to the pressures and deadlines our artistic companies have to adhere to."

This year, our major Christmas production is *Cinderella*, and it is good to note that the work being undertaken by the project delivery teams at RBO is making a major contribution to the creation of magical entertainment for our audiences. Like Cinders herself, the work of project managers is being seen in a new light – and taking centre stage.

Sam Davey is Head of Transformation at the Royal Ballet and Opera

Professor Adam Boddison OBE

Tackling the world's 'wickedest' problems

APM's Chief Executive looks at the bigger picture

To mark my three-year anniversary as Chief Executive of APM, I recently shared some of my historic columns from *Project* on LinkedIn. This resulted in an 'inbox overload', with the most common question being akin to: what does all of this mean for us as a profession?

The overarching theme has to be the role of the project profession in tackling the world's 'wickedest' problems: complex social issues that are incredibly challenging to solve.

It's a sticky profession

One thing that distinguishes the project profession is its ability to bring together many areas of expertise. It might be considered the 'glue' that binds all other professions. This is important, because no one discipline or profession can address the world's wickedest problems. However, the project profession can be the pivotal tool for driving change and realising long-term societal benefits by harnessing the power of multiple professions.

So, if this power to drive change and transformation in our world exists, the obvious question is: why is this not happening already? There is no single reason, but part of the issue is that the project profession does not yet have the status it deserves. It is too often seen as administrative and bureaucratic, rather than strategic.

Society would be significantly advantaged by the widespread projectification of leadership, not least because publicly funded projects would be more likely to deliver their intended benefits. One way to achieve this is to have project management included as a core pillar of all MBA programmes, giving it an equivalent status to HR, finance and marketing for strategic leaders.

Weaving sustainability into every project

Some of the wickedest global issues are articulated by the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), from poverty and water security to human rights and environmental sustainability.

The project profession is a core part of the solution. At APM, we know from our surveys that Chartered

Part of the issue is that the project profession does not yet have the status it deserves

Project Professionals are more likely to factor environmental, social and governance measures into their projects from the outset, taking a built-in, rather than bolt-on, approach. Project professionals have a unique role in ensuring that sustainability is woven into the fabric of project planning, execution and delivery, which in turn drives innovation.

The scale and complexity of today's challenges require international collaboration across and beyond the project management community. APM has made significant strides in expanding its global presence and in growing its partnerships with other international organisations. This global outreach facilitates knowledge exchange and ensures that project professionals worldwide are aligned in their efforts.

Guardians of truth and quality

My previous column focused on the vital role of professional bodies like APM in a world of misinformation and disinformation. With the continued proliferation of unverified content across digital platforms, it is now more important than ever to ensure that project professionals have access to reliable, high-quality information. This will help them to be more effective in tackling wicked problems.

APM's role in maintaining standards and promoting continuous professional development also helps to protect the integrity of the profession, ensuring that project outcomes are based on sound, ethical principles that maintain public trust and ensure project success.

APM's strapline, 'Because when projects succeed, society benefits', underpins our vision for the future of the profession. Whether addressing global crises or driving innovation in business, the project profession has the potential to transform lives and improve the wellbeing of communities. By emphasising collaboration, sustainability, adaptability and ethical standards, project professionals are uniquely positioned to deliver solutions to the world's wickedest problems.

The project profession is at a critical juncture, but it is poised to play a central role in tackling the most complex global challenges. Through strategic leadership, continuous learning and a commitment to sustainability and collaboration, project professionals can help to build a better, more resilient future for all of us.

AWE NUCLEAR SECURITY TECHNOLOGIES

APM PROJECT MANAGEMENT AWARDS 2024

MEET THE WINNERS

The people and projects we celebrated this year underline the importance of the profession in transforming lives, from improved train journeys and flood mitigation to transitioning to greener energy and keeping workers safe. In fact, it's the emphasis on the people in projects that merits the biggest round of applause this year. A big thanks to our headline sponsor AWE for its support.

Overall Project of the Year Award & Transformation Project of the Year Award

Sponsored by

QINETIQ

Core Valley Lines Transformation Programme, Transport for Wales

Cardiff has a vibrant economy, with an anticipated 2.87% population growth by 2034, yet the nearby South Wales valleys are one of the most deprived areas in Europe. The Core Valley Lines (CVL) Transformation Programme, to be managed and delivered by new body Transport for Wales (TfW), was conceived to bring greater prosperity to the region. A £1.5bn investment was delivered to fund the electrification of the 170km CVL track; the installation of new signalling across the network, controlled from a new purpose-built integrated control centre; the introduction of £800m worth of new trains; upgrades to all CVL stations; and the construction of two new railway stations.

Overall Project of the Year Award and Transformation Project of the Year Award

Led by TfW's Rail Infrastructure Director Karl Gilmore, the programme sought a delivery partner from the private sector, with Amey and Keolis winning the 15-year, £5bn contract. The Craidd (Welsh for 'core') Alliance was established. This was an innovative and collaborative partnership between TfW, Amey Infrastructure Wales, Alun Griffiths Ltd, Balfour Beatty and Siemens.

The programme began in August 2018, and the CVL asset was transferred from Network Rail to TfW in March 2020. The programme baseline was set in June 2020, and the team has delivered against this, successfully achieving significant outputs including the construction of new depots, the introduction of new rolling stock, new station infrastructure and associated road construction.

The short-term outcomes and benefits of the programme include: the electrification of the Merthyr Tydfil, Aberdare, Treherbert, Cardiff and City lines; the entering into service of the first of the new fleet of trains, the Class 231 Stadler units; and the nine-month closure and subsequent reopening of the Treherbert line to fully remove the 100-year-old token exchange signalling system and replace it with new state-of-the-art signalling.

The judges were truly impressed, saying "the South Wales valleys' transformation through the Core Valley Lines programme stands as a testament to effective project management, innovation and collaborative governance. Facing a multitude of challenges, ranging from socioeconomic deprivation to global disruptions, the project team delivered a resilient, modernised rail network that promises long-term benefits for the region."

● **Read more about the Core Valley Lines programme on page 37**

Company of the Year Award

Company of the Year Award
MIGSO–PCUBED

Project management consultancy MIGSO-PCUBED is currently growing its cohort of UK project professionals from 300 to 500, with a strong focus on teamwork to deliver excellence in project delivery and outcomes. This is demonstrated through its work with client Mondelēz on its digital transformation project Camden, and with HM Government's project portfolio Atlas.

Innovating and sharing good practice are encouraged at company, team and individual levels. In 2024, MIGSO-PCUBED implemented Clayverest: an all-in-one digital PMO solution developed in-house that centralises road maps, risks, KPIs, actions and costs using live data across various systems.

The company has a three-phase change management framework, which works to build foundations and manage and sustain change. Its toolset has been designed to assess impact throughout the project life cycle and includes assessment of business impact, stakeholder group impact and individual impacts through persona mapping.

MIGSO-PCUBED supported Mondelēz's transformation, moving from long-standing manual tools to embracing digitalisation with new systems, leveraged data and resource reallocation. Using its three-phase approach, it increased readiness to drive adoption, built trust in new ways of working and shifted mindsets from 'doing' to 'creating'. This was achieved through clear accountabilities and leadership, inspired by organisational redesign.

Through its work with HM Government on its Atlas portfolio, MIGSO-PCUBED incorporated change management tools to unify disparate teams, break down cultural silos and align to common goals under a shared identity, creating a collaborative culture. Its new capability centre and operations manual ensured an effective transition to business-as-usual. Additionally, developing a common knowledge portal enabled a culture of sharing, empowering clients to take ownership through self-service.

The judges praised the company's "innovative award system for staff, which is designed to recognise and reward employees based on the company's core values and the successful delivery of projects. The emphasis on values and project delivery in the award criteria highlights the company's strategic focus on aligning individual performance with the broader organisational goals, ensuring that the workforce remains engaged, motivated and aligned with the company's mission."

Small to Medium Enterprise of the Year Award
Sponsored by

Ministry of Defence   de&s

Iconic Project Management

Iconic Project Management was founded in July 2018 by husband-and-wife duo Darren and Lizzie Hewitt. After 25 years leading construction projects and programmes for major blue-chip clients, Darren decided to start his own business offering construction project management services to clients across

the commercial spectrum. Over the six years since Iconic was founded, the business has grown significantly in terms of headcount, revenue and ambition; it now has a team of five project managers and achieves a turnover of £1.5m.

Iconic offers a supportive working environment, including its use of 'thinking days', whereby, on a quarterly basis, employees are encouraged to take a day to themselves, away from work and home, to give them space to think. The company explains: "It's effective for managing stress, sparks innovation and our employees really value having this headspace."

One such innovation is its new online project management resource, MiPM, to guide small business owners through delivering their own construction projects safely on time and on budget. It will give access to coaching by an Iconic project professional, and they will have the option to order specific project outputs to be produced by its project managers. MiPM will provide affordable project guidance to people who don't have the budget to hire a project professional and will increase capability and best practice.

The judges praised the company for its innovation, saying: "The quarterly thinking day is a great example of how Iconic is committed to encouraging innovation and good practice, which has resulted in an online tool, MiPM, a free tool for SMEs that can't afford to pay for a project manager – a great example of driving the reach of the profession."

Public Sector Organisation of the Year Award
Defence Equipment & Support

Defence Equipment & Support (DE&S) equips and supports the UK armed forces. It employs more than 12,000 people and delivers over 600 projects to support emerging threats and world events, including 27 in the Government Major Projects Portfolio. It works with armed forces and industry partners to deliver an annual programme that exceeds £12bn and delivers more than half of the UK's largest and most complex equipment projects.
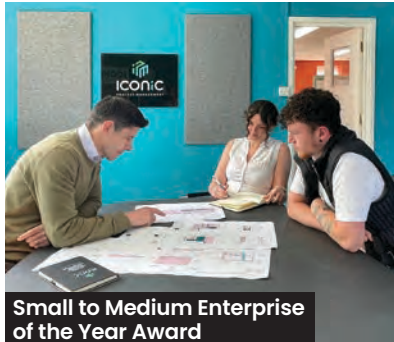
Small to Medium Enterprise of the Year Award

DE&S CEO Andy Start stated: "The world has radically changed, as have the threats we face, so we have got to change too. We need to get ahead of our adversaries today and be ready for the threats we will face tomorrow." Its 2025 strategy brings this into sharp focus by emphasising the importance of operating with its partners with a 'One Defence' mindset to remove barriers and simplify interfaces.

DE&S is at a pivotal moment in the delivery of this change programme, which will see it transition to an entirely new operating model by spring 2025. Its project delivery function is the largest in the UK civil service, and its ambitious change programme will drive operational excellence for defence, delivering faster procurement of better-integrated equipment and improved availability of key capabilities for the armed forces. The change has taken a bottom-up approach that gathered insights from over 1,000 people, both DE&S staff and its partners, in order to define seven key development areas that will help shape its target culture.

The judges found that DE&S's "sophisticated project environment,

robust training and career development programmes, and strong commitment to innovation and sustainability stand out. The organisation's ability to manage complex defence projects in a challenging geopolitical landscape, coupled with its proactive approach to change management and project assurance, underscores its excellence in project delivery. The strategic vision and effective leadership further enhance their credentials as leaders in the field. Overall, DE&S exemplifies the best practices in public sector project management, making a significant impact on national security and public service."

Engineering, Construction and Infrastructure Project of the Year Award
Bovarius Renewable Natural Gas Project, Shell

Shell's second dairy-to-renewable natural gas (RNG) project, Bovarius, is part of a programme to build a new, sustainable and circular business. RNG has a lower life-cycle carbon intensity than traditional natural gas, and its life cycle creates a circular economy while reducing harmful emissions in dairy farm operations. The Bovarius project was completed 20 days ahead of schedule and under budget. It exceeded production plans and had an excellent safety record.

The 910 Portfolio comprises three greenfield dairy-to-RNG projects in the US, which have received final investment decision approvals. Each of these projects seeks to convert dairy manure to RNG.

Engineering, Construction and Infrastructure Project of the Year Award

Social Project of the Year Award

Manure from 17,000 milking cows is collected by the dairy and pumped into the asset, instead of being pumped into open-air lagoons, and mixed in two large concrete digester tanks. As the micro-organisms within the manure continue to break down the waste, gas is produced and captured. The gas is cleaned up to remove sulphur and CO_2 and results in biomethane that is compressed and sold into a natural gas pipeline.

Bovarius has the capacity to deliver 400,000 MMBtu of RNG per year. The RNG produced displaces diesel fuel in heavy haul trucks (around 30 million litres per year) and the process to create it reduces greenhouse gas emissions from dairy operations. The RNG product is assessed with a negative carbon intensity score, and the operating facility removes over 80,000 metric tonnes of CO_2 equivalent each year.

Across the 910 Portfolio, project professionals found innovative ways to meet project challenges, including weekly "hot potato" discussions on the issues giving them problems. This allowed real-time learnings to be shared, unfiltered and with full context from the people working through those issues.

The judges praised Shell's pioneering work: "The rigours of Shell and its strong approach to project management are clear, together with particular challenges where new stakeholders and physical areas are being approached and engaged. The project brought clear benefits both short and long term, together with developing a team which will continue to bring the learning to future projects."

Social Project of the Year Award
Sponsored by

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The Scholarship Programme, Royal Commission for AlUla

The Scholarship Programme aims to transform AlUla, Saudi Arabia, into a cultural, heritage, and eco-tourism hub, enhancing local educational and professional opportunities. A unique governance model supports this initiative, allowing flexibility for students studying abroad and providing extensive pre-departure training through the AlUla Language Institute. The project has successfully integrated over 1,000 students, fostering a skilled workforce committed to regional growth.

From its inception, the project was tasked with a formidable challenge: to develop a local workforce that could drive the region's ambitions. Scholarship aimed to balance gender and specialisation diversity, ensuring equal participation from local boys and girls, which underscored a progressive approach to educational development.

A distinctive feature of the Royal Commission for AlUla's approach was its governance model, which provided robust support systems that are rare in scholarship projects. For instance, it allowed female students studying abroad to be accompanied by either a sister or their mother, reflecting a deep understanding of cultural sensitivities and family dynamics.

The project has significantly exceeded its original expectations by nurturing a generation of young professionals adept in fields pivotal to the region's strategic development goals. This initiative has not only prepared students for global academic

and professional arenas, but also ensured their successful reintegration into AlUla's local economy with enhanced capabilities. It has also significantly enhanced the project team's capabilities in managing large-scale, multicultural educational initiatives. Skills in project management, cross-cultural communication and stakeholder engagement have been particularly refined.

The judges found this to be an impressive project with global impact: "A well-structured, inclusive approach with clear strategic intent; with good focus on the growth/opportunities for local people as well as international opportunities; supporting family and cultural dynamics. It maximised national and international expertise to develop eco-tourism and support local communities while establishing an international destination." What's more, its "immediate outcomes are impressive with high achievement both academically and personally".

Technology Project of the Year Award & Innovation in Project Management Award
Sponsored by

KBR

Intelligent Project Prediction; Unlocking the Power of Artificial Intelligence Capability, MIGSO–PCUBED

Intelligent Project Prediction (IPP) is an innovative and technology-based project, a collaboration between MIGSO-PCUBED, greyfly.ai and DHL. Recent advancements have unlocked the power of artificial intelligence (AI) to support data-driven decisions, to improve efficiency in project management and to improve project outcomes, and the IPP platform uses advanced analytics and machine learning to predict project outcomes to enable better risk focus, improve decision-making and enhance project management maturity.

Programme of the Year Award

The project was initiated by DHL Supply Chain UK, which manages a portfolio of multiple project types, including construction, business change and new technology. It was finding it challenging to consistently deliver projects to planned budgets and timescales with its traditional project management methodologies, so engaged MIGSO-PCUBED to form an integrated team of data and project specialists to use the IPP platform to reduce the gap between initial plans and budgets and the final delivery.

The intermediate insights and the deployed interventions made significant improvements to the measured quality of the data. At the end of the project, the level of data assessed as poor quality had reduced from 78% to 9%. This improvement in data quality, together with refinement to the AI model in IPP, delivered forecasting that accurately predicted a project's overspend to an accuracy of 95%. This led to a set of focused interventions that resulted in the number of projects exceeding budgetary targets reducing from 33% to 6%, and the average overspend from the original budget reducing from 74% to 33%. Combined, this project avoided overspend of original budgets by 22%.

This project claims to be one of the first to use AI to predict project performance, provide insights into projected overruns and drive organisational change from these insights. The judges found this to be a "really fascinating project and a view to the future of project management's use of AI in performance prediction".

Programme of the Year Award
The Building Safety Regulator Programme, Health and Safety Executive, PA Consulting and Codec

Dame Judith Hackitt's report into the 2017 Grenfell tragedy exposed how the regulatory system covering high-rise and complex buildings was not fit for purpose. Following this, the Building Safety Act 2022 tasked the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) with establishing a major programme to design and deliver the new Building Safety Regulator (BSR). Collaborative working between HSE, external partners and government departments led to a new regulatory organisation underpinned by eight public-facing digital services to be successfully delivered to fixed legislative deadlines within two years.

To do this, a major programme was established, made up of an in-house team and an external digital delivery partner, onboarded in early 2023. The programme's mission was to design and deliver a new regulatory organisation under the highest levels of public and ministerial scrutiny. Its services, which have been implemented in the past 18 months, enable: accountable persons to register the details of 12,200 high-rise buildings in England (now published on a public register); around 550 building control applications per year to be assessed by the BSR; around 4,000 building inspectors to register with the BSR; and all 1.3 million residents of higher-risk buildings in England to contact the BSR directly for help.

The programme combined agile methodologies with user-centred regulatory service design, and always aimed to achieve the "minimum viable product", avoiding gold-plating and allowing for optimal resource reallocation, and created common components that enable economies of scale. These methods enabled the programme to move quickly, launching the first online registration service 12 weeks after onboarding the technology supplier in 2023. Most importantly, the programme delivered to legislative requirements on time and within budget. The new high-rise building registration service achieved the estimate of 12,000 registrations in six months, enabled by an innovative cross-departmental effort to listen intently to industry immediately post-launch and turn issues into functionality changes or updated communications.

The judges said this was a "strong submission with a clear purpose and long-term benefit, delivered on time and within budget" and "a transformative programme with impact long into the future".

APM Sustainability Award
Sponsored by

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Schools Water Strategy, Department for Education

The Schools Water Strategy team supports schools and their local communities to become more resilient to flooding. The programme is split into three main workstreams: SuDS (Sustainable Drainage Systems), PFR (Property Flood Resilience) and the EA (Environment Agency) Partnership. Each workstream manages a series of individual projects aimed at preventing and mitigating the impact of flooding on schools, prioritising nature-based solutions, so providing an additional educational benefit to schools. The projects are delivered in collaboration with schools, Lead Local Flood Authorities, water companies and charities to ensure they are both environmentally and economically sustainable.

The most important benefits of the programme include protecting educational sites through green solutions, as well as doors, gates and barriers (grey measures), which are often used in combination to maximise protection and mitigate the flooding experienced by schools. This helps to keep them viable and reduces the likelihood that they will experience significant damage, resulting in the need to rebuild.

There is also an additional educational benefit of undertaking sustainable measures; namely, schoolchildren are given the opportunity to learn about climate change in practical outdoor settings. In addition, the green infrastructure benefits provide increased green space to schools situated in urban areas. The estimated benefits of £70m will be realised over the next decade by reducing flood damage. The strategy (PFR, SuDS and the EA Partnership) is on target to deliver its Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy commitment of 800 schools by 2026.

The judges found that "there is thorough, persuasive evidence of embedding project management processes to support the outcome (benefits tracking etc), and the co-benefits of nature-based solutions in a learning-based environment are compelling". They also noted "very good outcomes and benefits through nature-based solutions, as well as other barrier measures".

PMO of the Year Award
AlphaPlus Project Management Community, AlphaPlus Consultancy Ltd

AlphaPlus Consultancy is a project-driven, small-size education service consultancy focused on a diverse range of projects in standards, assessment and certification. It has grown rapidly to a turnover of £8.5m and 60 employees. Although project management is not its core business, the value of its PMO team is recognised, with money, resources and time invested into developing the PMO team from six project managers in 2020 to 15 now.

In the past three years, the PMO team has successfully delivered 105 projects globally, ranging from standards and assessment to certification. It has matured into adopting agile project management

APM Sustainability Award

methods to better collaborate with software partners to develop digital assessments. AlphaPlus is considered to be a leader in delivering on-screen assessments, securing contract extensions of two multimillion-pound programmes for on-screen national standardised adaptive assessments in UK schools.

The biggest challenge for the PMO was coping with the steep learning curve as AlphaPlus moved away from traditional paper exams in the development of innovative, digital, on-screen assessments. "Balancing the race between innovating and meeting the milestones and delivery deadlines was challenging and required our PMO to integrate appropriate project management methods like agile to collaborate effectively with our digital developers," it said.

The judges found it to be "an evolving PMO that has played a significant role in the expansion of AlphaPlus over recent years. The strong focus on people was particularly good to see, with homegrown talent coming through the ranks, including several apprentices, with very low levels of churn. This is an aspect others could learn from. Good focus on innovation and introducing digital ways of working to automate processes. It is excellent to see such strong board-level support. Well done; it will be fascinating to see what you have built in a few years' time."

Safe Project Management Award
Sponsored by

Two Million Construction Hours Without a Lost Time Injury on HMNB Devonport 10 Dock Redevelopment, Babcock International Group

Babcock International Group's Major Infrastructure Programme (MIP) was established to deliver a portfolio of projects to design and construct facilities and infrastructure at the Devonport Royal Dockyard. The MIP 10 Dock Redevelopment Project is delivering an *Astute* class submarine overhaul facility. The project has completed all enabling works, including demolition of existing buildings and cranes, services removal, roads and networks enhancements, structural stabilisation and a range of enabling works. Since 2020, over two million construction hours have been achieved within the Construction, Design and Management Regulations (CDM) compliant site so far, and all without a single lost time injury.

Babcock owns and operates Devonport Royal Dockyard, within which the 10 Dock CDM site sits. The site is fully within the nuclear licensed site, adjacent to nuclear submarine maintenance facilities and a non-tidal basin that supports both active and decommissioned nuclear submarines, and a number of tidal warship berths.

Safe Project Management Award

Chartered Project Professional of the Year Award
Charlotte Blewitt, National Highways
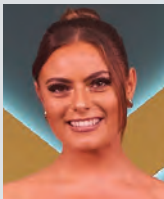
Charlotte Blewitt is accountable for supporting nationally significant infrastructure projects in the identification and embedment of efficiencies at National Highways. This work has been vital in supporting the aims of the latest Road Investment Strategy to budget, on time and to a high quality. "Striving for continuous improvement, transformation and maturation of National Highways' processes and ways of working is a strong passion in all of the work I do," she says.

As Project Manager, she has delivered the Delivering Efficient Projects (DEP) programme. This initiative had three core aims: reducing risk, reducing cost and increasing confidence. She was accountable for engaging with various stakeholders across the business and supply chain to identify efficiencies and opportunities on projects to reduce outturn cost and bring projects back in line with their funding commitments. She has led DEP through an end-to-end life cycle, engaging and achieving buy-in from project managers and senior leaders to drive behavioural change towards efficiency management. Successes have included identifying 128 efficiencies and realising financial savings to her organisation.

Blewitt promotes inclusivity as an active member of the Cross-Government Gender Network and National Highways' Leading Women Forum, and as a wellbeing and engagement champion for her divisional team. She also secured £10,000 of social value funding to a local cancer treatment clinic, engaging with The Christie NHS Foundation Trust to provide a long-standing, functional and fit-for-purpose clinic for people in the community.

The judges said: "Charlotte is an impressive talent and one to watch for the future. Her enthusiasm and passion for her development, getting the projects back on track and learning lessons were impressive."

Project Professional of the Year Award
Harriet Brennan, Deloitte

Harriet Brennan established Deloitte's UK Office of GenAI (OGAI) to drive the use of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) tools across

Babcock, supported by its delivery partner (a Costain and Mott MacDonald joint venture), the main works contractor (a Kier and BAM Nuttall joint venture) and a range of design framework suppliers, seeks to achieve and maintain the highest standards in the management of safety, health and environment (SHE). As well as SHE policy, Babcock has developed a range of Devonport strategic objectives, which integrate safety across the organisation. These objectives set a standard to ensure colleagues at all levels of the organisation are empowered to speak up and intervene, and can expect to be heard, invested in and trusted.

The enabling facilities provided to date have been delivered on time and are safe by design, achieved through a way of working safely within an operational military environment. They reflect industry and enterprise best practice, setting a foundation for the future bulk construction activities. The judges commented that: "Babcock has demonstrated a strong attitude towards recognition of safety, which will drive the culture and behaviour towards safety across the organisation."

Project Management Challenge Award

Project Management Challenge Award
Synergy – Babcock International Group, APM South Wales and West of England Regional Network

Team Synergy (Babcock International, Devonport) worked with Ash Rescue Centre, a Dartmouth-based charity, providing a permanent and holistic retirement home for horses, donkeys and other animals, while creating and sustaining habitats that encourage wildlife, birds and native plant species.

Ash Rescue had no way of monitoring or tracking sponsorships, and hence the team delivered a customer relationship management system which links to its website and payment system. The charity has already reaped multiple benefits from the implementation of the new software and has seen a major increase in sponsors since project handover.

The judges found the project to have a "strong focus on benefits realisation and impact on the charity's bottom line and, by extension, the wellbeing of the horses".

the company, managing governance across UK workstreams and global counterparts. OGAI's short-term benefit was developing a bespoke GenAI tool called PairD, which saved more than 10,000 working days in 2024. Long-term objectives included deploying GenAI tools to clients and contributing to the AI for Good initiative.

Brennan implemented a fortnightly governance process and detailed plan management to monitor progress and achieve success, and her role was instrumental in delivering a GenAI platform to 75,000 internal users, as well as clients and charity partners. The programme was completed on time and within budget, acting as a key success story for future internal transformation projects.

The judges said "Harriet's project showcases her exceptional project management skills, innovative approaches and commitment to delivering high-quality results that benefit the organisation, the team, customers and wider stakeholders. Her strategic approach, effective communication and leadership were key factors in overcoming challenges and achieving the project's objectives."

Emerging Project Professional of the Year Award
Kiara Orchard, Sellafield
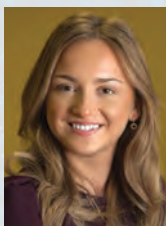
Having completed a project manager degree apprenticeship in 2023, and having since progressed to Assistant Project Manager, Kiara Orchard now owns key work packages across multiple projects. She has also played a leading role in several company initiatives as a committed volunteer. Orchard supports the Calder Heat Exchanger Deplanting project, delivering the removal of six heat exchangers (weighing 360 tonnes and over 23m high) from the original reactor buildings. She has led critical work to characterise the heat exchangers and ground investigations to initiate the design of the Heat Exchanger Laydown Slab. She has also led on implementing Urgent Access Sanitary Supplies across Sellafield.

The judges said: "Kiara's extra duties within her organisation were very impressive, as well as her list of accolades. She is a project manager who will do wonders for our profession!"

● **Read our interview with Kiara on page 58**

Donna Sinnick

Emma De Vita meets Babcock International Group's Chief Delivery Officer, who's on a mission to simplify

"I would cause trouble if I was bored," says Donna Sinnick with a grin – and I don't doubt her. Luckily, she keeps busy.

Babcock International Group's newly appointed Chief Delivery Officer joined the aerospace, defence and security multinational three years ago, tasked with setting up a global project management organisation. The business already had 2,000 project and programme management professionals, but there was no one pulling it all together.

"I was looking for the synergies and the frameworks, and thinking about competencies and how we work across the organisation to get that free flow of people across the breadth of the organisation," she explains. Sinnick evidently made a success of it, expanding the project management function, and adding procurement, supply chain, quality, facilities management and IT to her portfolio. Her new job title is comparable to the COO position in other organisations, and she reports direct to Babcock's Group CEO, David Lockwood. It's a reflection of how project and programme management is being welcomed to the top table.

She says: "The grounding in project management is what absolutely sets the foundation for everything. So as long as you've got that ability to understand, question, pull apart what you're being told and ask intelligent questions – and sometimes probably the obvious questions – you can turn your hand to most things."

Her portfolio of programmes covers everything from a Royal Navy dockyard major programme on the south coast to training the Metropolitan Police. Moving between programmes suits Sinnick down to the ground; she was raised by parents serving in the British Army, who travelled the world. "I'm an official army brat," she jokes. The military is in her DNA and it's why she has spent her entire career working in the defence sector – with 24 years working on military aircraft at Cobham before joining Babcock.

Sinnick stumbled across project management 25 years ago. "I remember having some challenges between the customer, the contract and the production and operations teams. I drew out a fairly basic flow of work that we needed to do, just trying to pull everyone together and ask: does everyone agree? Suddenly, I was the bee's knees of project management," she says. Happily for her, the business was looking to grow the area, and Sinnick jumped at the chance to get involved.

"The ability to stay at surface level but understand what it is and how you pull it all together just always really interested me"

BEN WRIGHT

The Big Interview

It gave her the ability to have a high-level view of lots of different, complex projects and programmes and the people working on them. "I've always worked in big organisations, and the ability to stay at surface level but understand what it is and how you pull it all together just always really interested me," she says.

"The whole point of project management is to overcome the complexity," she continues. That's easier said than done. How does she do it? "I'm a massive believer in simplification. So, if I can't describe something in the simplest possible way, it probably means I haven't quite unpicked it enough," she explains. "The simpler we can make things, the more people understand."

The biggest challenge of project management, she believes, is getting thousands of people to understand huge projects in the simplest possible way. "There's no doubt that there are huge complexities, but it doesn't mean that everyone in the project, programme or organisation has to understand those in a level of detail. So, how do you pull it apart enough that people understand and can be pointed in the right direction, but still allow space for the specialist to drive forwards?"

Being able to marry the complex with the simple requires honesty and humility, explains Sinnick. This means respecting someone's detailed subject matter knowledge, but also asking them to appreciate her role of stitching together a project. "I respect the position of each of the people in the team, but I have them respect what my role is," she says. They can help her get under the skin of a project, but it's her job to have the bird's-eye view.

Complexity is just one of the chewy aspects of project management she likes to get her teeth into. Another is finding the best people. "I love getting into an organisation and finding those secret little ninjas… and I recognise not everyone has to go up a classic hierarchical route. Sometimes there are people buried in the organisation who are ready to be picked out and elevated really quickly."

It's a tactic she used to great effect during one of the pivotal moments of her career, when she was working on a highly complex aerospace defence contract with multiple customers at the same time as things started going tragically wrong with Boeing 737 MAX aircraft, in 2019. While Sinnick didn't work on the Boeing 737 MAX programme itself, her programme did need sign off from people who were working on it. She had twice turned down working on the programme, but her boss eventually told her to step up.

"Sometimes opportunities come even if you don't see it as an opportunity. I didn't want that role. I was in a fantastic world. I was loving my job. I was loving the team that I was working with all the way through to the customer, the supply chain. I thought that moment was pretty catastrophic, but actually it became one of my proudest moments and one of my pivotal moments. I wouldn't be at Babcock now if it wasn't for that, because of the level of confidence that it gave me, having said no," she reflects.

Sinnick rebuilt a fractured team, finding "the superstars who were hidden in that organisation, pulling them out, restructuring and then driving the programme forwards by simplifying it".

It was a lesson in pushing herself beyond her comfort zone – and in saying no. "The point is: you can say no – you don't have to take every opportunity – but if it gets to a stage where the business needs you to take a role or go in a new direction, my advice would be, at that point, go for it," she says. "It was quite flattering, because someone had actively not only asked me, but told me that this is the role that I'm going to be doing. They must have great confidence in my ability."

"I love getting into an organisation and finding those secret little ninjas"

CV: DONNA SINNICK

EMPLOYMENT
2024 Chief Delivery Officer, Babcock International Group, leading project management, procurement and supply chain, quality, facilities and IT functions
2021–2023 Joins Babcock International Group as Group Director of Project Management; later becomes Chief Programme Management Officer
2006–2021 Works at Cobham Mission Systems as Project Planning & Control Lead, later taking roles as Project Manager, Programme Manager, Programme Director, Vice President of Programme Management and KC-46 Senior Programme Director
2002–2006 Project Manager, Flight Refuelling Ltd

EDUCATION
2016 Essentials of Leadership, London Business School
2010–2012 Business administration and management, the Open University
2000–2002 HNC, production engineering, Bournemouth University

BEN WRIGHT

"If you're really invested in and really love and enjoy what you're doing, then I do believe opportunities will turn up"

of your daily tasks as sand in a jar, with pebbles and rocks as the big strategic changes that you need to get into your programme or project. "If you start with the sand, you've got no time left to drive the rocks."

Talking of rocks and pebbles, our conversation neatly turns to her life outside of work. Sinnick lives on the south coast of England, very close to the beach, where she can indulge her love of sea kayaking ("fair weather" only, she says, in the sunny summer mornings before the tourists arrive). Her big passion, though, is Formula One. When we speak in November, she has just returned from a trip to Austin to watch racing at the Circuit of the Americas. She's fascinated not only by the inspirational British drivers, but by the technical side of the sport. "There's so much to learn in the way we deliver projects at pace, because ultimately that's what people need," she says. "They turn around major technical design changes through all the testing and onto a platform within no time at all."

Her love of cresting the waves is reflected in the way she approaches her career. "If you're really invested in and really love and enjoy what you're doing, then fundamentally I do believe opportunities will either turn up or you'll naturally find them." Yet, she warns early-career professionals not to be fixated on moving too quickly. The danger is that they won't learn the important lessons they need to digest along the way. "You'll get to a certain level in your career where you can't backfill that knowledge and experience... It's great picking up bigger programmes, but that grounding is so important."

Listen to Donna's interview with APM Podcast on Apple Podcasts, Spotify or via web browser

I ask her whether she has crafted a particular leadership style, and she reveals that early on in her career, she listened to some poor advice to be harder and more direct in the way she dealt with people ("kind of shouty", she says). "It was everything I'm not. I remember for about a month trying to be someone really different to who I am... I got to the end of that month and I thought, even if this is working, I am utterly miserable because it's not me... I've naturally moved to what's core to me."

Working in a male-dominated environment in a traditionally macho sector has not created any setbacks for her, says Sinnick. Because she doesn't want to have the loudest voice in the room, she likes to conduct a little stakeholder management ahead of a particularly emotive meeting. By this, she means making sure she's aligned with other people in the room, knowing that someone will have her back no matter what happens (even if it's something as seemingly innocuous as people talking over her).

"Allyship is important, particularly if you're genuinely stretching yourself and moving through your career or through a difficult project or programme. It doesn't need to be overt. You just need to know that if you can't say something or you don't want to say something, someone else is going to pick it up for you," she says.

When it comes to the technical side of project management, Sinnick's biggest piece of advice is "to trust the data". In a really difficult situation, she will "move straight back to the centre and go into the data". As long as you're measuring and monitoring appropriately and correctly, then the data has "no reason to lie. So if something under the surface is telling you that there's a problem, you do need to dig into it," she explains.

Also, don't put things off or ignore things in your work, she counsels. Think

GRENFELL

What can we learn from the Grenfell Tower disaster?

POOR PROCUREMENT, FRAGMENTED THINKING, INADEQUATELY ENFORCED REGULATIONS AND LACK OF SCRUTINY IN CONTRACTS: THE CAUSES OF THE GRENFELL TOWER DISASTER BEAR SOBER ANALYSIS, NOT LEAST FOR A PROJECT PROFESSION WHERE ACCOUNTABILITY IS JOB NUMBER ONE. RICHARD YOUNG INVESTIGATES

It is 14 June 2017. The emergency services take their first call about a fire at Grenfell Tower at 12.54am. By 6am, live images of the ruined 24-storey residential block smouldering in the heart of London – in one of the country's richest boroughs – stun the nation. During the day, the scale of the tragedy becomes clear: 72 people, including 18 children, are dead. Hundreds more are injured, traumatised and homeless.

Several attempts have been made to understand what happened and what should be done to prevent a repeat – notably Dame Judith Hackitt's independent review, *Building a Safer Future*, and the Grenfell Public Inquiry, whose final report was published in September. (Its first report, from 2019, focused on the fire itself.)

Dame Judith Hackitt gives evidence to the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee

The question was, as the inquiry put it, how "in 21st-century London… a reinforced concrete building, itself structurally impervious to fire, turned into a death trap that would enable fire to sweep through it in an uncontrollable way in a matter of a few hours". The answer, in simple terms, was the installation of new cladding as part of a refurbishment project between 2013 and 2016. This turned out to be highly flammable, allowing flames to jump from one flat and floor to the next.

"The project management failings have been well documented by the inquiry and they make for hard reading," says Gill Hancock, APM's Head of Technical Content. "But at the heart of the issue for the profession lies one simple concept: competence."

Experience and expertise

A search of the inquiry report yields scores of results for "project manager". But in almost all cases, those mentioned had little or no specific project management training or experience. They were not competent.

For example, in 2013, the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation (TMO, the body charged with running the building) recruited a "project manager", Claire Williams, whose key skill was "resident relations" (even though the report severely criticised resident stakeholder engagement). Her qualification? A diploma in maintenance management.

The inquiry concluded: "She considered herself to be the TMO's project manager for the refurbishment, although there was some confusion about who, if anyone, was formally acting in that capacity." In other words, while some witnesses spoke to Williams being serious about her job, the actual role of "project manager" was unfulfilled.

The report also cites Paul Dunkerton ("working as a freelance project manager for the TMO") as the point-person for negotiations around the project brief and budget. His opposite number at Rydon, the main contractor, was also not

"The failings were baked into the whole approach, especially around cost and procurement"

an experienced project manager – and left in 2015. Rydon promoted Simon O'Connor to "project manager", but, says the report, "his role... had been effectively site manager".

At Harley, the cladding installation company, the "project manager" was listed as 25-year-old Ben Bailey – son of the owner Ray Bailey – who had no experience on high-rise buildings and was not qualified beyond an NVQ in construction site management. "My role as project manager, as I understood it, wasn't to be inspecting [compliance with regulations]," he told one hearing. "As I explained to you, I did snagging."

A veteran project manager in the built environment, John Ryan is co-founder of project data business SymTerra and has spoken out about the failings at Grenfell.

He says the biggest single lesson from the disaster is not to use project managers who are unsuitable for a job of this complexity.

"A genuine project manager understands change, how to manage risk and how to properly assess things," he says. "And when they don't know something, they know to put their hand up and say: 'Look, this isn't something I've done before, we need more support.'" This sits at the very heart of the idea of 'competence': being brave enough to say when you aren't.

But, as Hancock adds, "Even with the most amazing project manager in one of those organisations, you might not have been able to change what happened. The failings were baked into the whole approach, especially around cost and procurement."

Purpose and process

The refurbishment project does look incredibly complex to a layman's eyes (even more so when blame was being apportioned – see box, page 35). But the very purpose of the project, and its sponsors' commitment levels, contributed to the siloed decision-making that was inevitable, given the lack of a proper project management function.

The refurb was triggered in part because residents complained of cold and damp in the building. (The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea's

Top: Grenfell survivor Natasha Elcock speaking to the media. Above: the final report of the Grenfell Public Inquiry. Below: a silent march held in 2024 in memory of the victims

(RBKC's) desire to raise property value in the borough by regenerating less attractive sites might also have motivated the work.) New windows and insulation – protected by rainscreen cladding – were the solution. But, based on the inquiry's findings, the process to design, procure and commission the works was riven with compromises.

"If you make a decision [on different cladding products, for example] you become a designer," says Hancock. "And if you don't have competence to fulfil that role properly, don't take the decision. But because they didn't have proper contracts in place, because they didn't have any project structures, reporting or change controls in place – no one higher up the chain even knew about the changes for quite a while.

"There was no scope for delivery and no risk management. Everything was done on letters of intent, so the contractual piece was just missing," she adds. "No one knew who carried which risks, and there was little or no accountability."

It's hard to imagine qualified project managers making such fundamental mistakes. "Processes and procedures are so important," says Ryan. "Clear, simple rules will make up for a lot of the problems. But if you have a complex process, poor decision-making, unsuited or ill-equipped people – the points of failure just multiply. That's why we send

PROJECT TIMELINE

Even a top-level timeline of events for the Grenfell refurbishment project highlights unrealistic budgetary decisions, bad stakeholder engagement and poor procurement practices.

DECEMBER 2011

TMO asked by RBKC to identify housing estates for renovation. Grenfell Tower is picked at an estimated cost of £6m.

MARCH 2012

The TMO reports "overwhelming support" from residents.

JANUARY 2013

Leadbitter, the proposed contractor, estimates a cost of £11.3m.

JULY 2013

The TMO requests that the budget for the renovation work be increased to £9.7m. The council puts the contract out to tender "to ensure… value for money".

JANUARY 2014

The revised Grenfell planning application, including the use of zinc cladding, is approved.

people on APM courses to get structured thinking into their day job. It's important."

The report spells out the complacency: "Any substantial construction project needs to be managed by or on behalf of the client, and unless the client has the necessary experience and skill to undertake that task, it will usually appoint a professionally qualified project manager. In the present case Artelia [the principal contractor] would have been willing to act as project manager, but the TMO persuaded itself that it could perform that function itself."

Later, the report adds: "In this case, the cost of employing an independent professional project manager would have been money well spent." So why was an amply qualified project manager at Artelia, Philip Booth, limited to the role of employers' agent? The answer seems to be budget.

Realistic budgeting

The inquiry's report includes dozens of pages tracking the financial planning behind the refurbishment project. In 2012, the project was costed at £7.8m – and RBKC assumed that the £1.8m shortfall from its budget would be met by the TMO's capital programme. But as the scope evolved, the estimate rose to £9.6m, and by the start of 2013, one of the quantity surveyors working for original contractor, Leadbitter, raised that to £12.6m.

Will the Building Safety Act go further?

Rosalind Thorpe

One response to the tragedy, the Building Safety Act 2022 (BSA) is explicit about expectations on professionals in the industry. **"It introduced new practices to raise levels of competence, building safety and consistency,"** explains Rosalind Thorpe, Director of Education and Standards at CIOB. **"This places a legal duty on anyone in the wider construction and building industry to ensure those employed or appointed by them are competent, or are supervised by someone who is competent."**

The BSA has introduced two new statutory roles for projects relevant to the Act: principal contractor and principal designer. Project managers can appoint these positions, but they must understand their roles and legal obligations; project managers must also ensure that the client accepts its legal responsibilities before commencing work. In fact, the "project manager" is not in a duty holder role – they're there to support those who do have legal responsibilities as duty holders.

APM's Gill Hancock is Vice-Chair of the Industry Competence Steering Group under the Building Safety Regulator. As part of the work of the steering group, competence frameworks across the built environment are being developed, including one for project managers in the built environment.

Gill Hancock

"The new BS8670 core criteria for building safety in competence frameworks ultimately means we'll all have a common standard when it comes developing competence frameworks and embedding building safety," she says. As the new frameworks are rolled out, competence will increase, "but you can't expect people to be assessed against a brand-new standard straight off". As a result, qualifications including chartered status will serve as credentials to demonstrate competence until the new assessment for project managers in the built environment kicks in fully in 2027.

Rydon is chosen as the preferred contractor, "scoring the highest on both price and quality".

TMO sends out a list of requested savings – over a third comes from the use of a new type of cladding, ACM.

Work completed at Grenfell.

MARCH 2014

JUNE 2014

JULY 2014

DECEMBER 2015

JULY 2016

JUNE 2017

Work begins at Grenfell.

Grenfell residents petition the council over the running of the refurb; a review later praises the TMO, Rydon and the council for the management of the project.

Grenfell Tower is destroyed by fire, leading to the deaths of 72 people.

Even after the project was rebooted in May 2013 – which, the inquiry concluded, involved "manipulation of the procurement process" – the need to cut costs was paramount. And one focus throughout had been lowering the cost of the cladding.

"Clients need to understand the true costs of projects and to find the relevant funds, rather than beat down the price to fit a budget," says Ryan. "The decision to change cladding to 'value engineer' down costs was made without any understanding of the properties of the materials and the significant risks they introduced."

Tender winner Rydon scored highest for quality, and was lowest on price. But as Ryan points out, while the tender was weighted 40% price and 60% quality, with 34% awarded to the lowest price, this gave them a 4% advantage against the highest price tenderer, which leaves the field open to low-ball bids. "You've got a lot of tick-box stuff in written submissions," he says. "And on the technical side, the parameters are often going to be very similar. But that means being lowest price is often going to be the deciding factor in the ranking."

In any case, the report concludes, the TMO never asked for more money despite being told explicitly that even Rydon's low bid was higher than the likely budget. Inevitably, sub-contractors and suppliers would simply have to find new ways to save money through "value engineering".

Communication breakdown

The inquiry concluded that communication between RBKC and the TMO had been patchy for some time, leading to misunderstandings and gaps around fire safety issues. With a limited central project authority, the web of communications between parties, often completely siloed, was a recipe for disaster. "Companies in the finance industry get fined for using off-system communication tools," says Ryan. "A bank needs to know who said what to whom and when, and there's an audit trail in place. We're moving slowly towards that in the project space, but it's not there yet."

How we communicate with future users of projects is also a big lesson from

Above: The Grenfell fire was a wake-up call to address major failings in built environment projects

Grenfell. Knowing what maintenance has been done, to precisely what standard, and how the project team envisaged its life cycle is a must. "Record-keeping is key. There needs to be a kind of USB drive of data for every building," says Ryan. "You need to know not just what's been done in the past, but record for future owners and contractors what's being done now."

The project failures also compound one another. "Clients often give a budget that they don't really understand themselves," says Ryan. "And sometimes their scoping documents aren't clear enough – what I think I'm tendering for and what a bidder thinks they need to offer are different. And it quickly becomes adversarial." Budget, scope, sponsorship, communication, conflict – these issues are all interrelated.

Institutional failures

The Grenfell case hinges on accreditations for insulation and cladding materials that incurious "project managers" and contractors assumed made them fit for purpose. Ben Bailey at Harley relied on out-of-date paperwork as assurance that cheaper, more readily available insulation materials were compliant on high-rise buildings in conjunction with the new, cheaper aluminium composite panels that had been sourced.

Worse, many of the products used in the refurb should not have been available in the state in which they were sold; or were certified many years before by the Building Research Establishment and the British Board of Agrément in ways that were open to serious questioning. But the paperwork opened the door to lax decision-making. "There was a general understanding that if you met the guidance, you were compliant with the regulations," says Hancock. "That's never true, and that's got a lot clearer to people in the industry since Grenfell."

The inquiry also concluded that a key point of failure was an institutional disregard for the residents of the tower, and that this fed into a lowest-cost mindset and precisely that kind of tick-box approach to procurement.

"The Grenfell refurb seemed to have been more about aesthetics, and a lot of the long-standing concerns of tenants had just been ignored," says Hancock. "What was the business case? How does that set the tone? How were the interests of that broad stakeholder group represented? A lack of clear project leadership at the top, clear sponsorship and clear reasons for the project will result in that kind of confusion."

Look to the future

The inquiry has taken seven years to issue its final report. The building, architecture, local government and fire safety communities had already been tackling some of the clear issues arising from Grenfell.

"There's a lot of work across industries that's gone on to address the major failings," says Hancock. "We're not starting from scratch. These are not knee-jerk changes. Organisations are working more collaboratively than ever before in the built environment. Although the inquiry recommendations do look at the situation from seven years ago, they also force us to think again about the steps that have been taken."

The Building Safety Act (see box) and the joint *Competence Framework for Project Managers in the Built Environment* issued by APM, alongside CIOB and RICS, are a testament to the concrete steps that have already been taken. "The government

Diagram labels: The inquiry's questions; BRE (Building Research Establishment); BBA (British Board of Agrément); CSTB (Centre Scientifique du Batiment); Max Fordham; PSB UK; Kingspan; Celotex; Arconic; Artelia; Studio E; Government/DCLG; Exova; Rydon; Harley Facades; CEP; RBKC; NHBC; LABC; TMO; Clerks of works; Carl Stokes
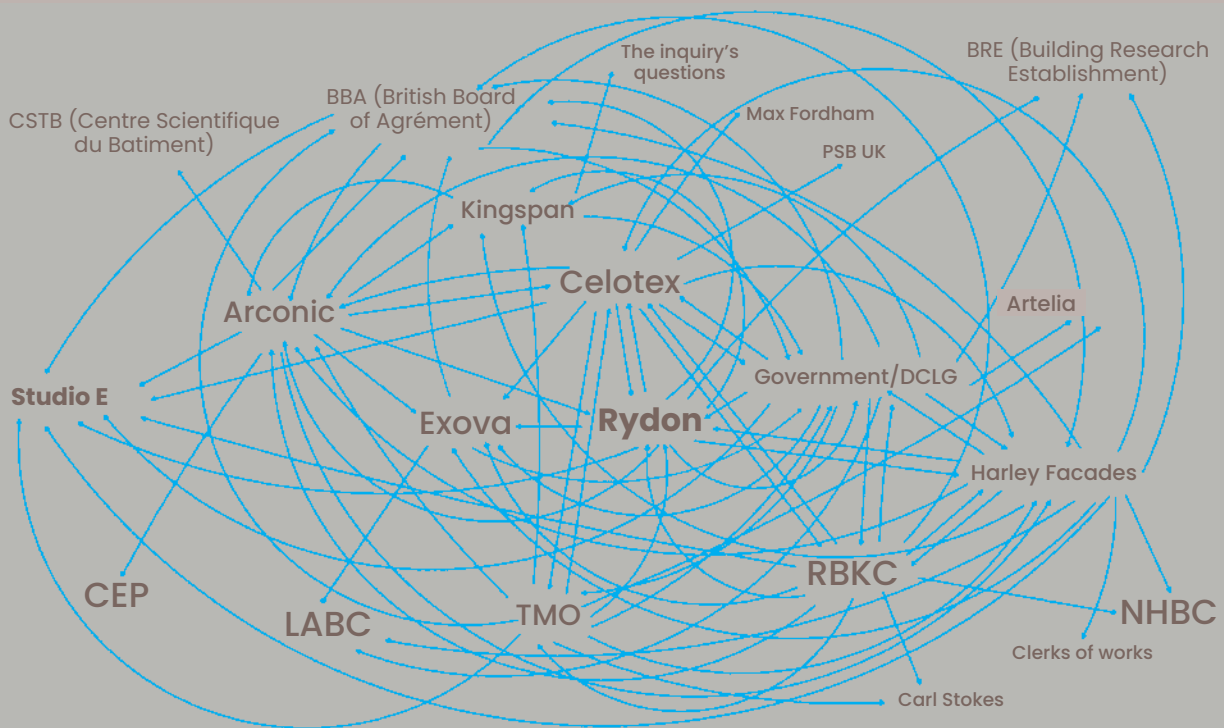
THE WEB OF BLAME

The Grenfell fire laid bare many failings for the building industry, its architects, contractors, suppliers and project managers. But perhaps the best illustration of why the core failures were not picked up was the reaction to the inquiry by those who were involved in the project. Every constituent was able to identify other parties at fault.

Sometimes the blame flowed directly between different organisations – but the scale of the finger-pointing prompted the inquiry to produce a diagram showing just how complex the situation became: "the web of blame". As Chief Counsel Richard Millett had said of the first phase of the inquiry, it was "a merry-go-round of buck-passing".

It illustrates two key issues for project managers. First, there was a clear lack of accountability and transparency in the project. In attempting to shift the blame, the various parties are effectively accepting they did not know, understand or audit counterparties.

Second, the project lacked a clear guiding hand. There was no "buck stops here" hierarchy at work. It highlights the need for each key stakeholder to have a clear voice and for knowledgeable people to make decisive calls when problems emerge.

There were many missed opportunities to prevent this tragedy; the lack of a competent, respected project management function was just one.

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has said it will need at least six months to digest the information from the Grenfell inquiry report before it announces any new policy changes," says Rosalind Thorpe, Director of Education and Standards at CIOB. "We will continue to support the current framework in the meantime, but we may need to revisit it once the government announces its new policy direction."

Thorpe points to the new Building Safety Regulator (BSR) – and CIOB's Principal Contractor Competency Certification Scheme, accrediting members for the BSR – as evidence of progress. RIBA's Chair of Board

Jack Pringle has also pointed out that the institute undertook a major review of education and training immediately after the events of June 2017. "Many of the report's insights and recommendations, particularly on the role and responsibilities of an architect, have great relevance for our members," he said.

"A lot of the long-standing concerns of tenants had just been ignored"

"We will take time to study them in detail, update our members and continue to play an active role in the creation of a safer built environment."

John Ryan recalls the effect another tragedy, in 1987, had on project management at London Underground when he was working there. "I learned to see the goal of the project in its entirety – what are we trying to do here? It's moving people in and out of the station as quickly as possible. The King's Cross fire had just radically changed the approach to fire safety as part of that. We can only hope this is the same kind of moment."

The Craidd Alliance partners outside their hub in Treforest, Pontypridd

THE WINNER TAKES IT ALL

APM'S 2024 OVERALL PROJECT OF THE YEAR AWARD WINNER – CORE VALLEY LINES TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME, TRANSPORT FOR WALES – SHOWS WHAT OUTSTANDING PROJECT MANAGEMENT CAN ACHIEVE. ANDREW SAUNDERS REPORTS

South Wales is a region of many contrasts – not only in terms of the landscape, which includes everything from sweeping coastline to imposing mountain ranges, all within a remarkably compact area, but also in terms of the prosperity and social outcomes of the people who live there. The Welsh capital Cardiff has an increasingly vibrant 21st-century economy with an expanding population and the highest GDP in Wales, but the neighbouring post-industrial region immediately to the north – the former mining country, which includes the Rhondda, Cynon, Taff and Rhymney valleys – is home to some of the most economically deprived towns and villages in Europe.

Enter this year's APM Overall Project of the Year Award winner, Transport for Wales's (TfW's) Core Valley Lines project. This is a £1.5bn programme with a grand vision – to help lift living standards in the valleys and also enable Cardiff to keep growing by revamping the aged and long-neglected rail lines connecting the city to its hinterland.

A rare opportunity

The programme involves fully electrifying the 170km of the Core Valley Lines, laying 180km of new track – much of it to convert old single-track routes to double-track working – upgrading the 52 existing stations and building two brand-new ones. A £100m depot and signalling control centre has also been constructed at Taff's Well, six miles north of Cardiff – a place historically regarded as the gateway to the valleys. Two fleets of new hybrid battery/electric trains (Class 756 and Class 398) complete the picture, ultimately resulting in much faster, more frequent and more direct trains, to provide what has been described as a 'tube-like' service in and out of the capital.

Funded by the Welsh and UK governments, with a significant contribution from the European Regional Development Fund (part of a deal that predates Brexit), the project represents one of the most significant investments in Welsh metro rail since Dr Beeching's infamous axe decimated the region's network in the 1960s. Karl Gilmore, Director of Rail Infrastructure at TfW, describes it as a "once in a generation" opportunity, but also admits that substantial external black swan challenges have had to be overcome, including "Brexit, three major floods [starting with

Main: Engineering works in progress.
Bottom left: Work to install overhead line equipment through Pontypridd.
Bottom centre: Upgrade works at Dinas Rhondda station.

Storm Dennis in February 2020] and a global pandemic. Then, just as we were getting back on our feet, there was war in Ukraine, which really affected steel availability in this country and put us on the back foot again."

Perhaps the greatest of those threats was COVID-19, which took off just at the vital but sensitive point when responsibility for the Core Valley Lines assets was due to be transferred from Network Rail to the Welsh government so that the groundworks could start. "We were so close to it not coming over because of COVID – the trigger [for the assets transfer] was late February

into March 2020, just when COVID hit. Network Rail was saying to the Welsh government and the Department for Transport that they really shouldn't be taking this on now, just as we're about to go into a global pandemic," recalls Gilmore.

And while a 'wait and see' delay might have been prudent, he and his team knew that they couldn't afford one. "You try to avoid having too many hard dates in a project, but unfortunately we had several – particularly around some trigger points for the European funding, which had to be spent by a certain point. As a senior leadership team, we knew that if we didn't do it now, the project might never happen at all."

Better together

The transfer went ahead eventually, some eight months late, but the project structure that emerged was highly resilient and agile, says Gilmore, at least partly because of all the challenges faced. "One thing we recognised right from the start is that no single contractor in the world could deliver what we needed because it's so multifaceted – there's signalling,

telecoms, permanent way, electrification. We knew we had to divide all the work packages up."

And so, with TfW acting as client, several delivery partners were chosen – Balfour Beatty, Amey Infrastructure Wales, Alun Griffiths and Siemens Rail. As a new and relatively small organisation working with such major industry players, TfW devised an innovative collaborative alliance called the Craidd Alliance (*craidd* being the Welsh word for core) to unite them all on a level playing field. "We [TfW] were a fairly new entity and they [the contractors] didn't really know us from Adam. We had to find a way

of baselining all that, which we did by creating the alliance."

High standards

Crucially, the Craidd Alliance was certified to ISO 44001 (the ISO standard for collaborative business relationship systems), the first rail alliance to get such accreditation. It was well worth the time and effort to achieve, says Gilmore. "We could have just passively said that we were an alliance, simply because we were working together. But ISO 44001 gives you a framework so you can work through any challenges that arise, as they always do on a major project. Having that framework
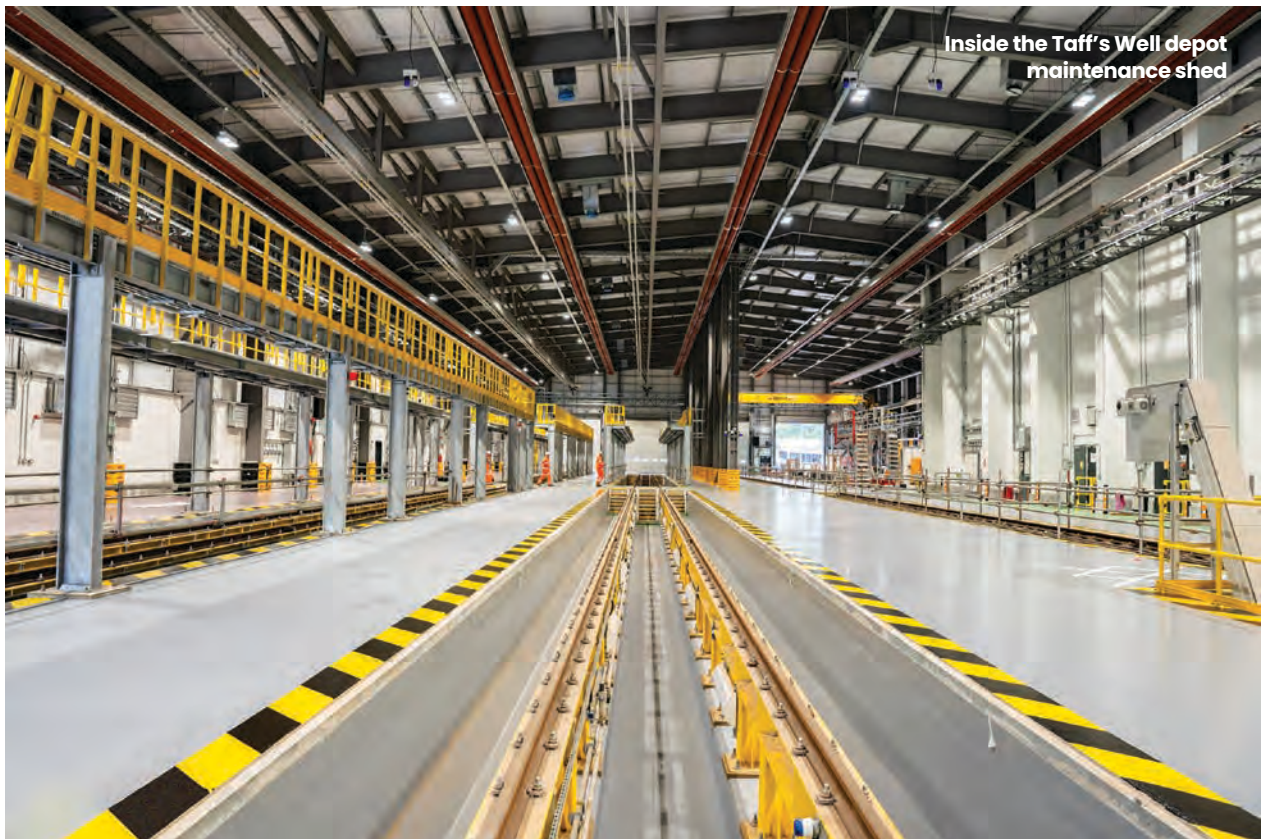
Inside the Taff's Well depot maintenance shed

The Taff's Well depot site in October 2024

and sticking to it as strictly as we have done helps keep everyone honest. We saw ISO 44001 as the highest benchmark we could go for."

A high-vis approach

Drawing on Gilmore's military experience – he served in the Royal Logistics Core before joining the rail industry – the project's leaders also made sure to get out into the field to communicate their vision to the front-line teams and other stakeholders. As well as monitoring all the usual project variables such as risk, and progress against budget and schedule, the senior leadership team also measured 'visible felt leadership'. "This is the time spent physically pressing the flesh, getting out there and being curious," Gilmore says. Because there is a world of difference between being told that this is the right way to do something and actually seeing your leaders exhibit that behaviour in person.

It made a real impact on team cohesion within the alliance, says Georgia Cope, Assistant Project Manager for TfW,

who worked on installing the thousands of concrete piles and steel gantries required for electrification. "I always knew exactly who each director was – they were familiar faces who you could have a conversation with or ask for a bit of advice. From the people working on site up to the senior leaders, we all knew what the challenges were and were brought along together as a team."

Innovative technologies as well as processes were also employed, including 'digital twin' computer models of the Core Valley Lines assets, created using aerial drone surveys. The surveys were complex but vital, because existing asset records were poor and numerous utilities such as power, water and gas lines had been buried along the rail corridors over the years, often in only vaguely specified locations.

In addition, many of the routes being upgraded were extremely old-fashioned as a result of chronic lack of investment. The 37.5km Rhondda Line from Cardiff to Treherbert, for example, still used token

A Class 756 tri-mode train undergoes testing

exchange signalling, a system that dates back to the 19th century requiring train drivers to manually insert a key into token machines at various points on the line. Modernising the signalling, electrifying the line and constructing several new twin-track sections required a nine-month closure, but in February 2024 the line reopened, initially running two trains an hour, but with the capacity for four trains an hour – a fourfold increase in frequency.

Smart electrification

The single most significant enabling technology, says Gilmore, is the mode of electrification used. Called variously 'smart' or 'discontinuous' electrification, it was devised by TfW and Amey and neatly sidesteps one of the biggest issues that faced the project – the fact that there simply isn't sufficient clearance to fit modern overhead powerlines to much of the Victorian rail infrastructure in the valleys. Bridges and tunnels in particular lack sufficient headroom, and the conventional solutions – either raising the structure or lowering the track bed – would have been both too slow and too expensive.

"I'm from the valleys…
I've experienced the
stresses of not being
able to get into Cardiff
very easily"

By using hybrid trains that can run on battery power for a short time, discontinuous electrification allows the Core Valley Lines to be electrified quickly and at much lower cost. When a train comes to a tunnel or low bridge, sensors trigger the retraction of its overhead pantograph and it passes through on battery power before flipping the pantograph back up and switching to overhead power again on the other side.

The Core Valley Lines programme represents the single largest application of discontinuous electrification in the UK, says Gilmore, and without it the scope of the project would probably have

Token exchange signalling dates back to the 1930s

been seriously curtailed. "It's brilliant technology; we've saved the best part of £100m by not having to rebuild bridges," he says.

The use of modular buildings, solar power on site and recycled concrete wherever possible has also helped to limit the carbon footprint of the works. In particular, the use of circular hollow section piling rather than conventional concrete pads has saved an estimated 2.2 million tonnes of carbon emissions.

It's all about the people

But processes and technology are ultimately delivered by people. Having the opportunity to work on such a transformational project for the people of Wales is both a great career opportunity and a powerful motivator, says Cope. "I'm from the valleys myself and I live right beside the railway. I've experienced the stresses of not being able to get into Cardiff very easily, and so it's very fulfilling when I look out of the window and see the work that's going on now and that I have been part of."

The public profile of the works has also increased recognition of the project

management profession – and the value of qualifications in building skills – across the rail industry and its supply chain. "People have really started to recognise APM, especially in the rail and construction sectors," says Gilmore. "It's creating a more professional workforce in Wales."

Everyone, from junior project managers to project leaders, is encouraged to get involved with APM and climb the professional ladder. "I went through my apprenticeship with the Level 4 Project Management Qualification, and I've had lots of support from my manager and from TfW to follow the APM route," says Cope. "I regularly use the APM website and online courses in my day-to-day work, and it gives us consistency to know that we are all aligned to the same body."

Staying on track

The programme's blend of people, process and technology has enabled it to stay on track despite serious setbacks along the way, and it is "82.5% complete" as of October 2024, says Gilmore, with passengers already enjoying the benefits of new trains and faster services on three of the lines, with the remaining works due for completion by the end of the year. This is around 12 months later than initially scheduled, but, given the array of external factors faced along the way, it is a remarkable achievement for the project team and for Wales itself.

A comment from one of the APM awards judges neatly sums up this remarkable and resilient project. "The Core Valley Lines programme stands as a testament to effective project management, innovation and collaborative governance. Facing a multitude of challenges, the project team delivered a modernised rail network that promises long-term benefits for the region."

MAKING THE SEASON BRIGHT

Christmas can feel like a busman's holiday for project professionals. It's a complex business: sourcing gifts, coordinating roast dinners, managing stakeholders as they fight over the TV remote. And your deadline is as fixed as St Nick's. But, for some in the trade, the workload is even greater – because it's their job to help make Yuletide merry. Dave Waller went behind the scenes to meet the project professionals who make sure the festive season goes to plan, preventing any nightmares before Christmas…

O Christmas Tree

Knut Johansson is Forest Manager for the municipality of Oslo. He's responsible for choosing and nurturing a 20m-high Norwegian spruce every year to send to the UK – a gift given by Norway as thanks for support in the Second World War.

Thousands will gather to sing carols, eat roasted chestnuts and take selfies in London's Trafalgar Square this Christmas.

Knut Johansson

What they won't see is the work that went into its tree – which began many years before and 1,000 miles away, with Johansson and his team scouting the forests around Oslo for the best candidates. The task: to identify 30 young trees that, at six-to-eight metres tall, showed signs they'd develop into a vibrant, perfectly conical specimen.

But, as trees slowly mature in that forest, they may be buffeted by wind, rain, heavy snow, fungus and tunnelling bark beetles. If they survive all that, they may still develop into the wrong shape or lose their lustre. "It's not a factory, these are trees out in the forest," says Johansson. "Out of 30 trees, maybe three will turn out nice."

A few years ago, the team had chosen their tree, only for it to be struck by lightning. They had to hurry back to the woods to find a replacement that was tall enough. "That was not the best tree we've ever sent," says Johansson. "But this is what happens. This is nature." This is also project management.

The prettiest sight to see…

Beauty specialist No7 produces its holiday gift sets at a safe distance from the perils of any forest – but its product managers are still painfully aware of what can happen to the best-laid Christmas plans.

"Outside influences bite us every year," says Dawn Cochrane, Head of Portfolio at No7. "There was the ash cloud from the Icelandic volcano in 2010. The crisis in the Suez Canal, our main transport route from Asia. Covid lockdowns. And the paper

Dawn Cochrane

shortage, when we ran out of board and couldn't print."

Christmas is a massive operation at No7. While typical launches feature two to five products, its holiday gift campaign will involve around 350 gifts, from eye-liner to advent calendars – all made to dramatically squeezed timelines.

So, what's the trick for ensuring those beauty gifts make it to people's stockings on time? "It's about teamwork, communication and contingencies," says Rose Young, Head of Product Management at No7. "We have a total handle on our controllables, so we're able to deal with any external factors without being derailed. We regroup very quickly. Everyone just helps each other. There's never any blame or finger-pointing. The team are straight into doing and fixing, and we meet regularly to discuss learnings – what went well, as well as what went wrong."

The No7 gift team use RACI charts to stay on top of key decision-making. But, as every single gift requires different

"That was not the best tree we've ever sent… But this is what happens. It's nature"

timing, depending on its market, each piece will have a different lead time. This lies beyond the scope of a typical Gantt chart. Instead, they work flexibly within a framework, grouping items to make things easier to track, and to allow stakeholders who aren't involved in the day-to-day to understand what's going on.

Another key factor in any Christmas project are its external stakeholders. At No7, the festive period is so core to its retailers' financial year that it's inevitable they'll throw out a barrage of questions. Hence reporting has to be so much more detailed in the gift team than anywhere else in the business. This ensures the whole team is kept in the loop on progress at all times, which in turn helps isolate their project managers from the distraction, freeing them to focus on getting stock in and managing the critical path.

Driving (and sailing) home for Christmas

In Norway, Johansson's arboreal duties continue long after the tree has been picked. Stakeholders ask a lot of questions of him, too. After a felling ceremony in November – attended by the Lord Mayor of Westminster and the Mayor of Oslo, alongside choirs of local carol-singing school kids – the tree has to be loaded onto a truck and carried for 170km; transferred to a boat and ferried across the sea; and then taken by road to Central London, where it's stood beside Nelson's Column and dressed in vertical strings of lights (energy-efficient, naturally).

The voyage takes several days. Johansson has been in charge since 2010. When the salt water of a rough sea crossing made all the needles fall off, he sent a new tree on the next boat. When too many branches broke on one crossing, he had to send replacement branches and a guy to mount them. And one year the tree was damaged irreparably on the way to the port, with the boat due in a matter of hours.

"You have to remember the tree you passed on the way to the ferry that looked quite good," Johansson explains, of the drastic measures sometimes required to prevent a nightmare before Christmas. "Maybe you can steal it." Of course, one tree does not a happy Christmas make. You need presents too. And even Santa needs helpers to ensure

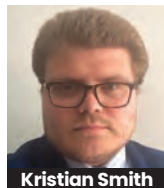**The journey of a 20m Christmas tree from Norwegian forest to Trafalgar Square**

smooth and efficient gift fulfilment to meet modern demand.

Sugar plum fairies

Hotel Chocolat, the upmarket chocolatier, will see thousands of chocolate hampers, calendars and other gifts fly out the door for Christmas. Its two distribution centres, in St Neots and Northampton, will increase their staffing six-fold in late November, ready for a few peak weeks leading up to the big day.

"The magic of Christmas is built on a foundation of preparation and hard work," says Kristian Smith, the Fulfilment Planning and Compliance Manager at Hotel Chocolat. In

Kristian Smith

the week-and-a-half before Christmas, customers will suddenly realise all the presents they haven't bought, and decide they need something delivered the next day. There's only a certain amount of orders you can process at that sort of notice. With our capacity nearing its limit, we have to be prepared and able to mitigate those risks." That means regular meetings, clear KPIs, thorough training and working with agency partners to bring in just the right number of extra workers at just the right time.

It's Smith's job to align everything to sales forecasts that are as susceptible to outside forces as a tree in the Nordic snow. But for him, good management comes down to being present out on the floor, talking to his people, "not just sitting in an office looking at spreadsheets", he says.

"I like to focus on the things I can influence, not those I can't."

Bah, humbug!

As any parent will know, the work of Christmas isn't done and dusted just because you've delivered the gifts. There soon comes the moment of unwrapping – which means real-time feedback on whether you got the job all wrong.

Some are better at masking their distaste than others. Johansson has had to grow used to online mockery of the Trafalgar Square tree – from social media users and reputable media outlets alike. "Nothing says global Britain like a half-dead tree," wrote one commentator last Christmas. Johansson points out that people have a habit of making

Rose Young

uncharitable remarks when the tree is first lifted off the truck. At that point its branches, which are tied to the trunk for transport, have yet to be loosened, or any broken ones replaced.

"Perhaps we don't prioritise a perfect Disney shape, but we always do what we can to make a tree that we're proud of," says Johansson. "It's a nice tradition. But it's apparently very important to be the first person to take a photo when it looks terrible, to put on the internet." And it's not just the public that will have a reaction to Christmas projects. Other stakeholders won't be shy to voice their frustrations in the pressure cooker of the festive period either.

At No7, they've had to learn methods of managing other people's responses as the project unfolds. Young recommends rooting such conversations in solid fact. "I love getting the figures, so I can completely disengage from the emotional side of whatever people are bringing to the table," she says. "If they're voicing concerns about something we know

is not going to significantly impact the final plan, you can show them through numbers and bring people together."

For Cochrane, the trick is to group people together quickly and give them the same aligned messaging – and to ensure that such communication starts immediately. "When one individual talks to another, and things start to escalate, that's when it always becomes fun and games. It's very much about just knowing your stakeholders, and keeping your communications and reporting open. And make it clear who's doing what. That normally nips things in the bud."

The good news is that, despite the pressure of managing all the moving parts, there's still plenty of good cheer left in Christmas. And being instrumental

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"I like to see people picking up the gifts the team delivered... It's really nice to know we're part of their Christmas"

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in delivering such a magical time remains highly rewarding. "I love it," says Cochrane. "Going into the store and they're playing all the Christmas music, and everyone's buzzing around shopping. I like to see people picking up the gifts that the team delivered, and putting them in their baskets. It's really nice to know we're part of their Christmas."

Silent night

There's another bonus for these project professionals: all that hard work happens ahead of time. Once the festive deadline has been met, they can join everyone else in savouring the true meaning of the holidays. For Johansson, that begins on Christmas Eve morning, with a long walk in the woods.

"The first snow has often settled on the trees and the ground, revealing traces of animals in the search for food and survival through these tough months," he says. "The light in the forest is magical, the feeling that nature is sleeping. After a few hours in the forest, it feels extra good to come in to make the final preparations for good food with close family, when we can let the peace descend."

HOW TO BE A GREAT PROJECT LEADER

SUSANNE MADSEN, AN EXECUTIVE COACH FOR PROJECT LEADERS AND AUTHOR OF *THE POWER OF PROJECT LEADERSHIP* AND *HOW TO DO THE INNER WORK*, OFFERS FIVE TOP TIPS ON THE ART OF BEING THE BEST POSSIBLE LEADER

1 Leadership is a coaching relationship

Leadership, of course, happens in relation to others, because you don't lead in a vacuum. So, the challenges that people come to me with are often relationship-based. A big part of being a good leader is being a good coach – it's about having a conversation. It's not just about you telling someone what to do. You are actually building a relationship.

When it comes to the expectations you might have of a team member, say: "Let's talk about how we get this delivered. My idea is XYZ. What is your idea and is this achievable for you?" Don't just say, "I want this to be done, is that OK?", so that the other person can only say yes or no. You want to have a conversation where you ask open questions, such as, "How does this fit into your schedule? What concerns do you have about this? What questions do you have for me about this task? Is there another way of doing this?"

This means the other person has to engage, and they have to think about and internalise what it is they are committing to, and not just say yes or no.

ANDRII YALANSKYI/SHUTTERSTOCK

2 Don't let yourself become overwhelmed

The topic of 'overwork' often comes up, and there are different reasons why people might feel overwhelmed. It could be that they're very junior and they haven't got their head around the work yet. That should iron itself out over time.

What's more serious is if somebody is quite senior and they have a track record of working too much, never getting a break and having very high expectations of themselves.

An underlying pattern may be them wanting to please others, so they can't really set boundaries and can't say no. Or it could be the idea of always needing to be in control, so it's difficult for them to delegate because they feel they have to do everything themselves. The end result – no matter the underlying pattern – is that they take too much onto their own shoulders. They desperately want to share and have other people to help them, but they don't really know how to make that happen. And so that's where the overwhelm comes from, and it's quite sad to see, but it's very common.

It depends on which of these patterns is true for someone, but the rule I will often give to them is to put their own oxygen mask on first, because if you're running around, super stressed, it's very hard to gain perspective and see what you can change. Then I ask them how they can energise themselves. Can they just take 10 minutes to do something that they know is going to give them a lot of energy, something that they will find inspiring? Maybe it's just a walk outside, listening to the birds. Maybe it's just doing some breathing exercises. Maybe it's just playing their guitar for 10 minutes.

They need to start filling up their tank with a bit of energy. And when they feel more resourceful, they can begin to look at what's really happening, because if they're really drained, it's very hard to even have the energy to look at the deeper patterns.

If you're running around, super stressed, it's very hard to gain perspective and see what you can change

3 Don't be a hero

Don't be the kind of project leader who feels that they have to fly in, save everything and get everything done. Don't think that, if nobody's stepping up, then you will step up, put your cape on, sort it all out and your managers and clients will love you. Why do people do it? It's because we all want a hero to come and sort it all out, but that's a pitfall. We need to shift out of 'fixing and doing' and start empowering others.

How can you create other leaders? How can you coach? Instead of telling people what to do, you need to take that tiny step back and create space for others. And that comes through having a conversation and asking more questions. How can we do this? How can you do that? What support do you need from me? It's a gradual process of you stepping back and allowing others to step up and step forward. It is a more sustainable approach to leadership, so you've always got people who are not scared to make decisions or have some autonomy about what they're doing, with some ability to go ahead and fix stuff.

4 Emotional intelligence will take you from good to great

The difference between somebody who's good and somebody who's great is emotional intelligence, because leadership happens in relation to others, and the challenges that often arise for a leader are in relationships. It could be that their team members aren't doing what they expect them to do, or that they don't know how to give feedback to a particular person. It's emotional

5 **Stay curious and learn**

A critical step towards ensuring that you keep on being a great leader is being aware of what you need to improve and wanting to make those improvements. If you think that you are perfect, then there's not much hope. The first step is for somebody to acknowledge that they want to learn. What do they do then? They can work with a coach. They can go on leadership programmes. They can ask for feedback from their colleagues, and work through that feedback. They can begin to simply listen more, to ask more open questions, to try walking in other people's shoes and to try to understand what is going on for other people.

There are a lot of different steps we can take to build our emotional intelligence, but it's good to know that it's something that can be developed – it's not something that you're either born with or without. You're born with a level, and you can improve it if you need to as long as you're self-aware and up for doing that.

Susanne Madsen's latest book is *How to Do the Inner Work* (TCK Publishing). For more information, visit www.susannemadsen.com. Listen to Susanne's interview with APM Podcast via your favourite podcast app.

CAGKAN SAYIN/SHUTTERSTOCK

intelligence that makes you able to do that with finesse. You don't want to be overly direct if that's not appropriate, or to avoid the conversation. You need to have that emotional understanding and emotional intelligence to adapt your message to the person you're with and the context you're in.

Emotional intelligence has many aspects. One of them is self-awareness; another is self-management or self-regulation. So, if you get frustrated, do you show your frustration or not? What do you do with it? And then there's the whole empathy piece, which is also part of emotional intelligence. You need to have all of these pieces in order to lead effectively. You need to be able to go a bit deeper in your conversations in order to build trust, because there's so much more research now pointing to the

fact that great relationships come from trust building.

Ask yourself whether you can show some vulnerability. Can you have a real conversation? Can you have the kind of trust where you can make a mistake one day and it's still OK, because you have built up that trust with each other over a long period of time? All of that is very difficult if you do not have emotional intelligence.

SHAPING THE FUTURE OF PROJECT DELIVERY

DAVID BELSHAW URGES YOU TO JOIN THE MOVEMENT TOWARDS DATA-DRIVEN SUCCESS AND GIVES PRACTICAL ADVICE FOR THOSE LOOKING TO START THIS JOURNEY

The world of project management is evolving fast, driven by the transformative power of project data analytics (PDA) and artificial intelligence (AI). I've had the privilege of witnessing this transformation first hand as Head of Project Management at Rolls-Royce, and it's clear to me that we're standing on the edge of something truly remarkable.

Over the past 10 months, I've embarked on a journey through a PDA apprenticeship, and it has completely transformed how I see project delivery. It's not just about acquiring new skills; it's about challenging the fundamentals of how we operate. What's more exciting is that this transformation is happening across multiple organisations.

A coalition for change

In March, seeing PDA as an incredible opportunity for project delivery, I founded and started as Chair of the Project Data Analytics Coalition (PDAC). The PDAC is more than a collective of like-minded organisations – it's a client-led movement dedicated to driving transformational change across the entire project management profession with clients and our supply chains.

By uniting, the founding organisations of Rolls-Royce, EDF, United Utilities, the Ministry of Defence, Thales, the Environment Agency and Projecting Success are creating a platform for innovation and collaboration.

No single organisation has the volume of data, breadth of skills or capability needed to unlock the vast potential of data-driven project delivery. The pace of change requires us to think differently and collaborate on an unprecedented scale, hence why we have come together as a coalition.

Our aims are not only to improve delivery of our own projects, but also to inspire others and help lead the entire profession forward by:

- developing open-source solutions to shared challenges using PDA and AI to benefit everyone in the project profession
- using these capabilities to drive standardisation at source and unlock the potential of AI
- enhancing PDA capabilities within our organisations
- redefining project delivery across all aspects of project management, including people, processes and tools/systems
- creating a "project brain" – an ontology for project management – and building a scalable data architecture for core project delivery use cases.

We believe that by achieving these goals, we will significantly shape the future of the project delivery profession, enhancing project outcomes and delivering substantial benefits, including improved return on investment.

By pooling resources from across our member organisations we are solving delivery problems using PDA and AI skills, and by training up our teams and involving our supply chain, we can solve problems faster and at greater scale than ever before.

By pooling resources... we are solving delivery problems using PDA and AI skills

Our Project:Hack hackathons are a prime example of how we leverage these collective efforts

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Achievements so far

Since the PDAC was founded in March 2024, we've been able to solve problems quickly by pooling the collective expertise and resources of our members.

We have created a roadmap that aligns our efforts towards shared goals, ensuring we remain focused on the most pressing collective challenges in project delivery. For example, the start of our roadmap sees us tackle problems associated with planning and scheduling, risk management and assurance, which are topic areas where we all see the potential for improved efficiency, better insights and optimisation.

By working with the PDA apprenticeship programme, which is training our staff in core data analytics skills, and then aligning their coursework and live environments (such as hackathons) to the problem statements from

our coalition roadmap, we have a unique combination to tackle shared challenges and create solutions more effectively than we could individually. It also brings fresh perspectives and cutting-edge ideas into the mix.

An important early breakthrough

One of our early breakthroughs was the creation of a shared data architecture – a framework that enables seamless communication and data integration across organisations. This was a huge step forward, allowing us to collaborate in real time and address issues that previously would have slowed us down.

Our Project:Hack hackathons are a prime example of how we leverage these collective efforts. By bringing together the brightest minds from across the PDAC, universities and other companies,

we've been able to rapidly develop innovative solutions. For example, the Schedule Performance Tool, which emerged from one of these events, analyses project schedules to identify performance changes and risks. We have shared the solution across the coalition and the tool is already making a difference in how our members manage projects, and it's just one of many success stories.

Reaping the rewards

Each member of the coalition is also reaping the rewards of this collaborative approach:
- Rolls-Royce has improved data quality by 50% through digital forms and workflows, enhancing scope and change management processes and generating predictive insights for future projects.
- The Ministry of Defence has piloted an AI-powered

scheduling tool that interrogates critical paths and flags resource inconsistencies, which is now being integrated into its wider project practices.

- Thales has created a digital operations team that is centralising project data, making it accessible across the organisation, while also transforming how it manages unstructured data through a searchable index of 13 million documents.

- EDF Nuclear Operations has transformed its IT infrastructure to provides a single source of truth, delivering real-time information and insights to ensure the right information reaches the right person at the right time, enabling informed decision-making. This infrastructure is built using project data from modern systems such as Primavera and SAP, along with custom Microsoft Power Apps, consolidating all data into a unified platform. This approach eliminates the need for Excel or manual data handling. EDF has also improved decision-making by changing its meeting habits, reducing meeting times by 50%. This was achieved by using Microsoft Teams to ask specific questions in advance, allowing participants to provide detailed answers before the meeting.

By pooling resources, combining expertise and leveraging the work done in the apprenticeship, we are driving results at a speed that would be impossible in isolation. It's a clear testament to the power of collaboration. We are less than a year in and it has been remarkable in terms of what we have been able to learn from each other.

Start small and explore tools like ChatGPT or Claude

Our practical advice for you

I know that embracing PDA can seem overwhelming at first. But my journey has shown me that transformational change is within reach for any organisation willing to take the leap. Here are some key lessons we've learned:

1 Experiment with new tools
Start small and explore tools like ChatGPT or Claude to see how AI can enhance your projects. I've been amazed at how these tools can streamline workflows and unlock new insights quickly.

2 Break down the problem
One of the most valuable lessons from the apprenticeship has been the power of problem decomposition. It's essential to clearly define the problem before jumping into solutions, ensuring you use the right data and approach.

3 Join a Project:Hack
If you're looking for hands-on experience, our hackathons are the perfect place to start. These events bring together experts to solve real problems, and the collaborative atmosphere is incredibly energising.

4 Don't get stuck in strategy
Having a plan is important, but don't overthink it. The world of PDA and AI is evolving quickly, and the ability to adapt and iterate is crucial.

5 Invest in quality data
High-quality data is the foundation of effective analytics. Rolls-Royce has invested heavily in data cleaning and new standards, and this has transformed how we use data to make decisions.

6 Leverage AI and automation
AI can do more than just analyse data; it can automate repetitive tasks and even generate code. These tools are becoming increasingly accessible, so take advantage of them.

7 Learn from others
One of the most valuable aspects of the PDAC is the knowledge sharing that happens between members. Joining a community of like-minded professionals accelerates

your learning and helps avoid common pitfalls.

8 Prepare for challenges
The journey won't always be smooth – there will be resistance to change, data privacy concerns and technical hurdles. Engaging stakeholders early and planning for these challenges will help smooth the way.

9 Build new capabilities
PDA requires a new set of skills. The *Developing Project Data Analytics Skills* guide from APM and the Project Data Analytics Taskforce is an invaluable resource, and I highly recommend it to anyone looking to upskill.

What's coming up?

Looking to the future, we're continuing to push the boundaries of what's possible in PDA. Over the next year, we'll be focusing on:

- deploying predictive analytics tools that will revolutionise how

My journey has shown me that transformational change is within reach for any organisation willing to take the leap
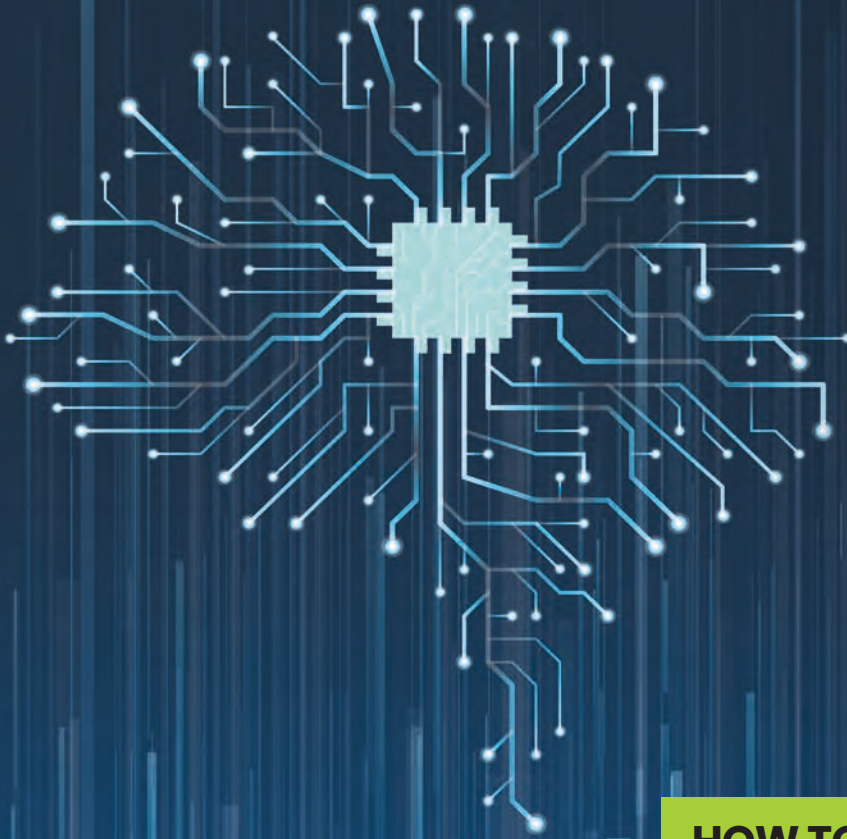
we forecast project schedules
- redefining project assurance through real-time, data-driven tools that will make assurance a proactive process
- leading the development of 'variance analytics', a new discipline that goes beyond traditional risk management by offering predictive insights into project variances.

At the core of all these initiatives is bold and visionary leadership. The PDAC is client-led, and our intention is to inspire transformational change across the entire supply chain. This isn't just about improving project outcomes – it's about setting a new standard for how projects are delivered. Our collective efforts are a powerful catalyst for change, and together we are creating a movement that will have a lasting impact on the profession.

David Belshaw **is Head of Project Management at Rolls-Royce and Chair of the Project Data Analytics Coalition**

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HOW TO GET INVOLVED AND LEARN MORE

The Project Data Analytics Coalition (PDAC) is always growing, and we're eager to bring more organisations into the fold. By joining us, you'll gain access to cutting-edge tools, insights and a collaborative network that is reshaping project delivery. We are currently made up of clients, but we are now expanding into our long-term delivery partners in the supply chain.

If you're interested in learning more or want to join us, please visit **pdataskforce.com/about-1** or email **david.belshaw2@rolls-royce.com**. You can find out more about hackathons at **projectingsuccess.co.uk/hackathons**.

This journey has shown me that the future of project delivery is not only possible but within reach. By pooling resources, leveraging the innovative work done in the apprenticeship and leading with a bold vision, we're solving problems faster than ever before. The PDAC is proving that transformational change can be driven at pace – and I'm confident that the ripple effect of our work will be felt across the project profession.

This is your opportunity to be part of something bigger. By embracing data-driven decision-making, we can not only improve our own projects, but also inspire change across the profession. Together, we can shape the future of project delivery.

HOW TO LEAP OVER PROJECT OBSTACLES

A NEW APM BOOK EXPLAINS HOW A CRITICAL CHAIN APPROACH CAN HELP PROJECTS SUCCEED. THIS EXCLUSIVE EXTRACT INTRODUCES YOU TO THIS POWERFUL TOOL

There are many root causes and ways to address the significant challenges to project delivery performance and high failure rates. A recurring theme is that complex projects, programmes or portfolios, by their very nature, must cope with a high level of uncertainty, variability and change. Uncertainty and the resulting resource contention are the predominant obstacles to on-time delivery. Critical chain is an approach with a track record of successfully dealing with these issues.

The advantages of critical chain project management

Critical chain project management has delivered significant improvements to performance in complex design and development, manufacturing and maintenance projects across various industries (e.g. aerospace, defence, pharmaceutical, construction, automotive, communications, consumer goods and energy).

It has been used at all scales of project, from small projects to complex multi-year megaprojects. The approach can be used to manage individual small-to-medium sized projects, but it is particularly beneficial for larger, complex programmes and portfolios. As noted in *APM Body of Knowledge 7th edition*, there is empirical evidence of the extraordinary results that can be achieved with critical chain.

Critical chain embeds many of the 'back to basics' principles known to experienced project managers. However, it deals differently with durations, schedule contingency and resource contentions during planning. In execution, it facilitates the timely and supportive leadership behaviours required for the early identification of, and rapid recovery from, issues to mitigate schedule risk.

What exactly is critical chain project management?

Critical chain project management is a method of planning and executing projects that addresses resource conflicts to protect the schedule against uncertainty. Today's highly complex projects have to deal with a great amount of volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity. Critical chain builds on critical path and sound logical task networks (also known as 'precedence networks') to provide focus.

It makes innovative use of a schedule buffer to drive the right behaviours to achieve on-time project delivery. Critical chain uses optimistic task durations when scheduling the project, with the addition of a sizeable time buffer

to protect the project's due date (the promise to the internal or external customer). The buffer is a shared project resource. An important consequence of this approach is that task estimates are not commitments made by the task manager, but are simply a part of the method for calculating the estimated project duration and buffer size.

During execution, tasks that are underway and are forecast to take longer than their optimistic

Critical chain embeds many of the 'back to basics' principles known to experienced project managers

duration will consume some of the buffer. Those few tasks that are completed in less time than the optimistic estimate will add time back into the buffer. The rate of buffer consumption (relative

to project progress) serves as a visible progress and performance indicator, and becomes an early-warning system.

A few key activities and behaviours are required to protect the schedule; for example:
- de-conflicting any major resource contention to avoid two tasks using key resources occurring at the same time, which would slow down execution
- relentlessly focusing on recovery actions to reduce or reverse

excessive consumption of the buffer

- focusing on task preparation to ensure that people have everything required to finish the task, without having to stop to wait for inputs, materials or information.

Why should project professionals embrace critical chain?

Time is the only resource you cannot buy more of. It is the role of the senior manager and project manager to select the right methodology to deliver projects successfully. Kendall and Austin (2012) analysed over 60 organisations publicly reporting improvements as a result of implementing the critical chain methodology (see box).

Senior managers should embrace critical chain to replicate these results by clearly prioritising tasks to protect the duration of the longest chain of dependent tasks in a project. As a senior manager, it is all too easy to be dragged into constant firefighting and repeated planning.

However, it is the senior manager's role to support the design and implementation of a system of work which provides early-warning indicators. This

IMPROVEMENTS ACHIEVED BY USING CRITICAL CHAIN

Metric	Average	Worst case	Best case
Project duration	−39%	−13%	−78%
Schedule adherence	+70%	+15%	+222%
Throughput	+53%	+14%	+150%

As a senior manager, it is all too easy to be dragged into constant firefighting and repeated planning

system should be able to accommodate, to some degree, the inevitable delays and issues that will affect on-time delivery. The role of the project manager is to apply the right approach according to the nature of the project and to systemically address resource contention and uncertainty.

What benefits does critical chain deliver?

The following are the main benefits experienced by project teams implementing critical chain:

1 Improved project success in terms of delivering the full scope on or ahead of time and on or under budget.

2 Projects have a reduced duration.

3 Increased project team satisfaction and reduced stress.

4 Simplified project management in terms of the level of scheduling, less rescheduling, simpler reporting and simpler priorities for decision-making.

5 Increased throughput with the same resources, due to reduced resource demand conflicts and less demand to hire new critical resources or agree overtime.

6 Increased confidence among stakeholders (including internal and external customers).

Many video case studies describe these benefits. For example, see TOCICO's website (tocico.org/criticalchain); and search for 'critical chain project management' on YouTube and LinkedIn.

THE 10 RULES OF FLOW

1
Reduce the work in progress
Reduce the number of live projects and tasks that are allowed to be worked on at any one time.

2
Complete full kits
Only release tasks to resources when they have everything they require to complete the task. Focus on enabling full kit well ahead of time.

3
Release to capacity
Release tasks in the correct sequence and priority to maintain the optimal level of work in progress.

4
Reduce multitasking
Minimise interruptions to allow people to focus on and finish each task as quickly as possible.

5
Show servant leadership
Ensure management and expert resources are visible and available, and are actively supporting daily recovery actions.

What is the role of a senior manager?

It is vital for senior managers to provide visible leadership when introducing critical chain. Their role requires:

1 Making the case for change and winning hearts and minds.

2 Setting up the environment needed for people to operate with a new set of rules, rewarding adherence to the new ways of working.

3 Allowing critical chain pilot projects to tailor their approach to meet the intent of existing policies and practices used for project management, reporting and governance.

4 Communicating early successes.

5 Demonstrating servant leadership by supporting the project team in 'recovery action' escalation when critical path or critical chain tasks are consuming buffer.

The project manager who is implementing critical chain needs to discuss expectations with the senior manager for being a proactive sponsor of implementing critical chain.

What are the critical chain principles and rules?

Critical chain consists of a coherent set of principles. Some are 'back to basics' project management principles, some are borrowed from lean approaches and some are new concepts developed by Dr Eliyahu Goldratt. The 10 rules of flow (see below) aim to describe, in practical terms, the process and managerial prerequisites to being able to work in 'the critical chain way'. The 'rules of flow' title was inspired by the novel *Goldratt's Rules of Flow* by Efrat Goldratt-Ashlag.

The rules clearly demonstrate that it is not just about scheduling with a significant time buffer (rule 7) or staggering the work so as not to overwhelm a critical constraint resource (rule 8). For critical chain to accelerate the flow of work and achieve the other benefits, all 10 rules need to be implemented.

Get your copy of *Senior Managers' and Projects Managers' Guide to Critical Chain*, a new book published by APM, at apm.org. uk/book-shop/senior-managers-and-project-managers-guide-to-critical-chain

6
Ensure clear definitions of 'done'
Ensure the project scope is clearly documented and communicated, and all tasks have clearly defined criteria for handover and completion ('done').

7
Plan for uncertainty
The rolling wave plan has logically linked tasks of the right size. Position visible buffers to protect the plan from the uncertainty and changes to it in execution.

8
Focus on the constraint/ integration point
Stagger the projects in the portfolio to synchronise resources and ensure they are not overloaded.

9
Focus on remaining duration (the past is the past)
Report the remaining duration of all (open) project tasks every day. Identify where and when to actively manage with fast recovery actions.

10
Measure to drive the right behaviours
Replace local efficiency measures that do not support flow with different measures aligned to deliver the project on time.

SOURCE: 'RULES OF FLOW FOR PROJECTS, PROGRAMMES AND PORTFOLIOS' BY BAE SYSTEMS PLC, EXPLAINING CRITICAL CHAIN PRINCIPLES. REPRODUCED WITH PERMISSION.

HOW TO START A STELLAR CAREER

(AND TAKE THE TOP TROPHY!)

KIARA ORCHARD, APM'S 2024 EMERGING PROJECT PROFESSIONAL OF THE YEAR, DEMONSTRATES OUTSTANDING LEADERSHIP QUALITIES IN HER JOB AT SELLAFIELD NUCLEAR REPROCESSING PLANT, PLUS AN IRREPRESSIBLE INSTINCT TO INNOVATE

Calder Hall at Sellafield was the world's first commercial nuclear power plant. Construction began in 1953, just a decade after the first fission reaction at the Manhattan Project. The plant shut in 2003, and nuclear technicians are still figuring out how to complete the dismantling.

The site is more than radioactive. It's riddled with asbestos and other hazards. And the record of what exactly went where is often lost in the mists of time. Frankly, it's one of the toughest working environments you can imagine. For Kiara Orchard, winner of the 2024 APM Emerging Project Professional of the Year Award, it's the perfect place to launch a career.

Working with the unknown

"I absolutely love it," says Orchard. "There are a lot of unknowns and challenges which come with working on a nuclear site. Every single day is different. But that's what makes it such an interesting job." Aged 23, Orchard finished her project manager degree apprenticeship a year ago and is already at the cutting edge of the remediation work at Sellafield.

Her current role? "I support the Calder Heat Exchanger Deplanting project, delivering the removal of six heat exchangers, which are 23m high and weigh 360 tonnes," she explains. "I have led critical work to characterise the heat exchangers and ground investigations to initiate the design of the Heat Exchanger Laydown Slab." The slab, she explains, is a reinforced concrete platform that the huge heat exchangers will be laid onto, prior to disposal.

The land around the site is composed of unknown materials. It's down to Orchard's team to figure out the composition. "There's not a lot of information about what's in the ground," she says. "It's so old! There's a lot of asbestos, which is a huge risk to people. My task is to understand the ground contaminants. There is potential for radiation. The site is next to one of our reactors. We need to know what's there for the years to come." This step alone comes with a £2m budget.

Collaborative work

The work is pioneering. There's no guidebook to turn to. "We work closely with the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority Group Investment Decommissioning Programme, which looks at the removal of heat exchangers across all of the nuclear facilities in England," says Orchard. "We are the first to do it, so we are the ones learning the lessons, which we can share with others afterwards. It is hugely important work."

Orchard's career offers lessons for other young project professionals. The first is the value of an apprenticeship. At a time when university courses are under scrutiny over value for money, Orchard spent four years enrolled on a BSc at the University of Cumbria, working at Sellafield. "It's classroom-based learning one day a week, then four days on the job. I shadowed project managers in different situations, doing six-month rotations. It was constant learning," she says.

Taking action for women

Orchard has a drive to push herself into any role where she can grow. She's involved in the

> **"Creating a psychological safe space is something I've been trying to do… It is important that people share when they are overburdened or overstressed"**

"My task is to understand the ground contaminants. There is potential for radiation"

CV: Kiara Orchard

Employment
- Assistant Project Manager, Sellafield
- Steering Group Secretary, Sellafield Menopause Support and Action Group

Education
- University of Cumbria, BSc project manager degree apprenticeship

Qualifications
- APM PMQ
- APM volunteer

MICHAEL LISHMAN/SELLAFIELD LTD

Sellafield menopause support programme and she spearheaded the provision of women's sanitary products across the site. "It's something everyone who menstruates is affected by," she says. "It's a nuclear site, so you can't just access sanitary supplies as and when. I've worked closely with unions, building managers, facilities and sites to be able to supply these products."

She's taking the initiative to boost working practices. "Creating a psychological safe space is something I've been trying to do recently," she says. "This means an environment where people feel comfortable to take risks and express themselves, and can own up to mistakes. I want people to be able to voice concerns without fear of negative repercussions."

It's good to talk

Her commitment to improvement includes the concept called SQCDP. "It stands for safety, quality, cost, delivery and people," she explains. "It focuses on the key elements of delivery, such as safety, cost and risk, but with a strong element focused on people." Part of this is about building interpersonal relations between team members. "I want people to open up more!

It is important that people share when they are overburdened or overstressed. At first it was difficult. We'd get to the people section, ask people if they wanted to share anything, and they'd just blink. Dead silence. Now we are discussing things."

Despite having recently graduated, Orchard went straight back to university for a six-month course on leadership. "There's a lot of acting, where we try to put our leadership techniques into practice before we go out into the real world."

As an aside, Orchard mentions she's a town councillor for

Silloth-on-Solway, a seaside resort near the Scottish border. She's renovating public buildings and creating a playpark and fitness trail. And she still has time for a social life: "I am a cheerleader also, which is a strong team activity. I am with the Cheerforce Knights. We are the current national champions for our level."

It's not hard to see why the APM judges were impressed by Orchard. Not only is she proving herself able to operate at the heart of a nuclear reprocessing plant, but she's also a devoted leader, making an impact on multiple fronts. Her passion, creativity and energy are infectious. She is a wonderful advertisement for the project profession to her generation.

"There are a lot of unknowns and challenges which come with working on a nuclear site. Every single day is different"

KIARA'S TOP TIPS

1 Network like crazy
Networking is a chance to get to know all sorts of different people. I attend conferences and APM events. They are a great way to learn new skills and theories and to build my network. Networking is a chance to expose yourself to other people's insights, their journeys and challenges. You'll make connections that last your entire career. I am a quiet, introverted type, but I am able to put myself forward with a strong handshake. There's no reason to be afraid, just get out of your comfort zone and meet as many people as you can.

2 Create a personal development plan
I recommend thinking about the road ahead of you over the next six to 18 months, and what steps you'll need to take to get where you want to be. I've created a personal development plan for myself. It helps me understand the gaps in my knowledge and experience. I write all my ideas down on a big piece of paper and then put it all

into a spreadsheet. For example, I did a plan recently and realised I lacked experience in project construction and commissioning, so I enrolled on courses relating to construction and demolition. I asked project managers if I could shadow them. The plan tells me what I need to do next.

3 Embrace change
Projects and teams continuously evolve. At Sellafield we are always changing and experiencing new things. So my advice is not to be afraid of change. It's a process that sparks innovation and improvement, and when things change, you learn. Maybe you've got a new team member or an unforeseen risk emerges. Be positive; be enthusiastic. If you can embrace change you'll be in the right mindset to tackle it.

4 Question everything
No question is a silly question. It is important to have an attitude of asking questions. This is particularly true if you are at the start of your

career. Ask why things are done in a certain way. You'll get to understand the logic behind processes. At times, a question can reveal gaps in other people's knowledge or expose inefficiencies. Often, the reply is, 'It's always been done that way', with no deeper explanation. At first I was shy about asking questions. Now I realise how important it is.

5 Get to know the people you work with
The biggest tip to getting ahead is to get to know the people you're working with. If you want to work collaboratively and support your team members you need to go beyond the surface level. I place a huge focus on developing my relationships with the people around me. It also helps you develop as a leader. I try to model the behaviours that I want to see in my team, such as listening to each other carefully and making sure we are open to each other's concerns and ideas. Focus on people and it will improve the way you work in so many ways.

PUBLIC REGISTER OF ChPPs

The following individuals make up the latest cohort to achieve Chartered Project Professional status with APM. Congratulations to you all, from those based in the UK and the US to those in Italy and China! Full details of the criteria for achieving chartered status and the routes to get there can be found at apm.org.uk/chartered-standard, where you can also view the full Register of Chartered Project Professionals.

APM
Chartered Project Professional

Name	Country
Ahmed Al Jabri	OMN
Faisal Alfarsi	**OMN**
Yousef Alkhoury	UK
Daniel Arantes Bernardes	**US**
Simone Badham	UK
Richard Bailey-Funnell	**UK**
Jason Bone	UK
Matthew Brereton	**UK**
Edward Bruford	UK
Sarah Carter	**UK**
Sin Ping Choy	CHN
Laura Cindolo	**UK**
Paul Deerans	UK
Christopher Dewhirst	**UK**
Alexander Dillon	UK
Charlotte Donovan	**UK**
Jason Ellam-Brown	UK
Dale Every	**UK**
Scott Ferrier	UK
Jonny Flaherty	**UK**
Steven Flatley	UK
Christopher Gardner	**AUS**
Rajiv Gohel	UK
Rebecca Green	**UK**
Thomas Greenwood	UK
Tom Grosvenor	**UK**
Loren Hadfield	UK
Luke Hale	**UK**
Thomas Hampson	UK
John Harrison	**UK**
Laura Harrison	UK
Elyssia Hart	**UK**
Stephanie Hendricks	UK
Sian I'Anson	**UK**
Caroline Illidge	UK

Name	Country
Steven Ingle	**UK**
Owain Jeffreys	UK
Ashley Johnstone	**UK**
Sean Jones	UK
Abdul Khaki	**UK**
Kirsty Lamb	UK
Javier Landaluce Gutiérrez	**ESP**
Colin Leat	UK
Heather Lynch	**UK**
Yvonne Mahaffy	UK
Neil McCallum	**UK**
Julia McCracken	UK
Uzodhu Michael	**UK**
Ahmed Mohsen	
Mohamed Sadek	UAE
Nicholas Moody	**UK**
Isabel Mostyn	UK
Jack Murphy	**UK**
Patrick Murray	UK
Daniel Newlands	**UK**
Nighat un Nisa	PAK
Helen Nisbet	**UK**
Michael Norton	UK
Tobias Nunn	**UK**
Lilian Nyaga	UK
Heather Ortiz	**UK**
Olakunle Adetolu Otele	UK
Chris Paden	**UK**
Thomas Pinkham	UK
James Powell	**UK**
Cathryn Rees	UK
Kirsten Rhodes	**UK**
Michael Rickwood	UK
Tom Robinson	**UK**
Nick Sharpe	UK

Name	Country
Robert Shelton	UK
Martin Sheppard	**UK**
Richard Simpson	UK
Thomas St Clair	**UK**
Robert Stockwell	UK
Fahad Suleri	**PAK**
Kyle Surette	US
Giovanni Tenderini	**ITA**
Simon Thom	UK
Claire Travis	**UK**
James Trott	UK
George Tsiamtsouris	**UK**
Elizabeth Turner	UK
Inemesit McCarthy Udoetuk	**UK**
Euan Welsh	UK
Ethan White	**UK**
Gareth Whittle	UK
Tom Woodworth	**UK**

DEAR SUSANNE

I'm going through a challenging divorce which is impacting my relationships and quality of work. I would like to regain my professional focus, and I wonder if I should discuss my situation openly with my project team.

I can imagine how challenging this must be for you. Know that you are not the only one who experiences difficulty. Many people are faced with situations – be it divorce, health issues or caring for a child with special needs – that impact how they show up at work.

Even when you wish things were different, it's crucial that you treat yourself with kindness and compassion. Give yourself a hug and say to yourself that this too shall pass. You have the strengths you need to meet the situation. It may feel counterintuitive, but when you accept the situation and show compassion for yourself, it will have a calming effect on your nervous system, which in turn will help you focus and process your emotions better.

It's a good idea to open up

Opening up to your team about your situation can also help relieve the pressure you're feeling. You don't have to say a lot. Simply saying that you're going through a tough time because of your divorce can be enough. It will explain to your colleagues why you sometimes drop the ball and it will enable them to better support you. And bear in mind that when you open up and show vulnerability, you signal to others that it's OK not to be perfect. That in itself can open the door for many new conversations to take place and for a deeper level of trust to occur among the team.

If your emotions are too raw, and you worry you'll break down in tears at work, make it a priority to calm down your nervous system and your emotional brain. One of the quickest and most effective ways to do that is to work with your breath. Whenever you can pause for a few minutes, spend that time practising deep breathing. Inhale calmly and deeply through your nose to the count of five, then exhale slowly to the count of 10. Relax your body and notice how your abdomen and lower ribs

It's crucial that you treat yourself with kindness and compassion

expand as you breathe in and how they contract as you breathe out. Making your outbreath twice as long as your inbreath will have an immediately calming effect.

Don't suppress emotions

Unless you're in the middle of a high-stakes meeting or an important conversation at work, try not to suppress your emotions. When you suppress your sadness, the emotion will get stuck because it's not being acknowledged by you. When you have self-compassion and allow the sadness to simply be there, it can pass through you. You can say: "Hello sadness; here you are again. It's OK. I know you're here for a reason. I accept you." It may seem irrational, but when you turn towards your emotions and accept them, they will cease to dominate you.

There is a powerful exercise in my new book, *How to Do the Inner Work*, that can help you make peace with your emotions, step

Susanne Madsen is an internationally recognised project leadership coach, trainer, consultant and author. Her latest book, *How to Do the Inner Work* (TCK Publishing), is out now. For more information, visit www.susannemadsen.com

by step. If you decide to try it out, set aside at least 20 minutes for it, preferably on your day off. In the book you'll also find a handful of breathing techniques that all serve to bring you back to equilibrium.

Plan your priorities

Finally, make sure you always know what your top priorities are. If you show up to work in the morning drained by what's happening in your personal life, having a ready-made list of your top five or 10 priorities will make it much easier to focus and just get on with it. And have compassion if you don't get through everything on your list. It's OK to be human.

Susanne appeared on a recent episode of APM Podcast. Listen for free on Apple Podcasts, Spotify and many more platforms.

Do you have a question for Susanne? Email mail@susannemadsen.com

PROJECT ME

WE ASK PROJECT PROFESSIONALS: WHAT'S THE BEST WAY TO DELIVER BAD NEWS?

What would Chief Brodie do?
Joanna Jackson, Service Transformation Programme Manager, RFL Property Services

Chief Brodie in the film *Jaws* continually has to give bad news that threatens to close a coastal resort to a mayor who needs to keep the resort open. So, inspired by the Chief, here's my advice. Be quick; bad news doesn't improve like wine the longer you leave it. Deliver bad news in a timely way and in person. Be honest; whatever the news is, you want the best outcome for the work and your stakeholders. Propose solutions to the problem; this will provide a level of reassurance and focus conversation constructively. Don't select individuals for blame. Be honest about processes that have failed. Discussion of individual failure should happen directly with that individual.
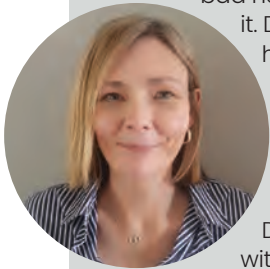
Think through the consequences
Ryan Crellin, Head of Projects, Sellafield

Delivering bad news can be stressful and daunting for the deliverer. This is why the urge to unburden ourselves of bad news means that we do not always think about the consequences of how we deliver it. Planning the discussion is as important as the discussion itself. Think about what the outcome of the conversation needs to be, how the audience will receive the news and what their reaction and concerns are likely to be. Frame the conversation and its context. Be empathetic and honest, but do not just regurgitate the bad news as a bullet-point list. Leave room for feedback and discussion, and allow the conversation to flow. Most importantly, remember that it is highly likely that you need to maintain these relationships in the future.

Avoid sugar coating
David Esset, Project Manager, Ansaldo Nuclear

Delivering bad news requires a careful, proactive approach. Prepare thoroughly by gathering accurate facts, consulting experts and anticipating concerns. Identify your audience, tailor your communication to the audience and choose a suitable communication method that encourages dialogue. Often a combination of communication approaches is necessary. Next, communicate early and clearly. Be transparent about the problem and its impact, avoiding sugar-coating. Offer potential solutions, mitigation steps and a path forward. Also, show understanding and empathy to everyone affected. It's essential to frame the discussion around solving the issue, not assigning blame. It is also helpful to highlight where actions have been taken to reduce the impact of the problem. Finally, follow up promptly. Address concerns, implement solutions and maintain regular updates. Keeping communication open and ensuring all stakeholders align with an updated plan helps rebuild trust and collaboration.

It's inevitable!
Aaron Devalda, Project Manager, JBT/ Proseal

Delivering bad news in a project environment is inevitable, and the sooner you come to terms with it, everyone benefits. Structure the way you deliver bad news to be direct and informative, but also empathetic to the situational context. Bad news is received better in person or on a video call. Emails or messages can sometimes be misread to come across as abrupt, aggressive or dismissive. Bad news is better received when there is a call to action with a resolution or plan to keep the project on track. Fear of unhappy stakeholders, not feeling in control or potential for conflict can make the safe and easy routes the preferred method. But when is the safe option ever fun?

Show you have listened

Melissa Everitt, VP – Product, Strategic Operations, Choreograph

Having spent time building trust with your clients/stakeholders, you should deliver bad news swiftly – ideally in a one-to-one and appropriate time and setting. It should be accompanied with suggestions on solutions, but also allow clients/stakeholders the space to absorb and reflect on the news. Second, bad news should be delivered with empathy and – if the fault is yours – an apology and ownership of the mistake. Being a partner to your stakeholders will allow you to support them through the project journey. Finally, there will always be bumps along the road in projects. If risks are monitored, then mistakes should be identified early and monitored. However, not all risks can be planned for, so as a project manager don't blame yourself too much if you haven't been able to anticipate something.

Do not second-guess

Tamsin Alli-Balogun FAPM, Associate Director, AtkinsRéalis

Do not second-guess how people will feel about the information you are sharing. What feels like bad news to you won't necessarily be bad news to them. A huge drama in your eyes may be a small obstacle in theirs. If possible, pick a time when they are able to give their attention to what you are saying. Then, get to the point quickly and give them the facts. Don't share your opinion unless you are asked to, and don't try to 'soften the blow' by stepping around the issue or trying to play it down – this can be frustrating for the other party. If it's appropriate for you to provide your perspective or thoughts on the matter, before doing so, remember to allow time and space for the news to be heard and understood. Their response may surprise you!

It's a harsh reality!

Dave Corbin FAPM, Head of Client Accounts, Gleeds Management Services

Always deliver bad news as soon as possible, along with solutions, in a manner that allows an informed decision to be made. Bad news is never welcome, but it is a harsh reality of project life. The earlier an issue is identified, the more likely an acceptable resolution can be found. Most people, including project professionals, do not enjoy confrontation and therefore will try to avoid having difficult conversations. Sadly, issues rarely go away or get better over time. Dealing with the issue promptly will often have the least negative impact on the project, and the most positive impact on the team. So, plan your announcement, plan for the varied responses that might come your way, keep the project outcomes at the forefront of your considerations, refer back to the intended benefits and remain solution focused. The project will benefit, the team will benefit and those who receive the bad news should at least be understanding.

Listen to episode 102 of APM Podcast, 'How to have difficult conversations', via your favourite podcast app

Avoid Friday afternoon

Karen Skinner, Chief Project and Portfolio Officer, LifeArc

Before giving bad news, prepare thoroughly. Gather the necessary information and plan how you'll share it and tackle any questions. Think about when and where to deliver the news. Avoid last thing on a Friday afternoon, and select a private setting. Tell the team up front and cut to the chase; don't keep them second-guessing with a slow build up to the blow. Be honest, but deliver the news with sensitivity, ensuring messaging is crystal clear and can't be misinterpreted. Tone and body language are as important as what you say. Acknowledge it's bad news – don't try to dress it up as something positive if it isn't, and have empathy for their feelings. Follow up afterwards; it's likely they won't digest all that you're saying after the initial shock, so be patient, allow them processing time and circle back to ensure they've understood, providing continued support through the next steps.

PROJECT: TO POWER SUSTAINABILITY

SARAH HALSTEAD FAPM USES HER PROJECT MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCE TO HELP A LOCAL COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVE IN NORTH SOMERSET

In 2015, I joined Low Carbon Gordano (LCG), a community benefit society focused on sustainable practices and reducing carbon emissions. Unlike profit-driven businesses, its goal is to deliver social and environmental benefits. I was attracted to investing in a new 1MW solar farm, making me a part-owner. This investment supports renewable electricity generation, contributes to the community fund and provides a dividend return.

LCG operates in the Gordano Valley, including parts of North Somerset and Bristol. Established in 2007 by residents concerned about climate change, it aims to raise sustainability awareness and reduce the community's carbon footprint. Our initiatives promote energy efficiency, renewable energy and sustainable living. The society engages locals in projects and reinvests surplus funds into the community. Operating democratically, members influence decisions, ensuring the organisation meets community needs.

Using my experience
With a passion for public infrastructure and an engineering background, I have experience in delivering major European projects for UK critical national infrastructure. In 2021, I joined the LCG board to support its development and net zero contribution, utilising my project management skills. The 10 board directors, mostly society members, bring diverse expertise in law, banking, business management, accountancy, renewables engineering, marketing, academia and infrastructure project management. My focus has been on our largest new project, a 1MW wind turbine proposal for Portishead near Bristol.

Opportunities for partnering
A reduction in wind turbine costs by around 40% in the last decade has made onshore wind a new opportunity for LCG, albeit leveraging partnerships with like-minded energy groups and securing external funding are essential. In 2020, Channel Green Energy (CGE) was established in Portishead to develop a wind turbine. With shared aims and values, CGE became a wholly owned subsidiary of LCG. Through CGE, LCG aims to build its first community-owned wind turbine, and I focus on leading the project development.

The project life cycle
In 2022, we started development work for the CGE wind turbine project. An initial challenge was identifying the project development life cycle relevant to the funding streams, planning processes and delivery mechanisms for renewable energy. I was able to bring an understanding of the life cycle from large-scale energy infrastructure development, where there are parallels, and the net zero hub in our region, which administers renewable energy government grants, was able to advise on a three-stage life cycle including feasibility, design and construction/commissioning.

Location and budget
Work had already been done by CGE to identify a possible location close to Royal Portbury Docks in North Somerset, which sat in a very narrow corridor identified to be suitable for onshore wind in the local plan. Before embarking on feasibility studies, we took a view as a board on what our order of magnitude budget might be, based on sensible levels of capitalisation for our organisation, which suggested an investment in the order of £1m.

Finding project funding
We worked with the regional net zero hub to prepare a successful application for a grant to cover the costs of an initial feasibility study funded through the Rural Community Energy Fund (RCEF).

RCEF was a UK government initiative designed to support community-led renewable energy projects in rural areas. Administered through regional

A reduction in wind turbine costs by around 40% in the last decade has made onshore wind a new opportunity for LCG

hubs, RCEF provided financial assistance for feasibility studies, technical support and project development to help communities transition to renewable energy sources. Its primary aim was to boost local energy resilience, reduce carbon emissions and encourage sustainable energy practices in rural communities. The fund supported a variety of renewable technologies, including wind, solar and biomass, by offering grants that facilitated the early stages of project development, helping communities assess the viability of their renewable energy projects and move towards implementation.

Demonstrating feasibility

The feasibility study commenced in 2023. The two most suitable wind turbine types were modelled in different scenarios to highlight the financial outcome of installing a community-owned wind turbine at this site. Feasibility was assessed based on cost analysis, site constraints including proximity to residential dwellings and utilities,

electrical grid capacity, projected yields, wind turbine technology types and sizes, and commercial models for sale of electricity – concluding that a 1MW size turbine could be feasible in this location.

Engaging the community and decision-makers

Planning routes for onshore wind require that local development plans have already identified areas where wind energy is possible, and require it to be demonstrated that the planning impacts identified by the affected local community have been appropriately addressed and the proposal has community support.

As part of the feasibility work, we undertook extensive community engagement and sought pre-planning advice from the local authority, who indicated that, despite support from the land owner and local community, permission was unlikely to be granted due to the project's location in green belt land, despite no specific restrictions on installing wind turbines in green belt.

The next project phases

We held a planning workshop on whether to continue, pause or stop the project. We created a high-level plan that enabled the board to decide to pause project development until after the general election.

Next steps

Since the new government came in, we have started to revive the project and have had positive engagement from the regional net zero hub. Later this year, we will be developing an application for grant funding for phase 2 development for design, environmental impact assessment, consents and legal agreements. Alongside this, we are engaging with the new MP for the area and other stakeholders to gather support and hope to be designing a turbine in 2025. Watch this space!

Sarah Halstead FAPM is on the board of Low Carbon Gordano, and is Head of Growth, Transformation, Delivery and Consulting at AtkinsRéalis

DIE HARD

IT'S TIME TO GO HEAD-TO-HEAD WITH TWO MOVIE PROJECT MANAGERS WHO DEFINE OPPOSITE STYLES. BUT WHO COMES OUT ON TOP: AGILE JOHN McCLANE OR WATERFALL HANS GRUBER? RICHARD YOUNG SAYS THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY TO FIND OUT...

A great Christmas film? Or the greatest Christmas film? Whichever side of that debate you're on, you'll also know that the 1988 action classic *Die Hard* is one of the classic project management movies. It's because it's about a brilliant heist – a brilliant project, in other words. What is an elaborate scheme to steal $640m in bearer bonds from a high-security vault if not "a unique, transient endeavour undertaken to bring about change and to achieve planned objectives"?

That's not the story the film's poster will convey, of course. Instead of the dashing project manager Hans Gruber (Alan Rickman), you see Bruce Willis in a vest. Because, you see, this isn't just a tale of lone off-duty cop John McClane foiling a master criminal. This is a clash of project management styles; a methodological battle for the ages.

Plots and projects

In the red corner, with a meticulously planned project, a carefully assembled team and multiple contingencies built into his risk register, we have

Gruber, waterfall master of the phased approach. In the blue corner, detective John McClane – adaptive, responsive, results-oriented. A rogue-but-effective scrum-master of the agile technique, he doesn't play by the rules – but he gets the job done.

McClane has flown into LA at Christmas to see his kids and win back his estranged wife, Holly (Bonnie Bedelia). She's a high-powered exec at the Nakatomi Corporation, and after failing to charm her immediately, the New York detective is left cooling his heels in an office while Holly attends to the small gathering of deal-doers in the atrium before they all head off for the holidays.

Meanwhile Hans Gruber and his squad of assorted heavies, euro-henchmen and hackers enter

the building, kill the security guards and begin a precisely ordered plan to raid the company. His hacker Theo (Clarence Gilyard) begins the process of defeating seven layers of security around the Nakatomi vault in the basement – containing the bearer bonds.

His project, then, is crystal clear, and from the outset it's obvious he's built the right team, considered all the variables (taking control of comms in the company, installing fake security guards and more) and is a highly effective motivator.

The subsequent raid of the office party involves gunshots – alerting McClane to the robbery and kicking off his real project: defeating the bad guys and saving lives. But with no plan, or even awareness of what he's dealing with, McClane has to be pure-play agile, refining project goals on the go, finding resources wherever he can and improvising.

Waterfall adapts, agile acts

But it's a huge misconception to think that the more traditional Gantt chart approach taken by Gruber doesn't demand flexibility. Far from it: when Nakatomi CEO Joe Takagi (James Shigeta) coolly refuses to hand over the vault's access codes, Gruber executes him. Game over? Not at all: he's anticipated this risk and has teed up Theo to crack the code.

McClane, meanwhile, is trying to unpick his project into deliverable tasks. Job one? Alert the authorities. With the phones out, his attempts to trigger a fire alarm are noticed by the gang. They call off the emergency services, and one of them is sent to dispatch him. McClane overpowers the goon and uses his radio to call in the hijack with the police. A great agile moment: he also uses the radio to listen in on the gang's comms,

With no plan, or even awareness of what he's dealing with, McClane has to be pure-play agile

noting down the different voices and names so he knows what he's dealing with. He's building a task list – even if he isn't using Post-Its to record them on the brainstorm wall…

The police send has-been officer Al Powell (Reginald VelJohnson) to see what's up, but he's hoodwinked by the fake security guards (more points for Gruber's contingency planning), and it's only when McClane chucks the corpse of another gangster out of the window and onto Powell's car that the cops take the situation seriously. This particular bad

guy was rigging explosives in the building, so now McClane has a machine gun and a bag full of detonators. This project's progressing nicely, even if the pathway to success still isn't clear.

But this is where Gruber really shows his mettle. After failing to negotiate McClane's surrender over the radio, he shows leadership and adaptability by heading up to the roof himself to check on the explosives.

McClane finds him, and despite Gruber's excellent bluff (pretending to be an escaped hostage), he tries to capture him – agile going for the quick win, natch – but fails, and the detonators are recovered by Gruber and his men.

Critical dependencies

By this stage, the cops have called in the FBI and things seem to be turning the way of our agile project manager. But these guys don't have a handle of the situation and are making up their own plans without McClane's inside knowledge. Agile can work really well, but must adapt to new project realities. Blundering in, all guns blazing, is rarely a good solution.

McCLANE v GRUBER: WHO WOULD YOU HIRE?

So who's the better project manager? We're going to score Hans Gruber and John McClane against some principles of good project management to see who's the true hero of *Die Hard*.

Principle	John "Agile" McClane	Hans "Waterfall" Gruber
Vision Clarity and alignment on goals	Save the hostages, foil the robbers. Agile demands clear outcomes, and McClane doesn't lose his way. **9/10**	Steal the money, make your escape. Couldn't be clearer: the plan is watertight and the team all know their tasks. **9/10**
Collaboration Deploying skills and coordinating	Cops don't buy his story; the FBI mess him around. Plus he gets Ellis killed. Argyle and Al work well, though. **6/10**	Outstanding: team assembled to meet every need in a meticulously planned project. Everyone knows their role. **10/10**
Flexibility Adapting to problems	Always skirting disaster by the skin of his teeth. But creative in problem-solving – home-made bombs, anyone? **8/10**	The project plan and risk register anticipate almost every issue that crops up. Willing to step in personally when needed. **8/10**
Accountability Take responsibility, empower others	Takes on the gang single-handed; also helps Al discover his lost mojo (shooting perps!). **8/10**	When things go wrong, he steps up; and he lets the team do their thing, unless it interferes with the project plan. **8/10**
Trust Boosting teamwork, mutual reliance	Earns cop Al's trust quickly, and they work together – but agile lacks a necessary external structure. **6/10**	Owns the project but ensures team members can execute tasks without issues. Great delegation without losing overall control. **9/10**
Evolution Learning lessons, adapting methodologies	His one advantage over Gruber? Lots of different approaches, often improvised, to deal with crazy strictures. **9/10**	Perhaps too bound by the dependencies built into the project plan; risk register is detailed, but inflexible. **7/10**
OVERALL	**46 points** A maverick, but he is responsive, creative and goal-oriented even in the face of "corporate" inaction.	**51 points** Such meticulous planning and execution, even in the face of a rogue element like McClane, is admirable. So close…

McClane can't convince them to pull back. It turns out Gruber's beautiful Gantt chart included a heavy-handed FBI response as a critical stage gate! The FBI cut power to the building ahead of raiding it, disabling the last security measure on the vault, and the gang has the loot. Gruber has also learned that Holly is McClane's wife and has her locked down while the other hostages are sent to the roof for a diversionary helicopter pickup – which the FBI turns into a gunship attack.

Thinking ahead

McClane saves the hostages – a task driven by expedience, but which does deliver half the overall goal of his project – while the gang blow the explosives to take out the FBI choppers and cause mayhem. Gruber really does think ahead, beyond the nominal end

It turns out Gruber's Gantt chart included a heavy-handed FBI response as a critical stage gate

of the project: "When you steal $600, you can just disappear. When you steal $600 million, they will find you unless they think you're already dead," he explains. A good project manager always considers what business-as-usual looks like after they're done…

But also (re)acting on events is McLane's limo driver Argyle (De'voreaux White), who spots Theo loading the loot into a stolen ambulance in the basement

car park, ready to leave unmolested in the chaos. He rams the vehicle, and delivers on the other half of the agile goal. Hostages, tick; plot thwarted, tick.

It's only now that Gruber's meticulous project unravels. Like his henchman Karl (who is driven to make poor decisions through anger at McClane for killing his brother), he's starting to deviate from the plan, now that the project dependencies have collapsed. Result? Well, this review has already been full of spoilers, so let's end it: McClane pulls one last agile move out of the bag with a hidden gun, introducing yet another variable that Gruber had not anticipated.

It's a tough choice between the two (see box). But ultimately, you'd send your project management trainee to learn from Gruber, not McClane, wouldn't you? Bloodthirsty pseudoterrorism aside, he really is a master project manager.

NEW BOOKS, RECOMMENDED FAVOURITES AND PODCASTS TO KEEP YOU ENTERTAINED

A NEW YEAR MEANS A CHANCE TO CONSIDER CHANGES IN YOUR LIFE. SHOULD SUCCESS BE TIED TO ENDLESS PRODUCTIVITY? PERHAPS THE WISEST THING TO DO IS PAUSE AND REFLECT

Meditations for Mortals: Four weeks to embrace your limitations and make time for what counts

Oliver Burkeman (Bodley Head)

I am a researcher in workplace safety, health and wellbeing, balancing the demands of a busy career and family life, and so Oliver Burkeman's *Meditations for Mortals* resonated deeply with me. Like many working parents managing multiple responsibilities – career commitments, external engagements and raising children – I often feel pressure to stay productive and on top of everything. Burkeman's reflections offer a refreshing counterpoint to the culture of relentless hustle, reminding us that it's OK to step back and embrace imperfection.

The book is structured into 28 short meditations, each designed to be read daily, but just as effective for those who prefer dipping in and out. What struck me, especially given the constant demands of both work and home, is how Burkeman dismantles the belief that success is tied to endless productivity. He argues that productivity is not the ultimate measure of our worth and that, sometimes, the most productive action we can take is to pause, rest and reflect. This message is particularly powerful for those managing busy lives, providing a much-needed reminder that balance is more important than the endless pursuit of doing more.

One of the most insightful reflections comes on day 13, where Burkeman shares that even famously prolific authors like Charles Dickens and Anthony Trollope limited their workdays to just four hours. This isn't a call for laziness, but an acknowledgement that our capacity to perform well depends on our ability to rest. As someone deeply involved in researching workplace wellbeing, I know all too well how pushing ourselves beyond our limits leads to burnout, decreased productivity and poorer outcomes both in the workplace and in our personal lives. Burkeman's message reinforces what research already shows: overwork doesn't lead to better results.

On day five, Burkeman offers another profound insight when addressing the guilt many of us feel due to unfinished tasks, whether it's a growing to-do list or a pile of unread books. Instead of treating these lists as buckets to be emptied, he encourages us to view them as streams we can dip into occasionally, without guilt. This perspective is invaluable for anyone managing multiple priorities, reminding us that we don't need to accomplish everything, nor should we feel guilty for not doing so.

Meditations for Mortals is a practical guide for anyone seeking a more balanced and meaningful life, offering a timely reminder that wellbeing is found in embracing our limits, not in constantly striving for more. It's a book that will leave a lasting impression, encouraging readers to prioritise what truly matters and let go of the pressure to be endlessly productive.

Review by Dr Clara Cheung, Reader in Engineering Management, the University of Manchester, and author of the APM report *The Wellbeing of Project Professionals*

★★★★★

Managing Risk in Projects (2nd edition)

David Hillson (Routledge)

David Hillson has once again demonstrated his vast experience in risk management across all levels, but specifically covering project risk management in a well-written, well-presented and easy-to-read manner.

His coverage of risk versus uncertainty, along with his comparisons of risk management standards and approaches, is long overdue. He presents the risk management process with supporting explanations for each step in a manner that even newcomers to risk management

can easily absorb and apply. The inclusion of a post-project risk review is welcome.

A risk management process does not manage risk in itself. The inclusion of the soft side of risk management – people and leadership – adds great value. It is, after all, people who make decisions and play a vital role in the entire risk management process, from initiation all the way to the post-project risk review.

Hillson provides an overview of managing risk in complex projects and initiatives. His coverage of continuity management from a risk perspective blends well with his coverage of risk and people; and future thinking and adaptive resilience integrate with sustainable risk management.

Sustaining effective risk management on a project is often overlooked or seen as something 'we just do'. Hillson gives good insight into the challenges of treating risk management as a separate entity from the context or broader organisational setting in which it is applied.

Hillson successfully covers the importance of effective risk management application as a critical success factor, enhancing successful project delivery. Basic coverage of quantitative risk management is appreciated, as this is often seen as a 'dark art', and many project managers shy away from this important assurance activity for various reasons. Hillson presents quantitative risk analysis in a simple manner that should inspire deeper research and application of these techniques for both schedule and cost impact analyses.

As a consultant and trainer, I readily recommend this book as a valuable addition to one's bookshelf as a reference work. Even the highly experienced and knowledgeable in risk management would benefit from a refreshing read of the core concepts.

Review by Carl Karshagen, Learning Programme Director, QA

★★★★★

My Bedside Books
Gillian Magee, Head of Programme Delivery, AstraZeneca

Atlas of AI: Power, politics and the planetary costs of artificial intelligence
Kate Crawford
Professionally, I'm reading more than ever as I've just started a master's in artificial intelligence (AI), ethics and society. My day job is to deliver a large of portfolio of IT projects, many with AI at their heart. This is a fabulous book that brings to life the material world of AI, its societal impacts and some of the ethical challenges it poses. Kate Crawford is a very engaging writer and, whether you work in IT or even just pick up a smartphone, it's a thought-provoking read.

AI Needs You: How we can change AI's future and save our own
Verity Harding
Verity Harding has advised governments, worked in Silicon Valley and has now moved back to academia. In *AI Needs You*, she takes three case studies (IVF, the space race and the development of the internet) to show how different governance models have enabled, and sometimes frustrated, technological advances. Comparison is made to the growth of AI and machine learning to illustrate how new governance might be modelled on historical approaches. Her call to action is for us all to actively participate in shaping the future of AI.

And Away...
Bob Mortimer
I've loved watching Bob Mortimer since his *Big Night Out* days with Vic Reeves, right up to the latest series of *Gone Fishing*. This is his autobiography, by turns hilarious and touching. It's a beautiful insight into comedy and friendship and is also, simply, a daft laugh.

We're all ears – podcasts to listen to

APM Podcast (WiPM specials)
If you didn't get a ticket for APM's Women in Project Management (WiPM) conference in September, then be sure to catch up on some of what you missed with our episode 'How to be an inclusive leader', recorded live at the event. Join Elizabeth Nolan, Roselyn Unegbu, Sarah Outterson and Ali Parish as they share their top three things that make for an inclusive workplace. We've also put together a follow-up podcast led by our brilliant WiPM Interest Network on the many and varied career paths open to anyone looking for a career in project management. It's inspiring stuff!

The Diary of a CEO
Marketing entrepreneur and author Steven Bartlett interviews influential thinkers with the aim of making your life "more enjoyable, successful and fulfilled". His lengthy podcasts mostly cover mental and physical self-improvement. There's every topic covered here, but if you fancy something different, listen to his podcast with former prime minister Boris Johnson.

Communicating with Ros Atkins
We interviewed Atkins for the 100th episode of APM Podcast, but if you're craving more of his communication advice, then listen to his Radio 4 series, where he speaks to some of the best communicators out there, from White House speechwriter Sarada Peri and personal finance campaigner Martin Lewis to comedian Rob Brydon.

"Success" is defined by stakeholders

EDDIE OBENG SAYS SUCCESS MUST BE MEASURED BY THREE DIMENSIONS THAT REFLECT TANGIBLE OUTCOMES, THE EXPERIENCE OF WORKING ON A PROJECT AND THE VARYING PERSPECTIVES ON IT

I was booked for a morning and an evening meeting in London with a long gap in between. So, I did what I've done before: posted on LinkedIn that I'd be in London if anyone wanted to meet. In the past, I've made serendipitous connections with innovators, CEOs, book readers and QUBE users, each one delightful.

I was sitting in a glorious atrium at London's Landmark Hotel. Sophie (not her real name) took up my offer, and we have just been howling in laughter. Now she's telling me about one of her data security projects. She's explaining how only by forcing the stakeholders to define what they wanted from the data could she achieve success. The emotional effort of getting stakeholders to focus was for her the most dreadful part, because she has a superpower of literally feeling metadata resolving complex data systems. She's world class at her method, but without a goal, complete success is elusive.

Project failure leads to project success

We pause to enjoy our surroundings. I am reminded of the phrase, "The surgery was a success, but the patient died." Why? Because this majestic, palm-tree-filled atrium bankrupted the enterprise that created it. For them, going bust was not success. The hotel's operators picked up the building for a song and transformed it into a successful venue. So, weirdly, project failure led to process success!

In projects, in processes and in life, we seek success, but what is it? How is it measured? And how do we achieve it? Our bodies know a lot more about success than our brains. Success in achieving a goal is rewarded with a feel-good blast of dopamine, but so is progress towards the goal. The application of our mastery and skills also rewards us with a buzz of serotonin. Our bodies tell us if we are succeeding.

Sliding Doors

After just catching or just missing the lift, the heroine in the film *Sliding Doors* follows two alternate plot lines that unravel in different ways. You find yourself judging which was the success. In real life, there is no 'control' life to compare to. Chinese premier Zhou Enlai said it was "too early to say", when asked about the impact of the French Revolution two centuries earlier. Time passes and our perspective changes.

In life, other people have a broader perspective. They can compare your skills, mastery and results and declare

Success is hard to pin down, so just enjoy how it feels

your situation a success. And we know how to achieve success. From studying old legends and autobiographies, it's clear that the main determinant of success are the values you live by. I know people who were fired who now say it was the best thing to happen to them. They all hold values that allowed them to reinvent themselves and not wallow in self-pity.

Skiing the black run

"Black run… in the pocket," my ski guide would chant at the bottom of every challenging run. At the top, the start of the project, we'd look down the slope, select the route, plan, execute, make decisions and then complete. Virgin snow was the best, as you left your tracks as a temporary record of your skill to be admired by those who came along later.

We measured the speed, the symmetry of the turns and the cost in broken limbs, as well as the exhilaration of the experience. We reviewed each in comparison with previous deadly runs and considering the reputation of the run.

Professor Eddie Obeng HonFAPM is an educator, TED speaker and author. Join his masterclasses, courses and workshops on the QUBE #SuperReal campus at QUBE.cc

Those three dimensions – hard goals and tangible outcomes versus soft and experiential; absolute versus relative; and internal (our view) versus external (other people's views) – are the most helpful in an objective measure of success.

If project success is and can only be defined by the stakeholders, then it's critical to help the stakeholders to define success. Try my OnBa-l-ance performance enhancement tool to see the eight combinations (bit.ly/3UbeNKm).

There is only one combination that really matters: what people external to your project think about your project journey/experience.

Quick quiz

Read the following statements and realise how meaningless they are without the other dimensions.

"The sales revenue was £1.25m." Is that a good thing? What is it relative to last year, to our expectations and to market growth?

"The staff are happy with the new website." But what about customers?

"The restaurant meal was cheap." But the restaurant was noisy and hot, and the staff were rude.

Success is hard to pin down, so just enjoy how it feels.