

# One Project too many

## A 'novel' approach to project and programme management

by Geoff Reiss and Geof Leigh

*One Project too many – a novel approach to project and programme management*; 266 pp;

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**'It is inevitable that this book will become required reading for managers trying to get to grips with project management' ... 'in the future will be considered a classic business text'.** *Ed Burney-Cumming, Project – the magazine of the Association for Project Management.*

**'Imagine a cross between PG Wodehouse and the PRINCE manual and you have some idea of how the authors of this unusual textbook use the form of a comic novel to deliver the content of a thorough project management course.'** ... **'Highly recommended'** *Brett Hannam, Project Manager Today.*

Join Bob, Anna, Jason and the team as they explore the world of project and programme management. Anna's first question is: 'Where do I start?'

It's a question for anyone facing the complexity of managing projects. In part one, Anna and the other characters encounter a wide range of practical problems as they run a major project and the organisation gets up to speed with programme management.

In part two, the theoretical advice and diagrammatic examples are collected together for ease of reference – and there's a web site for the diagrams that are just too big for the printed page.

Now read on to get a flavour of this highly original new book:

"Bob lay in his bath holding, but not reading, the Sunday paper. His bath played a large part in his life...

Now he was 'in post', he wanted to make a mark on the organisation, to do something that improved the company, and would get his name welcomed and respected around the business. But what would make a difference? ...

A week and one Sunday bath later, Bob had an answer: the e-trolley. It seemed perfect: he needed to make a mark in his new job, he needed to get to know people in the firm and he wanted everyone to know about him. The e-trolley might also set his company apart from the competition, even if they had secret plans in that direction...

'So here is the idea', he told his wife over breakfast. 'You have a trolley with a built-in barcode reader. You, the customer, scan the things you pick up and a little display tells you what you have bought, how much it costs and how much you've spent so far. When you go to the checkout the trolley already knows what you have and you can simply pay and go' ...

### *do your projects deliver?*

'So, how are these other projects stacking up in terms of delivering benefits?' said Bob.

The two directors exchanged glances. A frisson of doubt was clearly visible in their eyes...

Bob began to suspect that they did not have a proper system for selecting the best projects to do – something he had seen many times before. He politely and quietly asked ever more pointed questions. With each point the two directors began to feel less and less certain about the firmness of the ground on which they were metaphorically standing...

It became clear that they did not have a proper system for selecting or running projects, nor any kind of vision of the future except one in which they kept their own quiet lifestyle...

'Could one of you outline a recent project and the benefits it delivered?'

This apparently innocuous question caused the assembled directors to do a great deal of staring down at their notes, the tablecloth and through the window thoughtfully...

### *the cull*

"By the time the workshop started only projects that at least made some kind of sense or were so far down the track as to be unstoppable had survived. The lack of smugness and the slightly worried brows of the team proved the value the workshop had already had and removed any danger of Bob and Jason looking like the Spanish Inquisition..."

### *developing strategy*

"Jason got on with the business of the day, explaining how the organisation's vision of the future should lead to the development of a programme at a strategic level. This strategic programme then should lead through programme selection to the definition of chosen programmes and these in turn should lead to specific projects..."

### *dawn of the e-trolley*

“The very next morning Ken decided to appoint someone to look at the whole e-trolley idea. On his way to the office he searched his mind for someone who was not too closely tied into one specific part of the organisation, as it was clear that the new programme would cover almost all departments and functions...

Anna Key was the person who came to mind. In the short time she had been with the company she had already become a bit of a pain. The idea of her working for Bob appealed to him. He briefed Anna, keeping the information about the e-trolley project as brief as possible. He rarely told anyone everything about anything as ‘knowledge was power’ and power was something he liked to keep to himself...

### *in at the deep end*

“Anna knew little about project management. She had never heard of programme management but had been involved in assorted projects, and Ken’s offer of the project management job seemed a great opportunity to progress her career. Working on a high-profile project directly related to the new CEO was her idea of ‘getting somewhere’. She had visions of herself at board meetings, knee-deep in thick carpet, but immediately got annoyed with herself for having such trivial ambitions...

### *getting to grips with programme management*

‘The result of our work today will form the basis of a methodology for programme management for SpendItNow’, Jason told the assembled managers.

‘So what is the difference between a methodology and a method?’, said one.

‘The price’, a wag from the back replied.

Jason joined in the laughter until a glance across at stony-faced Anna gave him a ‘Let’s get on with it’ message...

... a wise old bird noted: ‘We have been using the title programme manager as an excuse to pay our better project managers more money. The job is just the same, isn’t it, Jason?’

‘It often is very much the same role and it is often used as a system for retaining staff but it should not be...

### *a pilot for best practice*

“Anna was not normally invited to have coffee with the CEO, so what could he want?

He wanted her to put together a viability study to be used as an example of best practice in the organisation. Not only was she to run a high-profile project, but it was to be used as an example of best practice for all to see!

‘What I need’, he had explained, ‘is a really full and professional project initiation study done independently to show how these things ought to be done. I want you to understand that this study will set a standard for all future studies...

Anna’s mind was in a whirl; she had to think quickly. ‘So, I can take a suitable, current or just-about-to-start project and do a viability study to set a standard for future viability studies?’

‘Not quite’, smiled Bob. ‘We need a project proposal for the e-trolley evaluation project so we can use that and kill two birds with one trolley’...

Anna chewed her salad ruminatively. ‘So, in a sense, there are three projects in a straight sequence here: project one is to get a PID prepared for the pilot – that’s going to take about a month and that comes first. Project two is the pilot and that might take, I don’t know, six or nine months. Project three is the major roll-out which will take years...

### *getting to grip with risk*

‘When you plan a trip to one of the stores in mid-winter you know there is a significant risk of rain so you take an umbrella. We just need to apply this thinking to the project...

‘It doesn’t say this in the textbooks, but I happen to think risk logs are about sharing risks. You see if you know about a risk and keep it to yourself, you take it on your own shoulders. If you set risks down and publish them you share the risks with everyone else. It is only fair really’...

‘Hold on’, said Anna. ‘I can’t give these senior managers jobs to do – I just can’t make them take responsibility for these risks. I’d probably kill whatever support I might get from them in one fell swoop.’

‘You’re right – but you can suggest that responsibility for each risk needs to be taken by someone, and list those risks that don’t yet have an owner. For that matter the organisation doesn’t have experience at risk management and that’s a risk in itself!...

### *it’s all working*

The pilot project was actually happening. The six stores got their trolleys, their training, their market researchers and customers started to use the new technology. Anna’s role has changed from getting-the-project-going to keeping-the-project-going. Keeping-the-project-going meant meetings, and lots of them...

Sue said: ‘These meetings are kind of pleasant but the biscuits are terrible temptation for my diet. Do we really need to spend an hour together like this? Wouldn’t we be more useful running our parts of the project?...

Max supported Anna by saying: ‘The month we don’t meet will be the month something goes wrong, no one notices and we let a major problem build up’...

The project had reached that stage where every senior manager in the organisation seemed to be holding their breath. The big question in many people’s mind was: is it politically wise to support this or not? Most waited for some time and then took a subtle peek at how the thing was going. Eventually a few brave people could be expected to jump off the fence and either condemn it as an utter waste of money, or praise it as a great idea whose time had come. Bit by bit, as with most high-profile projects, more and more people clambered off the fence to form an ever growing group on the positive side. This psychology can, and frequently does, make or break a project...

### *fish and chip suppers*

Anna had suggested that the team should spend the evening together ... ‘This meal would have been fish and chips and a half of cider if we had used up the budget ... ‘I think someone should write a book about this project’...

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