EDUCATING PROJECT MANAGEMENT STAFF

IS WHAT WE ARE DOING ENOUGH?

Kaye Remington

QUESTION?

How do we better educate and prepare

- project managers,
- project team members,
- project contractors and suppliers,
- project sponsors,
- project owners,
- project executive boards,
- specialist professionals

to more effectively deliver complex projects within acceptable bounds of stakeholder requirements?

OVERVIEW

- Professional education
- Workplace education and training
- Tertiary and post-secondary education

Project Management Education
A qualification to do what?

- PM is not a small subsidiary element of General Management as it is taught in many MBA's
- **PM is a highly practice-based discipline which also demands high levels of cognition**
- Formal education must emphasise practice in a way which challenges students to THINK and ACT

- **Project management is higher order management**

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A qualified PM should have acquired …

- **Knowledge about**
  - A range of high level tools to plan and control scope, cost, schedule, resources, etc. – from first principles
  - Procurement options and contractual approaches
  - Project contexts – governance models, methodologies; ethical frameworks; business finance
  - How programs and projects operate as interrelated systems
  - Themselves as individuals – personality and behavioural strengths, weaknesses, values, motivation
  - Where and how to get help and advice - mentoring
- **Skills to**
  - Communicate with people at many different levels –project executive board / contractor / affected local resident
  - Work through problems and situations logically and from multiple perspectives
  - Reframe, restructure problems, find and implement alternative solutions
  - Design or re-design PM frameworks according to the project needs
  - Work with and manage teams at different levels
  - Negotiate and resolve conflict
  - Work with and manage challenging political situations
- **Attributes to enact and model**
  - Initiative and insight
  - Courage to act decisively
  - Ability to challenge constructively
  - Sensitivity to perspectives of multiple stakeholders
  - Resilience and ability to motivate others
  - Authenticity
  - Political acumen

Obviously Super Heroes don’t exist

- But project management professionals do need a deep knowledge of
  - what they can do, and
  - where they might best fit
- What hat(s) they wear best!
- This is best taught by those who have been there!
- The role for the career academic is research

PM Education

Attributes

- Initiative and insight
- Courage to act decisively
- Ability to challenge constructively
- Sensitivity to perspectives of multiple stakeholders
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We need to question what we are achieving

PM education rarely develops the attributes needed to survive in highly contested project environments

Practice! The ‘cop out’ for educators!

- ASSUMPTIONS include

- Attributes (courage, resilience, sensitivity multiple perspectives, polical acumen) are best or only developed in practice! Therefore they are not the responsibility of educators.

- This is because developing and testing attributes is in the “too hard basket”!

Projects exist “in the fast lane”

- Graduates are expected to “hit the ground running”
- And yet in many institutions young PM’s are being trained solely by people who have never been there!

- Some organisations mentor their new graduates and provide in-house training … however
  - Projects are fast-moving, and
  - Knowledge transfer between projects is problematic

- A dilemma for our profession!

If our graduates are to survive , flourish and contribute they must …

- Know what they are getting in to
  - Understand the difference between functional management and project management – they are worlds apart
- Have made a definite choice that PM is for them – it is not for everybody!
- Be interested in working with PEOPLE
- Be motivated to achieve TASKS

PM education is compromised!

Education at all levels is now a commodity!

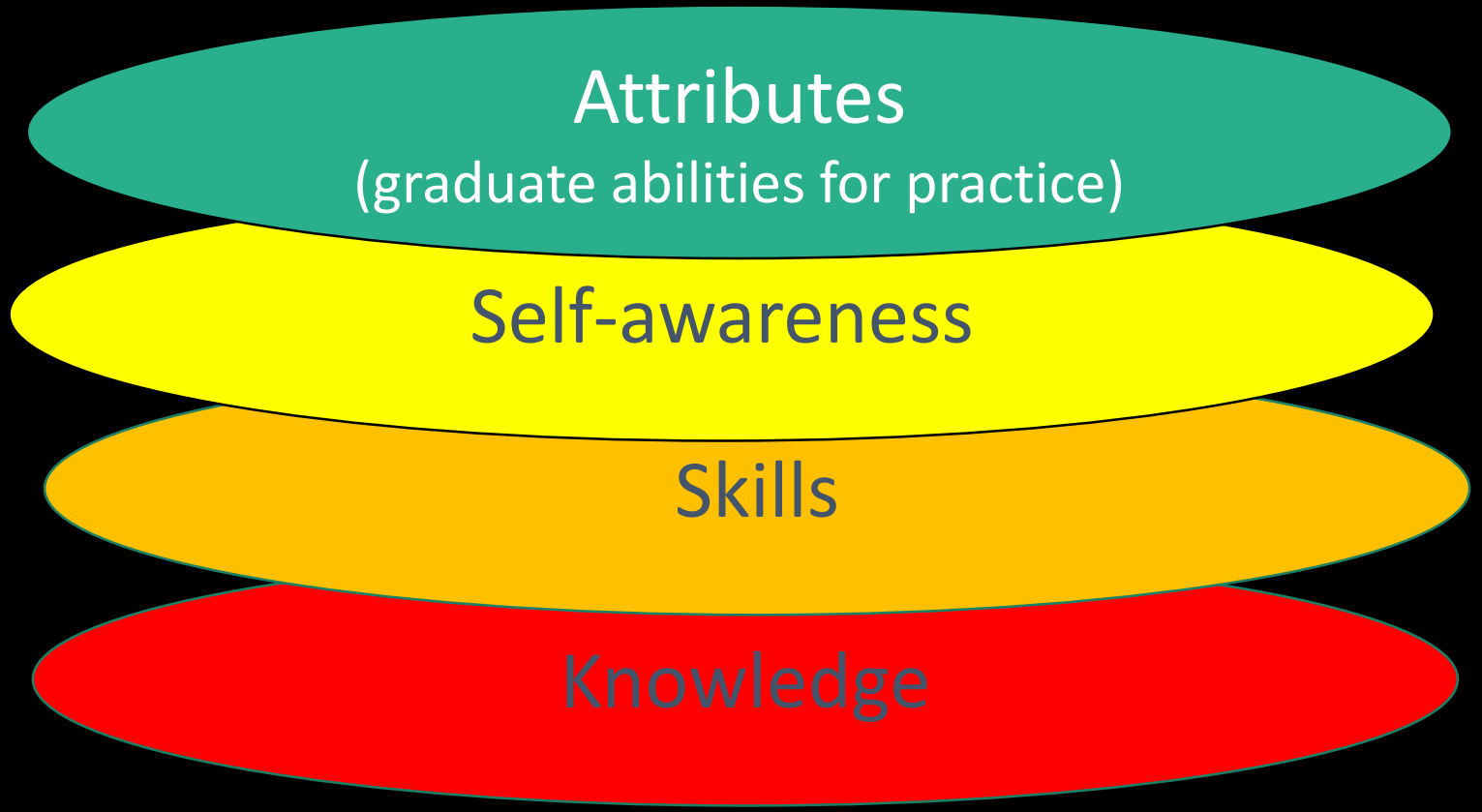
Professional education in the workplace

- Professional education trainers have a vested interest in delivering training to as many people as possible
- Professional bodies have a vested interest in maintaining and increasing membership
- Professional bodies, organisations and trainers become wedded to their products – having invested in a PM product they cannot afford to divorce themselves totally from their main offering

The higher education sector faces many challenges

- International education remains **Australia's third largest export** – just behind iron ore and coal – $20.3 billion in 2015/16
- The pressure on universities and other places of higher education to take in more and more students means that
  - students are enrolled who have no real idea of the demands of PM as a profession
  - traditional approaches to learning dominate – efficient but passive!
- Knowledge and skills are taught in a way which is disconnected from reality
- **Traditional approaches are EASIER / LESS DEMANDING / LESS CONFRONTING**
  - **for educators and for the students!**

PM education should offer multiple level learning



But all these must be developed simultaneously

Like a project, PM education must be integrated

Segmented/discrete subjects require the student to put it all together

That is the job of the educator!

How can we change the pedagogy?

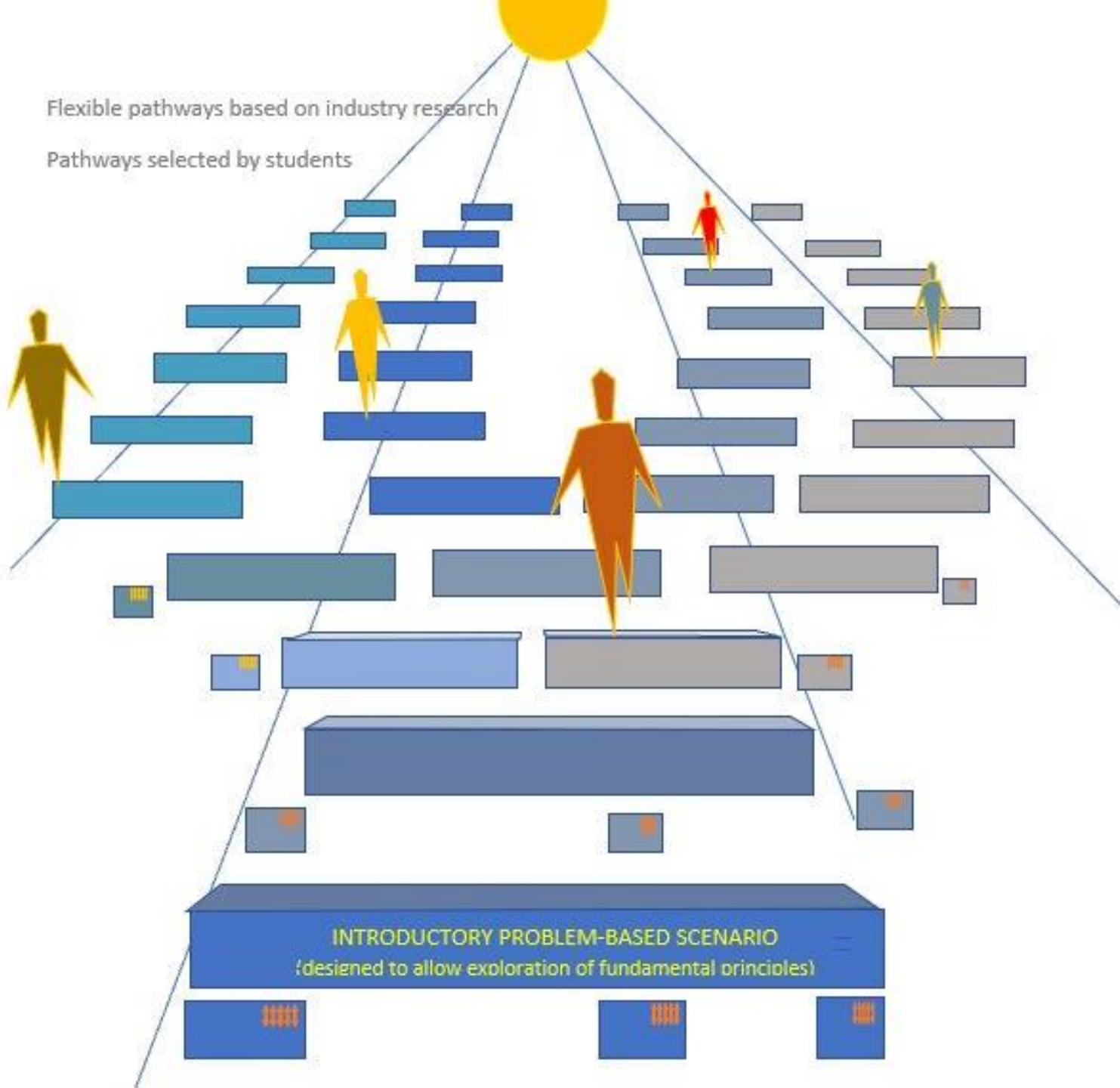
- We must redesign the courses from the ground up as integrated programs
- Knowledge acquisition should be based on first principles – everything else will change
- We need to better understand where our graduates are ending up
- Offer pathways to cater for the specific requirements of industry
- We should work more closely with professional bodies and industry

Learning programs should offer…

- Pathways from simple to challenging to complex
- Graduated programs that are integrated / systemic and simulate real projects
- Knowledge and skills acquisition should feed into the simulation/problem-based courses (not just case studies) in a graded logical manner

A PBL model might look like …

- Flexible pathways selected by students based on industry research, comprising PBL scenarios/simulations that are graded in terms of complexity.
- Learning packages associated with each PBL scenario offer knowledge and skills that underpin each scenario/simulation.
- Initial individual tests online identifies which packages each student needs to complete. Gates open to enrol in scenario when students pass their own requisite set of packages. Offers rapid pathway for students who come into the program with substantial prior knowledge and experience.



Simulated/problem-based learning is not new

Celestin Freinet, 1920's
Dewey, 1933
Bruner, 1957

- Simulated reality allows students to acquire, explore and develop …
  - Knowledge underpinning
  - Skills and behaviour
  - Attributes
- These are all acquired simultaneously – in real time – as close to the real world as we can make it
- Simulation based PBL is used extensively in professional education, such as medicine

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Best educational practice is achieving this in primary and secondary education …

we need to

- Rethink our course structures and learning outcomes
- Engage with practitioners and industry to advise and teach
- Banish the traditional lecture/tutorial subject mode
- Integrate as many subject areas as possible
- Structure learning around real world or simulated problems and projects
  - carefully designed to allow students to acquire and build on skills, knowledge and attributes
  - selected to give students exposure to a broad range of contexts and to allow them to specialise
- Collaborate with other educators
- Engage experienced practitioners to work with/ mentor students on real problems
- Reward problem centred learning
  - Students assessed on ability to ask questions, structure problems, work in contested environments, lead teams, motivate others
- Not reward passive learning
  - Students not rewarded for rote learning, regurgitation, lack of engagement with problems, being ‘there for the ride’

Currently most education results in generic project management qualifications

- We need to revisit this.
- Rather than try to develop little super heroes - impossible
- Offer graduated and diverse pathways that allow people to shine

A collaborative effort

- Education specialists
- Practitioners
- Career academics

Project Management is

HIGHER LEVEL MANAGEMENT