

# BY THE SEAT OF YOUR PANTS

BY RACHEL ROSS

**P**roject management is an acquired skill. It takes knowledge of the right concepts and methodologies, and proficiency of techniques and tools. How managers acquire these skills shapes their approaches and defines their abilities. People are typically thrust into project management with little but their own ingenuity and diligence to pull them through.

"I had been a project manager for 14 years, but had never learned any specific techniques. It was all sort of seat-of-the-pants learning," says Steve Devaux, president of Analytic Project Management in Bedford, Mass.

The first time he took a computer-based training course on critical-path methods, Devaux was in for a surprise. "My reaction was 'My God, why has everyone been keeping this information



**Training aids are proving to be valuable skill enhancers for project managers who have long accustomed themselves to learning on the job.**

from me?" he recalls. "I had been getting results staying up till three in the morning, and if I had known this [what he learned in the course], I wouldn't have had to lose so much sleep. I've been training now for 14 years and people don't come up with this on their own—you have to be shown it."

## **DETERMINE YOUR NEEDS**

Training offers the opportunity to learn new skills and enhance current ones, while providing an environment in which to practice. As you work through simulated problems, you begin to see

how ingrained assumptions or outdated techniques have shaped your behaviors.

Training aids come in several formats, including CD-ROMs, online courses, public workshops and on-site seminars. Matching the method to an individual's learning style and time constraints is key, says Karen Tate, PMP, president and co-Founder of MartinTate LLC in Cincinnati.

We think of project managers as very organized, but sometimes their skills are stronger as "firefighters" dealing with chaos, Tate says. "The training aid that works best for you depends on the type of project manager you are."

Before exploring the array of training aids in the chart on the next pages, take a moment to reflect on how you learn best. Are you able to make time for self-paced learning or would you prefer learning in a classroom?

Highly self-disciplined people may find self-study from a CD-ROM to be a perfect match. Others may find learning in a classroom setting keeps them on track. "And if they're gregarious, they like to bounce their ideas off colleagues, so they learn through the networking component as well," Tate says.

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# Training Aids for Project Managers

Whether you were thrown into project management or chose it as a career path, investing in some training will enhance your abilities, and probably teach you a few new skills. Training formats are available to suit any learning style.

COMPANY	CD-ROM LEARNING*	DISTANCE LEARNING*	CLASSROOM LEARNING*
<b>Advanced Management Services Inc.**</b> Stoughton, Mass. <a href="http://www.amsconsulting.com">www.amsconsulting.com</a> 800/773-8560	N/A	Real-time, instructor-led webcasts with direct access to facilitator. Self-paced case studies, learning reviews. <b>Cost:</b> \$2,000–\$3,000 per day for enterprisewide arrangement.	PMBOK®-aligned programs offered on-site and in public venues in major cities. Customization available. <b>Cost:</b> \$2,000–\$3,000 per day enterprisewide on-site. \$400–\$1,000 per person for public offerings.
<b>Boston University Corporate Education Center**</b> Tyngsboro, Mass. <a href="http://www.butrain.bu.edu">www.butrain.bu.edu</a> 800/BU-TRAIN	N/A	N/A	Locations in Massachusetts. Courses include Real-World Project Management. <b>Cost:</b> \$995–\$1,295.
<b>ESI International**</b> Arlington, Va. <a href="http://www.esi-intl.com">www.esi-intl.com</a> 888/ESI-8884	<i>Managing Projects in Organizations</i> (\$495) consists of 15 lessons that offer grounding in project management concepts and practices. <b>Note:</b> incompatible with Windows 2000.	From 30 to 40 hours of online instruction; 42 days of online access per class. <b>Cost:</b> \$700–\$1,345.	More than 40 courses for basic to advanced project management skills. Classes run 37 days, scheduled in public venues in 24 U.S. cities, and on client sites. <b>Cost:</b> \$1,000–\$1,800 per person.
<b>gantthead.com</b> Fairfax, Va. <a href="http://www.gantthead.com">www.gantthead.com</a> 703/219-1909	N/A	Cyber community of 50,000-plus offers advice, forums, industry events, resources. <b>Cost:</b> Templates free to all members. Premium members pay \$350 a year.	Academic Partner is Western Carolina University. <b>Cost:</b> Discounts available to gantthead members for some classes and certification programs.
<b>Global Knowledge**</b> Cary, N.C. <a href="http://www.globalknowledge.com">www.globalknowledge.com</a> 800/268-7737	N/A	Two-way live audio with instructor. At class times, students and instructor log into server simultaneously. <b>Cost:</b> Classes available for \$1,165 and \$1,195.	GK offers extensive schedule of courses in major U.S. cities and on-site. <b>Cost:</b> Courses available for \$1,165 and \$1,195.
<b>The Hampton Group Inc.**</b> Denver, Colo. <a href="http://www.4pm.com">www.4pm.com</a> 303/756-4247	<i>The Digital Encyclopedia of Project Management</i> (\$175) is a PM library of techniques and tools, as well as multimedia instruction for Microsoft Project software.	Online PM community offers free newsletter and forum. Self-paced study. <b>Cost:</b> \$800–\$2,200 per person.	All courses and certification programs delivered on client sites. HG will customize courses to fit client culture and processes. <b>Cost:</b> \$5,000 per day for up to 16 people.

\*The above chart features a sampling of each education provider's courses. Course listings are not all-inclusive. Cost varies widely. Volume discounts are available for some courses at some companies. For complete course descriptions, catalogs and current prices, contact the companies directly.

\*\*PMI®-registered education provider.



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Effective project management training is highly interactive. Look for courses that combine case studies, hands-on exercises and practical tools with real-world applications and simulations. Simulations create realistic business situations for practicing behaviors in a risk-free environment. While role playing, students answer questions about story lines. As

the scenario unfolds, participants gather data and interact with story "characters" to chart a course of action. Quality simulations reflect the consequences of decisions in new circumstances, providing more opportunities to learn best practices.

### CONSIDER CONTENT

Project management training varies according to the education provider,

observes Bob Wysocki, director of methodology at Sapient Corp. in Cambridge, Mass. "So if I sent my employees to different providers for training," he says, "it would be truly unusual if they came back saying the same things."

Many education providers, however, use the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) developed by the Project Management Institute (PMI).

COMPANY	CD-ROM LEARNING*	DISTANCE LEARNING*	CLASSROOM LEARNING*
<b>Prime Learning</b> Stamford, Conn. www.primelearning.com 800/776-1474	N/A	Two levels available: fundamentals and professional. <b>Cost:</b> Two levels, \$325 and \$695 for 1-year individual license, respectively. Volume discounts available.	N/A
<b>ProjectLEADER®</b> Zionsville, Ind. www.projectleader.com 888/873-0086	N/A	N/A	Specializes in on-site presentations, ProjectMAN® simulations. <b>Cost:</b> \$500–\$1,200.
<b>ProjectConnections.com</b> Los Altos, Calif. www.projectconnections.com 650/610-0700	N/A	Free standard membership. Learning groups, access to tutorials, templates, live presentations. <b>Cost:</b> \$149 per person per year for premium membership, or \$14.95 per month for individual license.	N/A
<b>Project Planning</b> Lawrence, Mass. www.primelearning.com 978/686-1780	N/A	N/A	Classes run from half-day to three days. <b>Cost:</b> \$2,500–\$6,900 for 15 to 20 people.
<b>Strategic Management Group**</b> Philadelphia, Pa. http://phl.smginc.com 215/387-4000	<i>Understanding Project Management</i> (\$250, volume discounts available).	Online learning with interactive simulations, practice exercises, assessment, mastery tests, job aids. <b>Cost:</b> \$100 per person for up to 1,000 people, plus annual hosting fee of \$2,500 for up to 2,000 people. Discounts available.	Courses include Business Skills for Project Managers, Project Leadership and Leading Project Leaders. <b>Cost:</b> \$480–\$800 per person, depending on number of participants and client's other business with SMG.

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Introductory courses in project management typically cover defining project needs and scope; developing work breakdown structure; managing the critical path; working within organizational and cost constraints; controlling project change; and effectively overseeing team performance and project close-out. Advanced courses hone high-level skills, including risk management.

### CHOOSE THE SETTING

Educational formats vary widely in design, delivery and cost. "Certain quantitative techniques, such as 'critical path scheduling' and 'earned value analysis,' adapt well to computer-based approaches," Devaux says. Browser-based, multimedia-rich CD-ROMs can support various learning styles, while offering the least expensive option.

Distance learning, also called "e-training," offers self-paced exercises and anytime access while creating a tangible sense of community with "webinars" (real-time, text-based discussions with instructors and students), webcasts (real-time, digital camera-assisted, Internet lectures), video conferencing and instructor feedback via e-mail or phone. Most e-training providers offer college credits, continuing education units (CEUs), and preparation for the PMI Project Management Professional (PMP) certification exam. E-training makes it possible for project managers, or the entire organization, to participate simultaneously in the same course without ever leaving their desks.

Like distance learning, classroom instruction offers college credits, CEUs, and preparation for the PMP certification

exam. The strength of instructor-led classroom training is the focused time that students commit to being present and absorbing new information.

### SIGN UP THE TEAM

Providing training only to those whose job title reads "project manager" may backfire. If the whole team is not on the same page, it's easier for one person to derail the efforts of everyone else. It's valuable, in fact, to train a team together. "Any company that would embark on a two- or three-million-dollar project without investing in training the project team is making a bad cost-benefit decision," Devaux counsels. "Why risk [that amount] on the basis of not providing 10 or 12 thousand dollars of training, when that training pays off in spades in a shorter, better controlled project?" ■

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