Is Traditional Project Management Classroom Training Dead?

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Title:	Is Traditional Project Management Classroom Training Dead?
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Abstract:	Most of you are either trainers/consultants whose livelihood depends on putting on training events attending training or are a project manager who takes training classes. Regardless, learning is a key ingredient to an evolving trend in "extreme" project management to "learning and discover." (It also doesn't hurt to give or earn PDUs either!) This document analyzes a recent survey that basically asks the question: "is traditional classroom training a thing of the past?"
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Is There a Shift Taking Place?

To keep up with the ever-accelerating change with project management, you'll need to read a lot of books in addition to getting lots of real world project experience. In case you haven't noticed, the traditional bookstore is slipping away. There are some interesting statistics identified in the forthcoming eBook *InDesign to Kindle* (April 2011). By mid-2009, Amazon announced that Kindle eBook titles sold surpassed hardcover-bound books sold on www.amazon.com and in early 2011, Amazon beat its own predictions of Kindle eBooks titles sold surpassing that of softcover books sold. And if that's not enough, Amazon expects that by 2012 Kindle book sales will surpass traditional book sales on their popular Web site. That's a bold prediction.

My contacts with individuals with other training organizations are seeing a shift from public training classes to onsite, private training *and* to some form of online training. You may have noticed that some of the leading project management training companies are promoting combinations of course offerings consisting of both public and online training classes.

The Survey Itself

I wanted to compare traditional training classroom with three variations of eLearning including (1) scheduled, online training, (2) self-paced, online training, and (3) self-paced, offline (mobile) training.

We broadcasted ("attacked" is probably a better word) thousands of possible respondents in about 50 LinkedIn groups and other mailing lists with a survey of five simple questions. The target audience were project management, software/IT management, and training professionals. In order to entice folks to fill out the survey, the five questions were designed to be answered in under 4-5 minutes along with

a drawing for a free copy of my book *Managing Software Maniacs*. The number of respondents were around 50 in total and I thought I'd share the results. I actually gave away three MSM books: one to a USA respondent, one to a Canadian, and the other one to a UK resident.

Q1: What is the Best Delivery Method?

Let's compare what training method of delivery works best. Respondents could select any and all options ranging from traditional classroom to self-paced offline training (suitable to be used in a mobile, unconnected device).

Surprisingly, traditional classroom and self-paced online training lead the pack of choices (28 and 27 respondents selected these, respectively). Schedule-lead online training and self-paced offline/mobile training were not nearly as popular. No respondent skipped this question.

# Q2: Should Traditional Training Class Fees Be At a Premium?

Training budgets continue to be slashed yet the costs to put on a live training class continues to increase (for trainers *and* attendees). Respondents were asked to select one option comparing how attendee fees should compare with any form of eLearning classes.
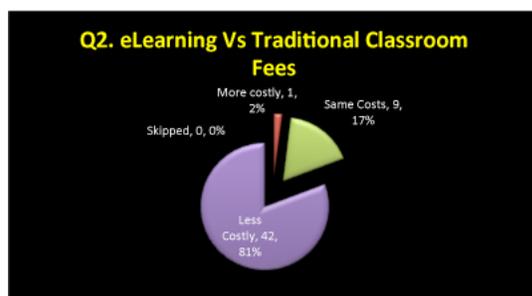
81% of the respondents believed that any form of eLearning attendee fees should be less than traditional classroom training classes. 17% believed that the costs should be the same and one brave respondent believed that eLearning training should be more expensive that traditional classroom training classes.

Q3: How Long Should an eLearning Class Be?

While "live" classroom training is typically delivered in 6 to 7 hours a day, we were anxious to know what respondents thought should be the optimum duration of an eLearning training class. Respondents could select any and all of the four options: 6 hours at a time, 1 hour, 3 hours, and 6 hours spread over two days (3 hours each day).
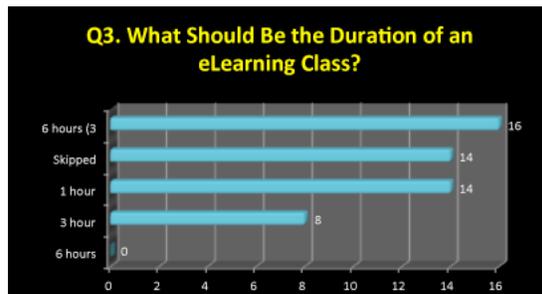

The results to this question were somewhat inconclusive. The leading response for an optimum class duration was 6 hours divided into two 3 hour training sessions. Next in line was a tie between those with no opinion (skipped) and those who believed that the optimum eLearning class should be limited to just one hour. Finally, there were a few folks who believed that a single 3 hour class was best. Nobody liked an eLearning class of 6 hours (in other words, it would tie up an entire day sitting in front of a computer).

So, it appears that either eLearning classes need to be a "quick fix" (1 hour) or "I'll invest a day's worth of time for training, but not in one sitting" (6 hours divided into two 3 hour sessions).

Q4: Are PDUs (or CEUs) Required In Order to Take a Training Class?

Do project managers only take training in order to fulfill their "60 PDUs every three years" requirement? Or, do they take the training classes because they love to learn? Respondents were asked to select the most appropriate answer from:

- I'll take training, but only if I receive PDUs.
- I want to take the training and if I get PDUs too, even better!
- Earning PDUs isn't important at all—I really want to learn what is being taught.
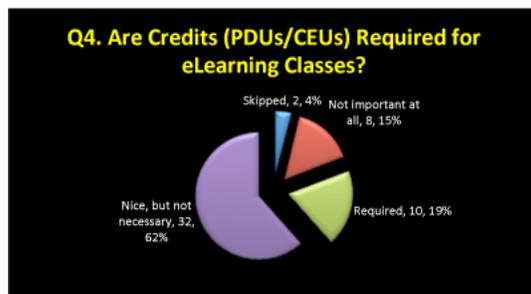
The majority, 62% of the respondents, thought that PDUs were nice but not a requirement in order to attend a training class. A distant 19% indicated that they would only take a training class if PDUs were offered. Two respondents skipped this question.

Q5: What Training Topics Are Most Desired?

PMI R.E.P. training providers typically train on specific project management topics that contribute to PMI's overall project management theme (like, for example, the *PMBOK® Guide*). However, there are a number of training classes that are not related to PMI topics designed to help your ability to lead, communicate, motivate, and so on. There are also an assortment of training classes with the ability for attendees to earn PDUs that focus on specific industries. Respondents were asked to select any and all that apply to their interests in training subject matter from the following list:

- Project management (PMI) topics only (you know, those that cover the *PMBOK® Guide*'s knowledge areas).
- Agile, lean, Scrum frameworks (currently the rage in software development projects, for sure!)
- General leadership principles.
- Job-specific topics focused on targeted industries (like IT or healthcare, for example).
- People-related management issues.
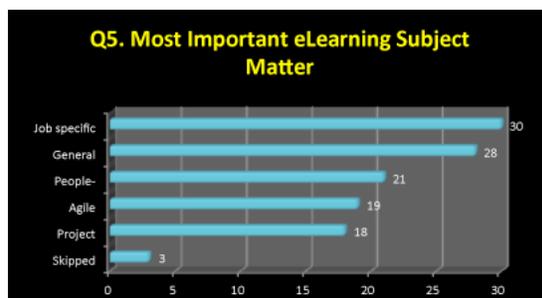
The #1 response was job-specific topics that probably implies that folks want to learn more about their industry and improve in their specific job roles. This was closely followed with general leadership topics. The rest of the training topics were grouped quite a ways behind those two, but still important. Three respondents weren't sure how to select from this list and skipped this question.

A Final Word

Our intent is to perform the survey a year from now, and depending on reader feedback, we'll be very happy to post the results again.

Bibliography

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Bio

Ken Whitaker of Leading Software Maniacs™ (LSM) has more than twenty-five years of software development executive leadership and training experience in a variety of technology roles and industries. He has led commercial software teams at Software Publishing (remember Harvard Graphics?), Data General, embedded systems software companies, and enterprise software suppliers. Ken is an active PMI[®] member, Project Management Professional (PMP)[®] certified, a Lewis Institute instructor, and a Certified ScrumMaster (CSM). Sources for LSM's presentations come from case studies, personal leadership experience, the PMI *Project Management Book of Knowledge* (*PMBOK[®] Guide*), and Ken's two books: *Managing Software Maniacs* and *Principles of Software Development Leadership*.

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