**What Does it Mean to be a Competent PM?**

**Roger Warburton**

**Introduction**

***(This is a draft of my intro to the conference theme, presented here as background to the questions that follow.)***

I tell my students that the most important concept in PM is the Critical Path. Once you know the CP, you know which tasks have to be worked on; which team members need support; and, in general, where the PM needs to put the effort.

Who does the PM need to buy coffee and donuts for today?

On the other hand, Vijay tells his students that 90% of PM is “Communications.” IF they can’t communicate, they can’t be a PM.

Which one of us is right?

What is more important? Technical skills? Or, the so-called, soft skills?

Today, we are going to explore that dilemma. Technical skills or Soft skills: Which is more important?

We do not expect that we will answer the question today. Vijay and I have been debating this for nearly a decade and neither of us is willing to concede an inch to the other.

But why are we exploring the issue today? Well, like good researchers, we have some more data and, as usually happens, data have a way of changing the way we look at an interesting issue.

The Project Management Institute (PMI) as just published a new volume: PM Curriculum & Resources.

Undergraduate curriculum in PM. Vijay as king of the world!

Vol I: Rationale for the Project and Vijay will describe this later.

Vol II: Curriculum for a First Course in PM

Rationale for First Course:

* Many students may be their only PM course.
* Establishes the vocabulary of all of PM.
* Covers: Scope, WBS, Network Diagram, CP
* Parts of EV – somewhat controversial

Soft Skills so important, they deserve their own course—the second course in the sequence.

Another question that we, as faculty, wrestle with is: What should we teach?

* We do not teach the latest fad. We concentrate on fundamentals.
* Kip’s question: 5 years from now your students will be in positions of authority, what will be of value to them at that future point?
* So we emphasize technical fundamentals. The CP will always be the CP, even 100 years from now because it is mathematically based.

**Discussion Forum Questions**

**Technical Skills (Roger, Vijay, Alice)**

Roger to Vijay:

Can you give us a quick overview of the key motivating factors for PMI’s development of new undergraduate curriculum in PM?

Roger to Alice:

Can you give us a sense of what you look for in potential PM employees at the City of Boston? What are they key attributes you look for?

Roger to Vijay:

How does the new undergrad curriculum address Alice’s points?

Roger to Alice:

In your opinion, are there any characteristics of new employees that are obviously missing, or maybe, not well prepared?

Roger to Vijay:

I know you tested the curriculum by sending out to industry representatives. What was their response?

Roger to Alice:

Does that sound familiar?

Roger to Alice:

Your job is to elevate the skills of the City of Boston in PM. What are the major challenges in that assignment?

Roger to Vijay:

The PMI curriculum was “for faculty by faculty,” how did that affect the curriculum?

And

Carla insisted that that the PMI curriculum be solidly based in research. How did that affect the curriculum?

Roger to Vijay:

There is a constant debate about whether technical skills or soft skills are more important. That is a debate that we will not settle here. But it seems to me that you need to teach vocabulary before you can teach skills. One of the major motivations for PM-1, therefore, is to teach vocabulary. For example, if you tell a student to calculate the CP and explain it to stakeholders, they need to know what a CP is and also what a stakeholder is?

**Soft Skills (Steve, Vijay, Alice)**

Steve to Vijay:

Same question as Roger asked, but from the soft skills perspective:

There is a constant debate about whether technical skills or soft skills are more important. That is a debate that we will not settle here. But it seems to me that you need to teach vocabulary before you can teach skills. One of the major motivations for PM-1, therefore, is to teach vocabulary. For example, if you tell a student to calculate the CP and explain it to stakeholders, don’t they need to know what a CP is and also what a stakeholder is?

Steve to Alice:

What are the requirements of City of Boston employees in the soft skills arena?

Steve to Vijay:

You frequently say that 90% of PM is communications. What exactly do you mean by that?

Steve to Alice:

Does the City of Boston provide specific training in the soft skills arena?

Or

Is there something we (or other teachers) could do better in the soft skills area?