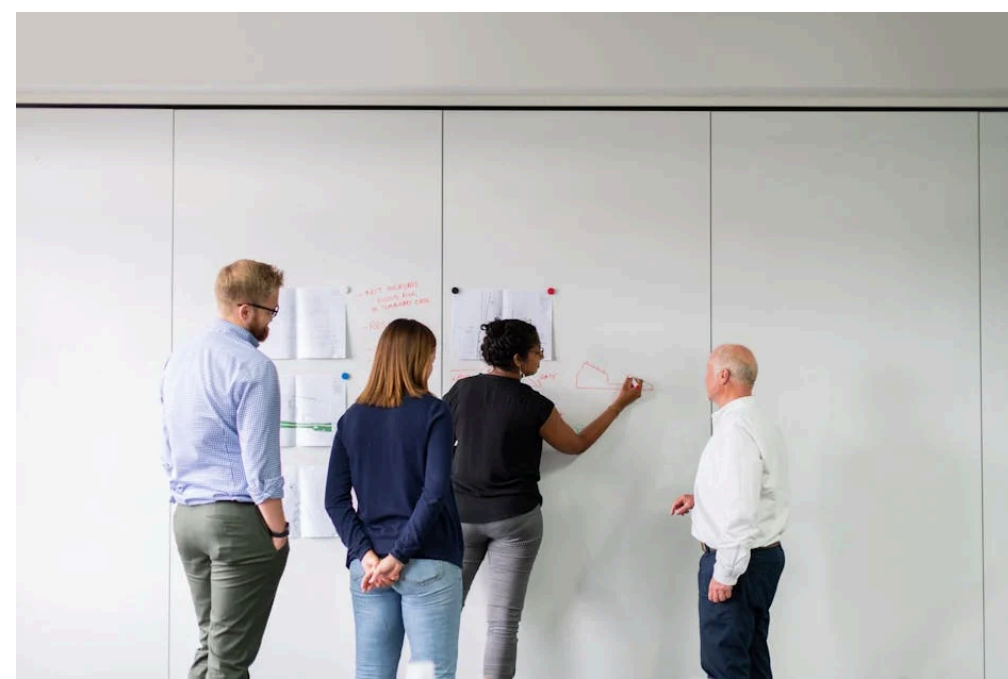


I've spent 12 years in the trenches of UK public sector bodies and highly regulated industries, and if there is one thing that keeps me up at night, it isn't budget cuts or staffing shortages. It's the creeping, insidious death of a project by a thousand "quick wins."

Let's get one thing clear: calling project management a "soft skill" is an insult to the discipline. It is a technical, rigorous practice that requires governance, forensic attention to detail, and the backbone to say 'no.' When projects spiral out of control, it's rarely because the team lacked passion. It's because they lacked a formalised framework to protect the work from the people who don't understand the impact of their "small requests."

The Data Doesn't Lie: Scope Creep is the Silent Assassin

The numbers are grim. Studies from the Project Management Institute (PMI) suggest that roughly 55% of projects suffer from scope creep. In the UK context, where we are currently facing a massive project skills shortage, this statistic is exacerbated by a lack of standardised capability.



When you have "accidental project managers"—that brilliant marketing lead or finance business partner tasked with a digital transformation—without a grasp of the **change control process**, you aren't running a project. You're running a free-for-all. Every time someone adds a "must-have" feature without adjusting the budget or the timeline, your project requirements control disappears. And when you lose control of your requirements, you lose control of your ROI.

Beyond the 'Attendance Certificate' Culture

I've seen too many UK organisations treat project management training as a box-ticking exercise. They send staff on a two-day workshop, hand them a certificate of attendance, and expect them to deliver multi-million-pound outcomes. That isn't training; it's window dressing.

True organisational capability comes from structured, accredited pathways. In the UK, the Association for Project Management (APM) provides the gold standard. We need to stop treating training as an expense and start treating it as risk mitigation. If your team can't distinguish between a minor adjustment and a scope change that impacts the business case, your training isn't working.

The APM Pathway: Scaling Capability

To fix the scope creep epidemic, we need to map our teams to the right qualification pathways based on their career stage and project responsibility.

- **The APM Project Fundamentals Qualification (PFQ):** This is for the accidental project manager. It introduces the fundamental language of project management. If your team doesn't know the difference between an output and an outcome, or why we need a RAID log (Risks, Assumptions, Issues, Dependencies), they aren't ready to lead.

- **The APM Project Management Qualification (PMQ):** This is the leap from theory to application. The PMQ forces practitioners to demonstrate how they manage complex variables, including the dreaded scope change.

Why Generic Leadership Training Fails PMs

I see organisations dump thousands into "Generic Leadership Training." While empathy and delegation are important, they won't save your project from scope creep. Leadership training won't teach you how to implement a formal **change control process**. It won't teach you to analyse the impact of a stakeholder's request on your critical path.

In fact, sometimes "leadership" without governance makes scope creep worse. A manager who wants to be "helpful" or "collaborative" without a firm grasp of the project scope is a project's worst enemy. They end up saying "yes" to everyone, only to find that in 90 days, the project is three months behind and 40% over budget.

The 90-Day Reality Check

My litmus test for any project activity is simple: How will we measure this in 90 days?

If you cannot look at your requirements document today and compare it to the state of the project in 90 days, you have lost control. We need to move away from vanity metrics—like "number of meetings held"—and focus on governance-linked KPIs.



Table 1: Comparing Skill Sets for Scope Management Attribute Generic Leadership Training Accredited APM Training Focus
 Interpersonal rapport Governance and delivery Scope Handling Often defaults to 'yes' to appease Evaluates via change control
 process Risk Management Reactionary Proactive (RAID focus) Outcome Improved soft skills Measurable delivery success

The Business Case for Governance

When I talk to stakeholders about the ROI of training, I ignore the buzzwords like "efficiency" or "synergy." I talk about **rework**.

Scope creep is essentially unpaid rework. It is the cost of doing the same thehrdirector.com thing twice because we didn't define it properly the first time. If we could quantify the hours lost to internal scope disputes in UK organisations, the numbers would be staggering. By investing in APM pathways, you are not just educating staff; you are building a defensive wall around your delivery schedule. You are implementing governance that protects the bottom line.

Steps to Tame the Creep

If you want to stop the 55% failure rate in your organisation, start here:

1. **Formalise your Change Control Process:** If a change isn't documented, impact-assessed, and approved by the board/sponsor, it does not exist. Period.
2. **Standardise your Language:** Everyone involved in delivery should understand the APM PFQ level definitions. If they speak different languages, your requirements control will collapse.
3. **Stop the "Soft Skill" Nonsense:** Treat project management as a core organisational capability. Hire for it, train for it, and reward it.
4. **Audit your 90-Day View:** Require your project managers to report not just on progress, but on the *stability* of their scope.

Final Thoughts

We are facing a legitimate skills shortage in the UK. The demand for qualified, competent project managers is skyrocketing as organisations realise that "getting it done" is not the same as "getting it right."

Don't be the lead who watches a project die a slow, creeping death because they were too afraid to say 'no.' Don't be the organisation that settles for attendance certificates when you should be building deep-seated technical capability. Invest in the APM pathway, tighten your governance, and for heaven's sake, stop calling it a 'soft skill.' It is the engine room of your entire organisation. Start treating it like one.