

## Engineers are bad project managers

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When interviewing engineering graduates and young engineers I always ask what field they're most interested in pursuing. The normal response is "project management". To this I ask: why did you study engineering?

The problem is we expect engineers to be good project managers. How common is the phrase in a project manager job description: must have tertiary qualification in engineering. Amongst four years of memorising structural codes, trying to make sense of fluid dynamics and sleeping through traffic engineering should we really expect a graduate engineer to have also mastered project management?

I was that graduate engineer who thought I was also a project manager by default. I didn't really have a clue about project management. Like many of my colleagues I lacked "soft" skills involving understanding the project cycle, embracing the wider purpose and engaging stakeholders. Engineers are hard wired to get involved in the detail of design or construction rather than taking a wider view of the entire project and ensuring that key measures of a projects success are actually met.

I'm not saying that an engineer cannot be a good project manager. But we need to recognise that an engineer needs to overcome the inclination to be all things. In my current role managing a project delivery team I place emphasis on differentiating the roles of a project manager as opposed to a project engineer. But this is made difficult by preconceived attitudes that an engineer is a project manager. This mindset must be broken down for the benefit of improved performance across the wider public works sector. Ultimately an evolution within tertiary institutions might be required whereby specific project management programmes are the norm. But here and now, as public works engineers, we can start by recognising that project management isn't a subset of engineering.