

Project Management Competence - Who Needs It?

The application of project management is growing at an exponential pace worldwide.

More and more different kinds of projects are managed professionally. Initially, construction and defence projects dominated the scene. Now they are important but a minority. We are dealing with projects in for instance information and communication technology, organisational development, product development, marketing changes, production development, research, events, political projects, legislation projects, educational projects, social projects in different sectors of the economy.

The question "is project management necessary?" is rarely asked, today. The relevant questions now are:

- **Are the project management personnel competent to undertake this project?**
- **Is the board assured that the people responsible for project delivery, are sufficiently competent, and have the capacity to achieve satisfactory project outcomes?**

More project personnel may need *Project Competence* than you may realize. Every key role affecting each project must demonstrate project management competences. Specifically, each stakeholder must demonstrate competence in the actions required by his or her role.



These stakeholders include:

Project Sponsor
Projects Director/Programme Manager
Resource Manager
Senior Project Manager
Project Manager
Project Associate
PMO Consultant

Webster defines competence as properly qualified, capable, or adequate for the stipulated purpose. In project management we talk about the "eye of competence" covering:

Technical- the techniques of project management,

Behavioural – the professional behaviour of project personnel

Contextual competences – linkage between the project and organizations involved.

Interest in Competence

Latent for years, we have recently seen a surge of interest in Project Manager competence. We feel this is because of increasing project failures in a time when organizations are trying to make their project funds stretch farther. It is also driven by the desire for greater competitiveness. Project management as a management discipline underpins much economic activity. Societies are becoming more & more project

oriented. Nowadays, it is hard to imagine an organization that is not engaged in some kind of project activity.

Emerging Interest in Certification

The last ten years has also seen increasing interest in project management certification. This raises interesting challenges for those who manage Project Management Learning, Performance, and their interrelationship.

Today's range of PM certification programs is a useful starting point for the person and the PM discipline, but there is a vast difference between programs on offer, something that some people fail to understand.

Does Certification Assure Performance? We Have Several Responses.

- Some of today's Project Management certifications are for Project Management, not for the Project *Manager*. A subtle distinction?
- Such certifications test Knowledge (recall of facts), not Competence (demonstrated ability to perform). Knowledge assessment is a fair start, but who knows whether (and how) that knowledge was ever applied? Assessment of Competence is far more useful for those whose personal success depends on project success.
- What about the other factors any Project Manager's assessment should cover, like Skills, Attitudes and key Behavioural Attributes? Just as with Competence, these factors are harder to assess—and can have significantly more impact on project success—than Knowledge.
- The domain in which you apply Project Management is important, too. For example, the Project Manager who is great on a large project may crush a small one with too much method, and fail to apply enough in a large Program.
- Even with a great Project Manager, is your next project sure to be a success?
Only if:
 - Your Project Team members know and effectively carry out their roles.
 - Resource Managers prioritize effectively, and allocate resources accordingly.
 - Sponsors know and fulfil their responsibilities.

You really need to assess the competences of all the key players to succeed. Just as one bad apple can spoil the bushel, one less-effective project stakeholder can spoil your project. Or, to update the theme a bit, who is *your* weakest link?

The discipline of project management has come of age. While the body of knowledge is well defined, in many organizations there remains a serious gap with the issue of the appraisal of the competence of project personnel. Responsible practice requires that this gap be eliminated. Doing so will help improve corporate performance, reduce shocks at boardroom level and avoid hardship to stakeholders.