

Introduction

As management practices change at an ever-increasing rate, a gap is formed between the foundation provided by an academic education and technical and management competencies required in today's business environment.

Professional certification achievements document your expertise and recognise your personal commitment to professional development.

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ARE PM QUALIFICATIONS IMPORTANT?

As we all discover from time to time, having a collection of qualifications is no guarantee of intelligence, professional ability or satisfactory service. It is also the case that many first-class and talented Portfolio/Programme/Project Managers have become so because of their many years' experience in the role, not because they were required to obtain a qualification.

However, there is often a correlation between a good Portfolio/Programme/Project Manager and a commitment on their part to learn as much as possible about their profession.

Generally, someone who is prepared to put in the effort and hours needed to learn about a subject and pass an examination is showing a higher level of commitment than others who don't make the effort.

The Employers perspective

The business environment is changing at an ever-increasing pace. More and more organisations are employing programme and project managers, either as they take up a management by programme/project-lead culture or because they are already performing a preponderance of Portfolio/Programme/Project management activities.

Employers are looking for high standards in Portfolio/Programme/Project management and seek verification that individuals working in this field are knowledgeable in addition to being capable.

Benefits of Portfolio/Programme/Project Management qualifications to the organisation:

- The organisation has documented evidence of an individuals knowledge and understanding of project management
- A common baseline level of knowledge and understanding is assured
- The organisation can objectively measure the success of the PM training programme
- The organisation can assure employees have evidence of corporate commitment to their profession
- Reassures employers and/or clients that their PM's take professional knowledge and continuing education seriously

The Individuals perspective

Holders of recognised programme and/or project qualifications will stand out from their colleagues as people with a well grounded understanding of the profession.

These qualifications, many recognised both nationally and internationally, are based upon a generic use of programme and project tools, techniques and procedures; this means that the skills acquired may be carried from job to job or from one industry to another.

Benefits of PM qualifications to the individual:

- Provide documented evidence of personal achievement
- Provides a foundation for continuing professional and personal development
- Helps to improve promotion/job prospects
- Can add substance to salary or contract negotiations
- Increases knowledge of the tools and techniques required to do a good job
- Often allows those who pass to claim various "designatory" letters, e.g. MSP Practitioner, PMP, etc.*
- Can lead to increased levels of respect from employers, clients and colleagues
- Helps keep them up to date on PM topics
- Can lead to greater job satisfaction

* Many awarding bodies insist that to keep those valued letters after their name, an individual must maintain records of continuous learning, or continuous professional development (CPD).

PM qualifications are especially important because people with demonstrable expert portfolio, programme and project management leadership competencies are comparatively scarce and, as intense global competition demands that new business development and projects be completed on time and within budget, are highly sort after in the Project Management Marketplace.

The following definition of project management (taken from the Project Management Institutes 'A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge' PMBOK® Guide, - Third Edition) illustrates the need for individuals with a broad range of expertise to manage projects.

"Project management is the application of knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to a broad range of activities in order to meet the requirements of a particular project. Project management is comprised of five Project Management Process Groups – Initiating Processes, Planning Processes, Executing Processes, Monitoring and Controlling Processes, and Closing Processes – as well as nine Knowledge Areas. These nine Knowledge Areas centre on management expertise in Project Integration Management, Project Scope Management, Project Time Management, Project Cost Management, Project Quality Management, Project Human Resources Management, Project Communications Management, Project Risk Management and Project Procurement Management."

About your Industry sector

Some sectors are steeped in Portfolio, Programme and Project Management, whilst others are comparatively new to the disciplines. There are industries that use PM disciplines occasionally whilst others don't use them at all.

Which Industry sector?

Rigorous PM Industry sectors

These are sectors that are Portfolio/Programme/Project driven in achieving their corporate objectives and habitually use the various PM disciplines in a *business-as-usual* manner. Many programmes and projects are under way at any given time.

Such industries have a high regard for experienced and qualified Portfolio/Programme/Project Management personnel, often recognising PM as a key profession with a well defined career path.

- Aerospace
- Banking
- Defence
- Insurance
- Financial Services
- Government (central and local)
- IT

Flourishing PM Industry sectors

These are sectors that use PM disciplines, but are essentially driven by their core products or services. Programmes and projects are fairly common, but more emphasis is given to operational activity.

Industries that fall within this category usually have a high regard for experienced and qualified Portfolio/Programme/Project Management personnel, but often without a well defined career path.

- Construction
- Consumer Goods and Services
- Education
- Electronics
- Energy/Utilities
- Engineering
- Freight/Logistics
- Healthcare
- Pharmaceuticals
- Professional Services
- Research & Development
- Retail
- Telecommunications
- Travel and Transport

Occasional PM Industry sectors

These are sectors that are very focussed on operational activity and rarely need to utilise a PM approach. There may be individuals who occasionally manage programmes or projects, but they will probably have to fit these around their operational responsibilities.

Such industries tend not to recognise PM as a required capability and rarely offer a PM career path.

- Armed Forces
- Agriculture
- Automotive
- Charities
- Equipment Manufacture
- Facilities Management
- Hospitality/Leisure
- Media/Entertainment
- Metals
- Mining

ABOUT YOUR ORGANISATION

The organisation that you work for (or for those seeking opportunities elsewhere - the organisations that you may work for) will have a certain level of maturity in portfolio/Portfolio/Programme/Project management. There is a growing realisation that professional development in these management disciplines is needed for organisations, and capability maturity models are now becoming commonplace.

The following is a brief description of an example of such a maturity model.

Corporate Maturity

The Portfolio, Programme and Project Management Maturity Model (P3M3) is a reference guide for structured best practice. It breaks down the broad disciplines of portfolio, programme and project management into a hierarchy of Key Process Areas (KPA's). The hierarchical approach enables organisations to assess their current capability and then plot a roadmap for improvement prioritised by those KPA's which will make the biggest impact on performance.

P3M3, which is owned by the Office of Government Commerce (OGC), describes the portfolio, programme and project-related activities within process areas that contribute to achieving a successful project outcome. The levels described within the P3M3 indicate how key process areas can be structured hierarchically to define a progression of capability which an organisation can use to set goals and plan their improvement journey.

The levels facilitate organisational transitions from an immature state to become a mature and capable organisation with an objective basis for judging quality and solving programme and project issues.

P3M3 recognises not only the project management activities being carried out at the individual project level, but also those activities within an organisation that build and maintain a programme and project infrastructure of effective project approaches and management practices.

Your organisation may have undertaken (or currently be undertaking) such a maturity assessment. Certification of the organisations staff will initially be an indicator of current corporate maturity and subsequently a method to improve. Either way certification will be important to both the organisation and the individual.

ABOUT YOUR PERSONAL AMBITIONS

Whilst PM qualifications are not absolutely necessary for those wishing to pursue a career in portfolio, programme or project management, they are becoming progressively more important. Organisations looking to fill vacancies for PM posts are usually seeking individuals with significant PM experience, but increasingly looking for people with relevant PM qualifications. Many PM job vacancy advertisements include statements such as:

“Five years experience in managing significant change programmes together with MSP practitioner accreditation is necessary to apply for this post”, or

“Must have three years experience of managing IT projects and preferably accredited to practitioner level in PRINCE II.”

It makes sense then, assuming you are looking to progress in a portfolio/Portfolio/Programme/Project management discipline, to choose and pursue a relevant PM qualification.