

The net results were stunning, significantly improving post-class application, support from Managers, and best of all, PM Performance. Participating clients embraced the “Three Legged Stool” for improved PM Performance. Today this approach would be no surprise, but 30 years ago, it was monumental. This history also helps explain why PRINCE2® is a fast-growing PM training and certification program today: It combines knowledge, standards, a methodology, support services, and most-importantly, a training/coaching network.

The Role of PM Certifications

In the mid-1990s, resulting largely from William Duncan’s completion of the 1st edition of the PMBOK® Guide, PM certification interest soared—especially among IT practitioners. With this newfound interest in certification, our PM consultancy increasingly encountered a new dilemma. When talking to a potential customer, we frequently had to ask, “Are you performing training or coaching to improve PM Performance, or just to pass an exam?” The reason for the question: based on the answer, the *recommended learning was completely different*. We still recommend that the learning must be aligned and evaluated against the needs.

Ideally, the *same Learning and Development path* should lead to both improved PM Performance and, where appropriate, certification at some level. However, there are different practices and resulting categories of certifications in the world of Project Management. Here are two categories; there may also be others:

- Entry-level certifications *test knowledge about project management*.
- Advanced certifications *assess Performance Competence* in the actual roles of Project Manager, Senior Project Manager, or Program Manager (or Projects Director).

Note the correlation between entry level and advanced certifications with the PM Performance progression on page 3: Entry level PM certifications focus on Knowledge about common practice topics, and advanced PM certifications focus on your Skills, Behaviors and Performance Competence in key PM roles.

In the USA, professional PM societies offer entry-level, knowledge-based certifications covering topics in project management. For example, IPMA-USA, the USA member association of IPMA, taps the worldwide prestige of IPMA’s integrated 4-L-C, four-level Competence-based certification program. Its IPMA Level D® uses a multiple-choice and open-essay exam to verify certificant grasp of PM Knowledge from the USA-NCB, the National Competence Baseline for PM. Other organizations offer similar entry-level exams. Knowledge-based PM certifications provide value by assessing one’s grasp of a recognized PM standard.

Some PM societies also offer advanced Performance Competence-based PM certifications. IPMA-USA engages professional assessors who evaluate a portfolio of results, and then interview candidates for certified Project Manager or Certified Senior Project Manager, Certified Program Manager, and Certified Senior Program Manager roles, probing the way they contributed to project or program success.

Others will probably move from entry-level knowledge-based certifications *about* project management to advanced Performance Competence *certification of Project Managers* soon after they figure out how let current knowledge-based certificants know there is more to PM Certification than exams. Consider, for example, a performance baseline that could transform the USA’s PM Learning and Competence development market: *Project Manager Competency Development Framework*, Second Edition, published by 2007 PMI^v. As alluded to earlier, *this could be Project Management Institute’s gap-closing solution*.

Summary

This article offers insights into ways Executives, Learning Managers, Functional Managers and Project Managers can “close the gap” between training and PM Performance. It explains the differences between PM training and learning, the PM Performance progression, suggestions for maximizing benefits of scarce learning funds, and other topics. These topics are very familiar to HR Managers; yet in the world of PM, too many still fall short in Performance.

Despite good intentions, and in the absence of involvement by HR or Learning Managers, too many have squandered training budgets and their participants’ time. They have spent hundreds of millions of \$USD on a wide variety of poorly-focused PM training, with little to show from their efforts. In fact, as asserted in this article’s Introduction, PM performance has declined. Part of the problem is that they failed to close the gap between training and learning; they sought Knowledge, rather than Skill, and “*quick fix*” cramming rather than PM Competence; the outcome: they failed to attain PM Performance.

Buyers who don’t understand the differences may continue to pursue PM training that has no impact on PM Performance. Meanwhile, savvy Executives, Managers and PM practitioners will continue to increase the Performance lead between themselves and their competition.

Which group will you be in, and how will you measure and evaluate your results? This article contains tips that can guide you to essential first steps in closing the gap between generic PM training and PM Performance. Apply these tips to improve your Learning Return on Investment, boost PM Competence in all project Stakeholders, and increase PM Performance throughout your organization. ***Wouldn’t you rather achieve as a PM?***

About the Author



STACY A. GOFF, PMP, the *PM Per4mance*™ Coach, is CEO of ProjectExperts®, a global Program and Project Management consulting, methods, tools and Learning consultancy. A co-founder and past President of IPMA-USA, Stacy has been an officer in IPMA®, the International Project Management Association. In 2015, he was named an IPMA Honorary Fellow. As well, he has contributed to the success of Project Management Institute since 1983.

A Project Management practitioner since 1970 and PM consultant since 1982, he improves Enterprise or project team PM competence, efficiency, and Performance. Mr. Goff speaks at industry events, offers coaching and consulting services, and presents workshops of great interest to Executives, Managers, Project Managers and leaders, technical staff, and individual contributors.

His Project Management tools and methods are used by Government Agencies, Enterprises, Consultancies, and individuals on six continents. He combines his PM Process insights with wide-ranging experience in projects and programs, and with sensitivity for the human aspects of projects. The result: Measurably increased ***PM Per4mance*™** -- Portfolio, Program, Project and Personal Performance.

About This Article

We originally published this article in 2009, as global economies were struggling to recover from “the Great Recession.” Five years later, many nations are still struggling with this recovery. For some nations, and for some organizations, competent and performing Project and Program Managers (with their organizations’ leadership support) have helped accelerate their recovery. During 2014, this updated article was featured by IPMA Education & Training in the PM World Journal, and on IPMA-USA, IPMA and ProjectExperts websites.

In this update, there are a few changes from the original article, but the most important change concerns the mention of the “half-life of learning that is not applied.” For years, we had used 1980s research that showed that half-life to be six weeks. In the last several years, more recent research has shown that half-life of learning that is not quickly applied to be just two weeks, instead.

What does this say for learning experience participants who spend the two weeks after their session just catching up with the work that piled up on their desks in their absence? An exacerbating factor: today, pressured managers have even less time to prepare workshop participants for learning, then evaluating their results and coaching them afterwards. Today, in many organizations, things are getting worse, not better.

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References

ⁱ The author presented a paper on this subject at the IPMA World Congress in Shanghai in 2006. See *Distinguishing PM Competence in Training and Development* in the Articles section of the ProjectExperts.com website.

ⁱⁱ PM CompModel, developed over a 30-year period and aligned to the IPMA-USA National Competence Baseline and the IPMA Competence Baseline (plus other versions) is available in a free demo version at the ProjectExperts.com website. One purpose of PM CompModel is to identify the best use of learning activities (and funds) to select the right participants for the right learning experiences, with the right objectives for performance improvement. Another purpose is to help prioritize and list the actions of the Competence Development Plan that moves each project stakeholder from their greatest Competence gaps to their needed areas of PM Performance.

ⁱⁱⁱ A service of the ProjectExperts, see the SNAP (Skills Needs Assessment Process) overview and sample results at www.projectexperts.com/assets/SNAP_MPM.pdf. Given selection of the right participants for the right learning experiences (using PM CompModel or other processes) SNAP supports Learning Objective-level pre- and post-class evaluation by Learning Managers and participant’s Managers. It helps establish Learner needs, topic timings, and identifies post-class follow-up actions needed to maximize the value of the learning experience.

^{iv} Donald Kirkpatrick’s articles and 1975 book, *Evaluating Training Programs* are foundations of learning measurement. His 1998 book, *Evaluating Training Programs: the Four Levels*, is clearer, and even more useful.