

Competency

Knowledge alone is not enough! To be effective in any sphere of life you need to be capable of applying knowledge effectively to achieve an outcome; this is competency. However, to be really effective you not only need to be capable of being competent, you need to be willing to act, to use your capability effectively. Effective (ie, competent) managers need to know what should be done, have the skills to do the work and be willing to actually do the work.

Knowledge + Capability + Attitude = Competence

Knowledge without capability is useless.

Capability without knowledge is non-transferable a person knows how to do what they do but no more (*monkey see – monkey do...*).

Attitude, ie, the willingness to apply your knowledge and capability to the benefit of the organisation/project is the key element for success.

Putting this into context, project managers agree that having an effective schedule is important and also know they need knowledge of CPM theory and their scheduling software to produce a realistic and achievable schedule. But simply creating a schedule is not sufficient – the project manager then needs to make effective use of the schedule if it is going to add value to the project delivery process.

Assessing Competence

Confidence should never be confused with competence. The definition and assessment of competency is based on a defined structure. First, there are three basic elements within the project management competency framework:

- **Technical competencies** – what you do or produce. Technical competences are aligned with the traditional project management disciplines, cost, time and quality management and a set of technical methods that are used to prepare and execute projects.
- **Contextual competencies** – how you work within the organisation / environment. Contextual competences are associated with the context of the project, its connection with its environment and the link between the project and the performing organization through sponsorship, procedures, portfolio and programs.
- **Behavioural competencies** – how you operate in the workspace and interact with people. Behavioural competences have to do with the way people act and behave in situations of: leadership, conflict¹, communication, and personal development, including ethical aspects².

Then each element of competence is assessed in terms of:

- **Knowledge;** what you know (tested by exams³).
- **Skills;** the capability to effectively apply the knowledge in the workplace and the artefacts produced.
- **Attitude;** how willing or effective you are in applying the skills.

This is normative competence and is the structure of PMI's Project Manager Competency Development Framework and virtually every other professional competency framework including those developed by the AIPM, IPMA and GAPPS.

¹ For more on conflict management see: http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1041_Managing_Conflict.pdf

² For more on ethics see WP1001: http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1001_Ethics.pdf

³ For the PMI range of credentials see: <http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/Training-Home.html>

However, these frameworks date back to the industrial age where task repetition was common and one could learn the best-in-class approaches and emulate these to deliver new tasks. In the 'age of knowledge' this is probably not sufficient, competent project managers in the 21st Century need to grow beyond normative thinking and embrace transformative practice. Project management competence is shifting from a process view towards autonomy; self reference and group self organisation. These qualities empower professional project managers to perform well despite prevalence of complexity and rapid change. They develop customised solutions for each new, unique, occasion; implementing the new solution requires the use of existing knowledge but will also generate new knowledge.

This constructivism theory has a basic assumption that each time you perform a new activity you build on your existing knowledge to acquire new insight and competence, and consequently engage in continuous learning. To be really effective, the organic 'on-the-job' learning should also be reinforced with the acquisition new information from journals, innovative courses, discussions with colleagues and participating in communities of practice.

Consolidating the new learning into tangible and useful knowledge needs reflection (to understand what has been learned) and possibly the assistance of a mentor⁴ to help unlock the complex factors needed to grow within yourself, develop creative solutions, and find new ways to succeed.

Yesterday's competence is the foundation on which you can build tomorrows, but relying solely on yesterday's skills is insufficient! Competent project managers know they need to keep learning and developing. This is driven by attitude!

Personal Attributes

A study by Dr. Paul D. Giammalvo⁵ identified the essential attributes that are reliable predictors of the success of a Project Manager. Attributes translate into attitude! The core attributes are:

1. **Takes Initiative** - a self starter.
2. **Enthusiastic** - Able to motivate⁶ and energise those around them;
3. **Finance/Business** - A "natural head" for business.
4. **Wants to lead**⁷
5. **Analytical** (but not overly so) - Able to gather enough facts to make sound business and technical decisions, but not succumb to *paralysis by analysis*.
6. **Handles Autonomy** - Able to take the initiative, and be enthusiastic, but also able to figure out what needs to be done and when. These people do **not** have to be told what to do nor when to do it.
7. **Wants Challenge** - Tends to be impatient and easily bored and wants to attempt difficult tasks.

Personal attributes that are highly detrimental to success, ie, it is unlikely that people with these characteristics would succeed as project managers at all include.

1. Defensiveness
2. Rebellious autonomy
3. Impulsiveness
4. Rigidly meticulous
5. Rigidly organised

⁴ For more on mentoring see: <http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/Training-PM%20Coach.html>

⁵ Behavioural Profiles of Successful Project Managers, a pilot research study by Dr. Paul D. Giammalvo of PTMC/APMX and John Suermond of Harrison Assessments: pauldgphd@gmail.com

⁶ For more on motivation see WP1048: http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1048_Motivation.pdf

⁷ For more on leadership see WP 1014: http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1014_Leadership.pdf

6. Evasive
7. Fast but imprecise
8. Dogmatic
9. Harsh.

The key characteristics of a project manager⁸

Most effective project managers (from their supervisor's point of view) are:

Conscientious – sticks to deadlines, completes jobs, perseveres with routine, and likes fixed schedules

Vigorous – thrives on activity, likes to keep busy, and enjoys having a lot to do

Controlling – takes charge, directs, manages, organizes, and supervises others

Socially confident – comfortable with strangers and likes to put others at ease

Evaluative – critically evaluates information, looks for potential limitations, and focuses upon errors

Persuasive – enjoys selling, changes opinions of others, convinces with arguments, and negotiates

Behavioural – analyses thoughts and action, psychologically minded, and likes to understand people

The traits that make a good project manager are quite different to the attributes of a competent planner and scheduler as defined in Mosaic's core scheduling paper *The Roles and Attributes of a Scheduler*⁹.

Assessing Employees, Credentials -v- Competency

No single assessment process is ever going to provide a guarantee of a person's suitability for employment in a particular organisation. Holding a PMP demonstrates knowledge, other assessments are competency based; nether on their own provide the complete answer.

Competency is demonstrated in a specific time and location. There is no guarantee the competent person will perform as well in a different setting with different people, cultures and relationships. Whereas, the disadvantage of a knowledge based assessments is that there is no indication if the person can apply the knowledge effectively in the workplace. But, employers need competent employees¹⁰!

The most important element for success, both from an individual's perspective and the employer's perspective is the right attitude, founded on personal attributes. However, both employers and employees need to be careful to avoid misplaced confidence; confidence should never be confused with competence. Most Australians are only too aware the saying 'she'll be right mate' usually indicates a significant problem.

⁸ See: What characteristics make a good project manager?:
<http://mosaicprojects.wordpress.com/2011/10/18/what-characteristics-make-a-good-project-manager/>

⁹ The Roles and Attributes of a Scheduler: http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/PDF/Attributes_of_a_Scheduler.pdf

¹⁰ For further discussion see: <http://mosaicprojects.wordpress.com/2010/01/29/the-value-of-your-pmp-qualification/>