



Managing Director of Aspire Europe Ltd and OGC Lead Author for MSP® and P3M3™ Rod Sowden, asks the question, *'Why, after so much training, are organisations not getting better at programme and project management?'*



Organisations have spent a fortune on training up their project and programme managers in the last 15 years.

Extensive work has been done to improve the tools that they use and the quality of the processes. So why do some organisations seem to be naturally good at project management whilst others are not?

The work in the UK using the P3M3™ maturity model has shown that there are common factors holding organisations back as they try to progress, it is these areas that need to be addressed. This article will look at these areas and the follow up will look at what can be done about to improve.

The last 15 years has seen a vast increase in the number of individuals holding professional qualifications. One framework alone, PRINCE2® now has well over a 400,000 practitioners worldwide, and I am sure many other internationally recognised approaches can claim equally impressive figures, so it wouldn't be unreasonable to suggest that there are over 500,000 individuals with project management qualifications.

In the UK Public Sector, Programme and Project Management training is one of the top 5 categories of training expenditure.

It would therefore be reasonable to assume that with so many qualified project managers around we should be ready to drive up performance and quality of project management throughout all industries. However, reports by bodies such as the National Audit Office suggest that this is not the case.

Aspire Europe's work with our partners Outperform in the UK, to compare and analyse results of the maturity assessments undertaken using P3M3™<sup>1</sup>, is supporting the conclusion that the investment training is not producing great value, some of the common characteristics we are finding within a broad range of organisations include the following:

1. Considerable investment has been made in qualification based training courses to establish benchmarks for individuals working in project management.
2. Few organisations that we have reviewed recognise project management as a career. It is seen as a skill set individuals in projects should possess, consequently, there is little evidence of a career path or development path for individuals.
3. Once the qualification has been achieved, there is little evidence of skills development as there is an assumption that qualification accredits skills, which they rarely do, the accredit knowledge.

It is important to say, that the reviews that have been undertaken are in large multi functional organisations with a wide range of services and cultures. These are not, for example, specialist organisations such as construction or IT companies.

It would be helpful to reference P3M3™ maturity levels at this point. Within the P3M3™ model, skills and competency are a "Generic attribute", this means that it applies to all levels of maturity and within all the perspectives that are reviewed as part of an assessment and therefore has a heavy weighting on the results.

The most common one is Level 2, which is characterised by hot spots of good and bad practice, some good teams some not so good, some good individuals some not so good, processes exist but not everyone is following them, I'm sure you can identify with these statements.

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<sup>1</sup> Portfolio, Programme, Project Management Maturity Model, more information can be found at our website [www.aspireeurope.com](http://www.aspireeurope.com)

It is also characterised by individuals having a general layer of knowledge but no specific skills and or personal performance development.

If we consider the number of individuals that have now attended qualification courses, surely we should be seeing a higher level of maturity, because most people have been trained and are qualified?

Our findings using P3M3™ suggest that training isn't necessarily leading to consistently good and mature delivery.

Aspire Europe Ltd is not only an Accredited Consultancy Organisation, is it also an Accredited Training Organisation. We have been aware for some time that people who attended standard courses were interested in learning about programme and project management but they were more interested in gaining the qualification. With pass rates of 90% we did our best to provide this service. Three years ago, we started to question what impact the training was having on organisations other than boosting individual CVs.

The early evidence from the maturity assessments in 2008 showed that the knowledge gained in training courses was not being applied or translated into skills and organisational performance. People were learning project management NOT training to be project managers and the same applies to programme managers.

We therefore worked with an examination board called the Centre for Change Management<sup>2</sup> to develop vocational qualifications. These required less classroom time and the completion of a project to prove that the knowledge could be applied, very much in line with the competencies required from the maturity model.

We found a very willing audience for the courses, but then noticed that the individuals on the events were not completing the assignments to gain the qualifications. Further investigation with the delegates led to a number of reasons for the failure to complete the project:

- a. Lack of individual motivation or skills to complete the assessment, they found applying the knowledge too difficult so they gave up.
- b. Individuals becoming isolated and losing motivation, training delivered to teams was generating higher levels of return
- c. Lack of support and encouragement from line managers to complete the assignment reduced motivation and when faced with a challenging task, they gave up too.

If you then look at the popular qualifications, these are completed DURING the classroom training events, which do not require the individuals to provide personal commitment without the support (and pressure) of their trainer and other delegates, they normally panic in harmony. They also do not require the provision of evidence that the knowledge can be applied in the real world, just that they can answer a theoretical question.

This is not the case for professional qualifications in other sectors (law, HR, marketing) where there is often a need to have evidence of workplace competence to achieve the professional status. This is a major challenge for programme and project management industry.

Our conclusions to date are that organisations have relied far too much on generic courses. Individuals are attending with objectives that struggle to go beyond gaining a qualification and there is no evidence of organisations taking any ownership of exploiting the new found knowledge of their staff.

*This leads us to question how serious the organisations and the individuals are about improving programme and project management performance. We would also question the value of training*

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<sup>2</sup> Centre for Change Management can be found at [www.c4cm.co.uk](http://www.c4cm.co.uk)

*people in programme and project management rather than training them to be programme or project managers.*

That's the gloomy story, but there are plenty of examples of innovation and ambition out there that we will talk about in the next article, which will be out in June.

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