



The **vision**
to stay ahead

Can training improve
organisational performance?

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“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 10 years. Extensive work has been done to improve the tools that they use and the quality of the processes are invested in. 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 talk will look at these areas and 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.

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.

Aspire Europe's work with our partners Outperform in the UK, to compare and analyse results of the maturity assessments undertaken using P3M3^{®1}, has not been showing this to be the case at all, 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 benchmark for individuals working in project management.
2. Few organisations that we have viewed 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.

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. 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. If we consider the amount 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. However, it isn't leading to consistently good and mature project delivery, based on our findings using P3M3[®].

¹ Portfolio, Programme, Project Management Maturity Model, more information can be found at our website www.aspireeurope.com

Aspire Europe Ltd is not only an Accredited Consultancy Organisation, is it also an Accredited Training Organisation and we have been aware for some time that people who attended standard courses were interested in learning about project management but they were more interested in gaining the qualification and with pass rates of 90% we did our best to provide this service.

The early lessons from the maturity assessments in 2008 were showing 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.

We therefore worked with an examination board called the Centre for Change Management² 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 it too difficult.
- 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

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. This is not the case for professional qualifications in other sectors (law, HR, marketing) where there is often a gap between education and lead up to examinations.

During 2009, our strategic partners, Outperform UK Ltd were working with the Team Animation Ltd who are widely regarded as “thought leaders” in the area project management behaviours.

Their collaboration led to the development of the following table which cross references the three types of competence required for project managers as defined by IPMA’s competency baseline:

- Individual
- Technical
- Contextual

There are three perspectives that are often considered when delivering change

- Individual perspective
- Team perspective
- Organisational perspective

² Centre for Change Management can be found at www.c4cm.co.uk

Using these two axis, a matrix can be developed that can be used in a number of organisations disciplines, as we are talking about project management then it can be developed as follows

	Individual perspective	Project perspective	Organisation Perspectives
Behavioural competence	Interpersonal skills	Team dynamics	Culture
Technical competence	Techniques	Methods	Frameworks
Contextual competence	Domain expertise	Lifecycle models	Strategic planning

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This matrix provides a really helpful diagnostic tool for explaining the effects of the training on organisational performance and to draw some basic conclusions.

Much of the project management training currently on offer focuses at raising technical competence. What we were seeing in the C4CM vocational qualifications was the need for behavioural competence and the attributes to use the knowledge gained on the course, which many individuals didn't possess. Others dropped out during the assignment period because there was not adequate team support, line management support or the corporate culture wasn't supportive in other ways.

This matrix also enables us to explain other factors that have come to light in our work. It is common to find two areas within an organisation that will have a reasonably standard approach to project management, these are IT and property projects. Most project managers in these areas will have developed a career in the disciplines and consequently they will have contextual context to help with their delivery. The other aspect to these two areas is that they tend to be disciplined and structured environments where projects have a visible cost, which brings with it accountability and organisational focus.

In our reviews of organisations it is invariably the case that these two functions will have project management standards (nearly always different to each other) and will prefer these to any broader organisational standards that may be in place for other types of projects, e.g. business projects.

Our conclusion has been that organisations must take a more holistic view of the training they provide to develop their internal project management capability. They need to have training programmes that develop more than the technical competence that is the focus of some of the qualification courses and supplement these with a broader range of personal and team development events. Dependence on one or two types of qualification are holding back organisations as their project managers are not gaining the personal competencies or having the organisational support they need to develop.

Work is ongoing with more and more organisations using the P3M3[®] maturity more information will become available to draw more accurate conclusions about these early trends we are spotting at the moment.

Rod Sowden, Managing Director, Aspire Europe Ltd and OGC Lead Author for Managing Successful Programmes (MSP[®]) and Portfolio, Programme, Project Management Maturity Model (P3M3[®]).

