



PMP Certification - The Basics

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The Project Management Professional, or PMP, certification is one of the most widely-recognized project manager qualifications globally. The Project Manager Institute - also known as the PMI - offers it, and acquiring it can give you a substantial advantage when finding work in this increasingly competitive field.

PMI was founded in 1969 and today is the largest not-for-profit project management organization in the world. We can trace its origins to the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta. Since its foundation, it has quickly spread to over 80 different countries.

Nowadays, PMI offers several different certifications in specific positions. They include *Scheduling Professional*, *Risk Management Professional*, and *Agile Certified Practitioner*.

The institute has grown enormously in the last 20 years, and that's thanks to the increasing popularity of the PMP - the first course they offered back in 1984. That year, there were twelve graduates, which has been increasing ever since. In a 2001 paper for *PM Network*, Ross Foti analyzed this and stated:

In the last three years, PMI has seen tremendous growth in the number of those seeking PMP certification. In 1997, the Institute qualified 4,500, and by the end of 2000, that number jumped to 18,000 worldwide. The surge can be explained by the evolving workplace. More business-to-business customers are expecting firms to have certified project managers in their organizations.

That remains true today and is reflected in the PMI's educational content expansion. Capitalizing on PMI to earn this certification is worthwhile if you want to make significant

advancements as a project manager. It will open numerous doors and ensure that you are a viable candidate for any high-level project manager position.

While IT and software are the industries that most graduates tend to gravitate towards, you could use the skills and knowledge the course affords in almost any line of work.

PMP is much more than a piece of paper like any good certification and teaches functional skills. Let's discuss the certificate in a little more detail:

PMI doesn't offer this course to beginners. To qualify, you must have already completed thirty-five hours of project management education and have three years of relevant experience.

If you are deemed eligible, you can partake in a computer-based exam that consists of 180 questions and usually takes about four hours to complete. PMI offers several resources for studying these areas, including an Exam Content Outline and the PMBOK guide.

PMBOK stands for Project Management Body of Knowledge. It is an expansive set of guidelines and terminology gathered to determine a global standard for project management.

Created by the PMI, in their guide compiling it, they refer to it as:

...a term that defines the knowledge within the profession of project management. The project management body of knowledge includes proven traditional practices that are widely applied as well as innovative practices that are emerging in the profession.

This is arguably the most informative and in-depth publication about project management ever. It will guide you through the three primary areas in this exam: People, Processes, and Business Environment.

Let's consider each of these individually, which aspects are covered in PMP, and how they relate to project management in the real world.

In the case of people, PMP will focus on communication. As a project manager, you will deal with a team of professionals. They must all be briefed on their responsibilities and kept up to date on the progress of a project. They must also be alerted to any changes to the project that will alter their role. That must be conducted helpfully to your team so that it doesn't cause any contention.

Consolidating the needs of a project with all of these different personalities takes strong communication skills, which are also essential for dealing with stakeholders. Ineffective

communication with the stakeholders can be disastrous as it can directly affect the project's budget.

The 2013 *Pulse of the Profession* report, released by PMI, discussed this. It stated:

...that \$135 million is at risk for every \$1 billion spent on a project. Further research on the importance of effective communication uncovers that a startling 56% (\$75 million of that \$135 million) is at risk due to ineffective communication.

Project managers will likely spend 90% of their time communicating, which makes these numbers even more concerning. The PMI recognized this, so their certification will test you on it. You will have to consider situations such as informing your team about a shift in focus from one strand of the project to another, managing conflicts between two team members who have differing opinions about how to proceed, or reassuring a stakeholder concerned about how beneficial the product will actually be.

And that leads us to the processes. When reading the PMBOK Guide, you will become familiar with PMP process groups. They are a framework for a standard method of progress through a project and something that every manager should familiarize themselves with.

The five groups are Initiating, Planning, Executing, Monitoring, and Closing. They are best utilized as a part of an organizational structure for the project life cycle. John Rampton of *The Motley Fool* sums up its importance by saying:

The purpose of the project life cycle is to define a project as well as roles and responsibilities. From the project manager to the entire team assigned to a project, the life cycle and its processes direct how to approach the project in an organized way. Company executives also get involved by sharing expectations of how the project should align with strategic objectives.

The first group - initiating - is when a decision is made on whether to proceed. The benefits, objectives, and deliverables will be determined, along with product expectations and resource availability. If the project is deemed worthwhile, it will be approved, and the next group can start.

The planning group stage is when the team is briefed on their roles. A clearly defined roadmap is laid out with a timeline for tasks and deliverables, and the necessary resources are gathered.

The execution and controlling groups will usually happen concurrently. If the plan is a thorough and detailed one, then implementation is as simple as setting that plan in motion, but some things will always go wrong. There could be scheduling, finance, resources, executive interference, workforce, or numerous other issues. It's crucial to have a monitoring system to pick up on these issues and keep them under control.

In a study for McKinsey & Company, a team of researchers estimated that *'98% of megaprojects suffer cost overruns of more than 30% and 77% are at least 40% late.'* Often, this isn't because of poor planning but a lack of monitoring and controlling. A project needs to be adaptable because it's impossible to anticipate the sheer amount of things that could go wrong.

If the execution and controlling are successful, the project can move on to the closing group. Here, the agreed-upon deliverables will be shared with the stakeholders, whether it's a finished product, a set of extensive reports and findings, or whatever else the project's goals were. Then, there will be a formal closure, and often, a review of how the project went to see if things can be improved in the future.

Understanding these groups and their function should help significantly with the Processes component of PMP. It will also lead well into the Business Environment section - a relatively recent addition to the exam.

Essentially the Business Environment section is about consolidating the project with the business. Susan Morrow of the *Infosec Institute* says:

By including this new section, the PMI has established the need for a project manager to understand business and the relevant skills to ensure the project works at a business level. This section of the PMP certificate may only be worth 8%, but it is a vital aspect of any project.

So, studying for this section of the certification would center around things like:

- company's health and safety regulations
- how to ensure the project complies with them
- ensuring that the project benefits the company
- knowing the typical customer base of the company inside out.

In short, PMP is a precious certification that will set you up nicely for landing lucrative project manager positions. It has become widely respected because of the valuable skill set that it encourages, which covers the most important aspects of people, process, and business environment.

If you want to solidify your reputation as a project manager, you should make the PMP certification a priority and gather as much knowledge and practical experience in these vital areas as you can.

Thanks for listening.

Reading List

[Article] The Case for Certification, Ross Foti

[Book] A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK Guide) Sixth ed.,
Project Management Institute

[Report] The High Cost of Low Performance: The Essential Role of Communications, Project
Management Institute

[Article] A Beginner's Guide to the Project Life Cycle, John Rampton

[Article] The Construction Productivity Imperative, Sriram Changali, Azam Mohammad & Mark
Van Nieuwland

[Article] PMP Domain #3: Business Environment, Susan Morrow