

PMP Certification Undervalued in IT Industry

For the past 25 years, the Project Management Institute's *Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge* has been considered the global standard for project managers, and its Project Management Professional (PMP®) designation has been considered the gold standard in certification.

Yet a recent study reveals that information technology (IT) recruiters in the U.S. consider PMP certification to be the least valuable of 15 core competencies. What's more, the study also reveals that IT executives don't find any significant differences in project-success rates among PMP-certified project managers and those who are uncertified.

In Phase I of the study, researchers Ernst Bekkering and Deborah H. Stevenson of Northeastern State University (NSU) in Oklahoma, U.S. surveyed 32 IT recruiters across the U.S., using online questionnaires and phone interviews. Each recruiter was asked to identify which characteristics they sought when hiring project managers. In Phase II, researchers Jo Ann Starkweather and D. Stevenson (NSU) polled IT executives nationwide for their opinions on the 15 competency areas identified by recruiters.

The study found that recruiters were most interested in experience and 'soft' skills such as the ability to communicate at multiple levels, and an understanding of when and how to exercise leadership. What was surprising, however, was that they had so little regard for the PMP certification.

The PMP was initiated in 1984 "to recognize an individual's demonstrated understanding of the knowledge and skills to lead and direct project teams and to deliver results within the constraints of schedule, budget, and resources " (PMI, 2009). Eligibility requirements included significant project-management experience.

The researchers had hypothesized that PMP-certification would be highly valued, yet only 52 per cent of recruiters found it to be an important competency; 48 per cent did not. Further, only 15 per cent of IT executives accorded any importance to certification, although they did perceive PMP-certified project managers to be more technically competent than uncertified project managers.

As a result of their study, the researchers have developed several suggestions for credentialing and hiring in the project management sector:

- PMP curriculum developers should re-assess whether there is enough attention devoted to soft skills, and also determine whether certification candidates have been given opportunities to demonstrate their ability to apply soft skills under various project constraints.
- IT executives must emphasize the importance of soft skills in the attributes they forward to recruiters for screening potential project managers.
- IT recruiters must find screening methods or instruments that can more effectively evaluate a candidate's soft-skill competencies.

The researchers also recommend that PMP curriculum developers find out more about IT executives' definition of project management success and discover what competencies they associate with success and how they would change the PMP certification to enhance its contribution to project management.

“Project management needs to be viewed and valued as a core activity in organizations, and should be better integrated into corporate strategy rather than relegated to the tactical arena,” says Starkweather and Stevenson. They further suggest increasing budgets for project management training and developing additional screening procedures for new hires.

“Our research suggests that IT execs perceive success as more than the techniques and procedures incorporated in the PMP curriculum body of knowledge,” they say. “If certification is to be viewed as more than a paper chase, a more relevant curriculum and experiential knowledge base must be developed.”

SOURCE:

Jo Ann Starkweather and Deborah H. Stevenson 2011. “PMP® Certification as a Core Competency: Necessary But Not Sufficient,” PMJ, Vol. 42, No. 1, 31-41.

Deborah H. Stevenson and Ernst Bekkering , 2007. “Project Management Certification Criterion as a Predictor of Hiring Success—Phase 1. Presentation. Knowledge & Project Management Symposium, October 3-4, Tulsa, OK.

PMPerspectives.org is a website which connects project managers and sponsors with project management researchers. Our mission is to understand and improve project management practices. The research team comprises Dr. Blaize Horner Reich and Dr. Andrew Gemino from Simon Fraser University, Canada and Dr. Chris Sauer from Oxford University, UK.

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