



The Case for a PMO Certification

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Background and Purpose of this Document

The purpose of this document is to build the case for a PMO Qualification to be developed and provided by Wellington.

It is acknowledged that Project Management is a profession in exponential growth and of critical importance for the global economy. In parallel, support roles such as the ones fulfilled by Project Management Offices (PMOs) have been and are expected to continue to experience growing. However, while project managers and other delivery roles have defined bodies of knowledge available to guide their practice and behaviour, PMOs are left to learn on their own, without sound and consensual guidance standard to rely on.

To the previous, not only does this gap demerit the credibility and the profession of those involved in PMOs, it also lends to a situation where individuals without appropriate competencies can be advising project practitioners and senior stakeholders in and about project settings. As suggested by the IPMA's Competence Baseline (ICB) and the APM's Competence Framework it is recognized that having the adequate competences is imperative for the success of projects. Yet, they both fall short in covering the competencies that are required for the deployment, operation and transformation of PMOs, evidencing an emphasis in the management of projects (by project managers) but neglecting the importance of ensuring the right conditions that allow projects to succeed, i.e., managing *for* projects (ensured by PMOs, project sponsors, etc.).

Considering the aforementioned, we argue that there is a need for guidance that recognizes the reality of PMOs in business, and for a PMO competence-based certification that defines the competencies necessary for PMO practitioners and for the PMO profession to be globally recognized and established.

This document offers a justification based in different perspectives and is intended to act as a foundation for further conversations to be initiated.

Note: while it is recognized that PMOs can take a multiplicity of forms (e.g. Centre of Excellence, EPMO, PSO, etc.), for the sake of simplicity, in this document we refer to "Project Management Office" (PMO) only. The same logic applies to "project management" and "project manager".

The Strategic Case

The strategic case refers to the contextual and strategic environment that supports the existence of a PMO Qualification.

1. Increasing projectification and contribution of projects to global economy

The world has become a projectified place to live in, with projects being a prevalent form of organizing work. According to Jensen and Geraldi (2016:21), “projects organize and shape our actions at work, in our professional profiles and networks, and also in our homes and free time activities”. Also from an economical perspective, project-oriented industries are in a leading position to improve a country’s productivity, with a recent report from the PMI suggesting that GDP contributions from project-oriented industries forecast for 2027 amounts to **US\$20.2 trillion**.

2. Increasing demand for skilled project professionals

According to PMI’s ‘Project Management Job Growth and Talent Gap Report 2017-2027’, there is an increasing demand for skilled project professionals, which create an extraordinarily positive outlook for new talent entering the industry. PMI anticipates that by 2027, employers will need **87.7 million** individuals working in project management-oriented roles. A shortage of skills could result in a potential loss of **US\$207.9 billion** in GDP through 2027.

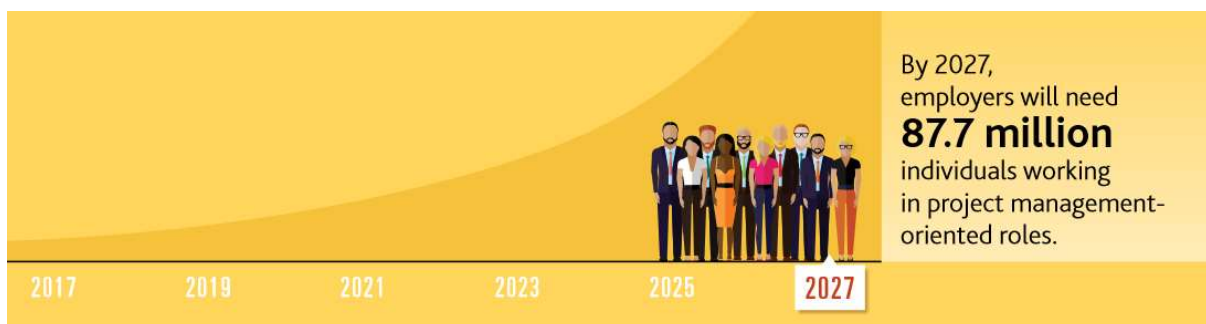


Figure 1 - Increasing demand of project professionals (PMI Report)

3. Most firms have a PMO in place

Recent reports (The State of the PMO 2016; The State of Project Management 2016) confirm that PMOs have become a standard feature of the organizational landscape, with **85%** of organizations having a PMO. However, the value of the PMO is still often challenged, with **less than half** organizations responding that their PMO realised its full potential in contributing business value to the organization.

4. There is a direct correlation between PMO capability and the value it delivers

According to “The State of the PMO 2016”, **greater PMO capability leads to greater performance** and contribution to business value, which reinforces our view regarding the impact of equipping PMO practitioners with the right skills and investing in the maturity journey of PMOs.

As the PMOs capability improves, the performance of the organization increases, based on a scale of 1-5 on how well they met eight measures of organizational performance (see PMO Capability Defined and Organizational Performance Defined on page 4).



Figure 2 - The correlation between maturity and performance (The State of the PMO Report)

The Competitive Case

The competitive case refers to the factors that should make Wellington be at the forefront of PMO Qualifications.

5. Increasing interest of the market for PMO-specific events

The growing interest of the market for events designed and intended for PMO professionals is visible in the creation of PMO tracks in congresses and the rising popularity of **PMO-specific events** such as:

- PMO Symposium (PMI, global-reach)
- APM PMO SIG Conference (APM, UK-based)
- The FuturePMO (Wellington Project Management, UK-based)
- The PMO Conference (PMO Flashmob, UK-based)
- 3PMO Conference (Finland-based)

6. Increasing interest for PMO publications

The search for knowledge in the PMO space manifests not just in the **increasing number of academic articles** published and Ph.D. thesis on that topic but also in the following publications:

- PMO Frameworks, November 2013 (PMI)
- The State of the PMO (PM Solutions)
- PMO Journal (CAI Media Group)

7. Increasing interest for PMO conversations

A quick search for the word “PMO” in LinkedIn groups retrieves **340** results, demonstrating the interest of PMO practitioners to engage in real conversations with their peers. Additionally, it should be noted that the Association for Project Management (APM)’s Specific Interest Group (SIG) for PMOs is the SIG with most active followers on Twitter, almost **4000** users.

The Professionalism Case

The professionalism case refers to the role of a PMO Qualification as a driver for rising the PMO profession in the industry.

8. The lack of sound and well-founded qualifications for PMO practitioners

Most PMO practitioners are not aware of the existence of qualifications suitable for their roles, resulting in a situation where PMO professionals are left to learn the practice of their jobs on their own or relying in established project management qualifications, such as IPMA-D/C, PMP or PRINCE2, which **don't reflect the reality of their role nor the competencies that they need the most.**

9. Shortcomings of existing PMO qualifications

While there is a very limited number of PMO qualifications available in the market, most have no expression outside the UK and are deemed as **not comprehensive and relevant enough** to meet the needs of PMO professionals.

10. The need for a competence-based qualification

Existing PMO qualifications are founded in knowledge-based assessments only. Given that most PMOs are involved in some sort of advice function, there is the expectation that someone with an appropriate qualification is ensuring that the advice they are given is sound and well founded. Thus, having a competencies-based assessment - similar to what currently happens with IPMA and APM certifications - provides a more relevant mechanism for assessing the **suitability of an individual for a PMO role** in line with the above and helps to define the career path for PMOs as well as to strengthen the notion of PMO as a profession.

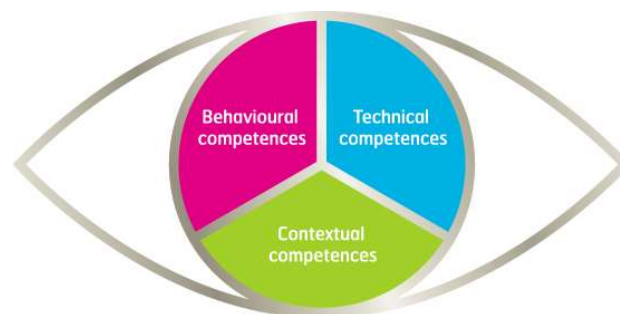


Figure 3 - The Eye of Competence (ICB, IPMA)

The Institutional Case

The institutional case refers to the role of the IPMA and the APM as the de-facto organizations (global and UK based respectively) for the development and promotion of project management best practices, thus, holding a responsibility towards PMO professionals too.

11. The role of the Associations as the accreditors of certifications

Being the oldest and Chartered Body for the Profession respectively, whose missions involve the development and promotion of project management best practices, it is our view that the **Associations are in a privileged position** to develop, qualify, and disseminate best-fit practices for PMOs amongst its members and the expanded global project management community utilising their accreditation practices already in place to leverage the knowledge of partners and training affiliates.

12. Avoid fragmentation of the market

Following the perceived interest of the PMO community, it is worth noting that some of the IPMA's members have already initiated work towards a PMO qualification or are currently offering a PMO qualification of their own (Projekti-instituutti – Finland), endorsed by the IPMA:

- Certified PMO Manager (CPMO™)
- CPMO™ Competence Baseline
- More information: <https://www.projekti-instituutti.fi/en/certification/cpmo>

This, alongside the emergence of PMO specific training and consultancy firms offering their own training courses, represents a great opportunity to build upon existing material and avoid fragmentation of the market, privileging instead a **unified, agnostic and collaborative approach** towards the development of standards and certification.

Call for Action

Considering the aforementioned, we propose the development of a working group to define how to take this work forward and to enquire about possibility of an APM or IPMA Accredited certification course.

Discussions already taken place in 2017 brought the following feedback from IPMA representatives:

“In The Netherlands they already started a certification (...) Joop Schefferlie is leading the certification of IPMA Netherlands and is at the same time VP Certification of IPMA. Furthermore, (...) Martin Sedlmeyer, IPMA’s VP for Products and Services, he discussed with Joop several possibilities of widening our Product Portfolio and is just working on a strategy and priorities. Matti is doing his certification outside of IPMA, but offered his help, e.g. for defining the standard. However, we definitely need to have a standard as reference model as we do with ICB, OCB and PEB.” *Reinhard Wagner*

“From my point of view, PMO is a significant and important role with our profession of Project Management. The added value is enormous and until now not in the right way recognized, for example by the possibility to certify.

For this reason, but also for people in an Agile environment, Project Risk managers, Project Planners, etc, etc., we decide to change our view on the ICB standard. Not by creating a lot of new standards (of course we need something like a reference model for other roles) for every role in our profession we can think of, but just by opening our current standards to other roles in the environment of PM. Our certification standard is good and general enough. This also opens the opportunity to create new product on (local) business needs.

This is exactly the reason why we in The Netherlands created a PMO exam. Based on the ICB4 competences and aligned with the ICR4. The exam is more or less on IPMA Level D. Other MA’s, like Finland, Switzerland, Germany and some people in the UK are interested. My intention is to share this with some other countries, harmonize if needed, and finally bring it to an IPMA Level.” *Joop Schefferlie*

In the UK, we have also successfully lobbied the UK Apprenticeship governing body, ECITB. In the higher level of Project Controls apprenticeship, the PMO Skills and Behaviours will be included to provide the elevation of the ‘mechanics’ of project controls to the portfolio and governance level. This change in one apprenticeship opens up numerous possibilities for other apprenticeships to recognise PMO such as Project Management, Project Assurance, and Project Risk.

With the introduction of the APM PMO of the Year Award, we believe that this is the time for a recognised PMO certification to be brought into the industry. As PMO is an extremely complex area, the most value will be unlocked by working together with the Associations.