**What Employers are asking for in Job postings for PM's**

By Gareth Byatt, Gary Hamilton, and Jeff Hodgkinson

One of us (Jeff) immersed himself in research for this article by searching open job postings on major sites in order to obtain a picture of the current job market for project management. We took this approach to best simulate the employment search process. It’s a good idea to take a ‘project approach’, the first step being to check a range of program and project posted positions, locally, nationally, and then globally; this will allow you to gauge current employer needs and requirements. When professionals are looking for new work, they will usually want to look at salary and compensation on offer before applying for available opportunities. We also presume people will be actively networking, contacting recruiting firms, updating LinkedIn profiles and such, but that’s not the scope of this article. Our goal is to provide some commentary for our readers on what is being asked of PM’s in the current job markets around the world (at a summary level at least), and to let you compare this with your own knowledge and experience as a PM professional.

In today’s challenging economic times (acknowledging that the economies of the US, South America, Europe, Australia and Africa are all experiencing different situations), you can’t take anything for granted, including your employment. Whether you work for a private or public company or a government or not-for-profit organisation, circumstances beyond your control can occur at any time, causing layoffs, downsizing, attrition, buy-outs, mergers, etc. If you are self-employed, future opportunities could be limited or non-existent. Without wishing to paint a ‘bleak picture’, anyone can be susceptible to job loss, and the best advice we can offer is: ‘be prepared’. A great example of this can be seen in the film ‘Company Men’, which dramatizes the effects that sudden layoffs can have at all levels. Keep in mind that the three of us writing this article share a common philosophy of, ‘always be prepared through continuous improvement’. We are all multi-credentialed and actively volunteer in our profession because we gain numerous benefits, including professional contacts.

PM positions that are listed today range from the project coordinator to a Director-type level. Obviously, salaries vary according to such factors as geography, scope of duties, and the industry in question and, for this article, we choose not to comment on compensation or its variations. A recent article in US News stated that employers are increasingly seeking workers proficient in project management; 90 percent of executives surveyed claimed that project management is either critical or somewhat important to their operations, and that roughly 1.2 million PM jobs will be created per year for the next 10 years. This seems to be good news for those in the PM profession, but there will be tough competition for these positions.

PM job postings generally request some technical background and experience specific to the type of business in which the company operates, which is, of course, to be expected – experience will always be a primary factor in hiring process. We realize that background and sector experience are important, but here we are focusing on the pure PM requirements. Titles and seniority levels aside, we have seen some common themes and expectations (listed below in no order of importance):

* Provide project updates
* Conduct project meetings
* Manage cross-functional teams
* Coordinate cross-discipline teams
* Manage all stakeholders effectively
* Meet project schedule commitments
* Define and achieve target milestones
* Manage risks and issues in a competent manner
* Be "self-motivated" or a highly motivated project manager
* Know how to lead and influence others without direct authority
* Successfully manage several projects simultaneously or a large program
* Deliver projects on time, meeting performance metrics and project objectives
* Manage resources and deliverables to meet both project and company objectives
* Strong interpersonal skills in addition to exemplary writing, speaking and presentation skills
* Experience working with globally dispersed, multi-cultural, multi-lingual teams preferred

Other requirements will often be included – we have not covered each and every eventuality. It is fair to say that many PM postings today state that ‘a PM type credential or certification is preferred.’ Different industries (construction, IT, etc.) tend to ask for some specific certification or group membership. The wording for the certification required ranges from ‘preferred’, ‘a plus’, ‘highly desirable’, or in some cases ‘required’. In some cases, postings suggest that multiple credentials would be desirable, but this is not always the case. Critical as well is the need for relevant experience (we will come on to this later).

Being a professional program/project management practitioner means that you should perform actions that lead to predictive, positive consequences and outcomes, not only in your projects and programs but also in your career. What is exceptional today is expected as the norm tomorrow, and the second that you rest on your laurels is the day you fully retire. Therefore, it is incumbent upon you to be personally prepared – as the saying goes, ‘only the paranoid survive.’ We have a few suggestions that may help you plan for the time that you need to be ‘competitive’ in the marketplace. Using the matrix below, objectively score yourself in the appropriate column. You may also find it beneficial to print or send this to a few trusted colleagues and ask them to score you. Use the ratings as a baseline; if there are any areas in which you believe need improvement, set a goal to seek out those experiences.

**PM Experience Attributes**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Requirement** | **None** | **Basic** | **Working** | **Advanced** | **Expert** | **Role Model** |
| Provide project updates |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Conduct project meetings |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Manage cross-functional teams |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Coordinate cross-disciplined teams |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Manage all stakeholders effectively |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Meet project schedule commitments |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Define and achieve target milestones |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Manage risks and issues in a competent manner |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Be “self-motivated” or a highly motivated project manager |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Know how to lead and influence others without direct authority |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Successfully manage several projects simultaneously or a large program |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Deliver projects on time, meeting performance metrics and project objectives |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Manage resources and deliverables to meet both project & company objectives |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Strong interpersonal skills with exemplary writing, speaking and presentation skills |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Experience working with globally dispersed, multi-cultural, multi-lingual teams preferred |  |  |  |  |  |  |

Having completed the above matrix (and perhaps after obtaining feedback from those that you know and trust), review the common PM credentials and certifications we found in various job descriptions (links for details are provided). Decide if there are any that you either need or plan to obtain. Note: we have not listed all credentials possible, but have focused on those that are most common.

**PM Credentials & Certifications**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Credential/**  **Certification**  **Acronym** | **Credential or**  **Certification**  **Name & Link** | **I**  **Have**  **It…** | **I**  **Need**  **It** | **I**  **Plan To**  **Get It** | **I Am**  **Not Interested** | **I Am**  **Open To**  **Consider** |
| CAPM | [Certified Associate in Project Mgmt (CAPM)®](http://www.pmi.org/en/Certification/Certified-Associate-in-Project-Management-CAPM.aspx) |  |  |  |  |  |
| PMP | [Project Management Professional (PMP)®](http://www.pmi.org/en/Certification/Project-Management-Professional-PMP.aspx) |  |  |  |  |  |
| PgMP | [Program Management Professional (PgMP)®](http://www.pmi.org/en/Certification/Project-Management-Professional-PgMP.aspx) |  |  |  |  |  |
| PRINCE2 - P | [Prince2 Practitioner Level](http://www.prince2.com/prince2-foundation-training.asp) |  |  |  |  |  |
| IPMA – A | [IPMA Level A® - Certified Projects Director](http://www.ipma.ch/certification/Requirements/Pages/LevelA.aspx) |  |  |  |  |  |
| IPMA – B | [IPMA Level B® - Certified Senior Project Manager](file:///C:\Users\hmeyer\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary%20Internet%20Files\Content.Outlook\554NYO63\IPMA%20Level%20B®%20-%20Certified%20Senior%20Project%20Manager) |  |  |  |  |  |
| IPMA – C | [IPMA Level C® - Certified Project Manager](http://www.ipma.ch/certification/Requirements/Pages/LevelC.aspx) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Six Sigma–G | [Six Sigma Green Belt Certification - CSSGB](http://asq.org/certification/six-sigma-green-belt/index.html) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Six Sigma-B | [Six Sigma Black Belt Certification - CSSBB](http://asq.org/certification/six-sigma/index.html) |  |  |  |  |  |
| ITIL – I | [ITIL Intermediate Level](http://www.itil-officialsite.com/Qualifications/ITILV3QualificationLevels/ITILV3IntermediateLevel.asp) |  |  |  |  |  |
| ITIL- E | [ITIL Expert Certificate](http://www.itil-officialsite.com/Qualifications/ITILV3QualificationLevels/ITILV3ExpertLevel.asp) |  |  |  |  |  |
| CPPP | [Certified Practicing Project Practitioner (CPPP)](http://www.aipm.com.au/html/cpd.cfm) |  |  |  |  |  |
| CPPM | [Certified Practicing Project Manager (CPPM)](http://www.aipm.com.au/html/cpd.cfm) |  |  |  |  |  |
| CPPD | [Certified Practicing Project Director (CPPD](http://www.aipm.com.au/html/cpd.cfm)) |  |  |  |  |  |
| PMOC | [Project Management Office Certified](http://www.pmousa.com) |  |  |  |  |  |
| PME | [Project Management Expert (PME™ )](http://www.ecgmn.com) |  |  |  |  |  |
| CBAP | [Certified Business Analysis ProfessionalTM (CBAP®)](http://www.theiiba.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=CBAP_Designation&Template=/CM/HTMLDisplay.cfm&ContentID=7490) |  |  |  |  |  |
| RPP | [Registered Project Professional (RPP)](http://www.apm5dimensions.com/rpp) |  |  |  |  |  |

If you have decided to improve your experience attribute level and/or to obtain a new PM-related credential or certification, set a goal for yourself to do both. At a minimum, we suggest either improving one skill (perhaps something you can focus on in your continuing professional development at work) and/or obtaining one additional certification which can actively contribute to your self-improvement every year. In this way, you are steadily making real career improvements, learning new skills, and keeping yourself “relevant”, both for the benefit of your current employment and also as preparation for facing an ever-changing and challenging international job market, should you ever be in such a position.

Critical to the decision to hire is the candidate’s experience to match the job required. Individuals always need to bear in mind that they need to continually demonstrate “on the ground experience” that will entice an employer to select them for interview. It is undoubtedly true that “experience counts”. Things you might want to consider are as follows: What is the toughest assignment you have had to manage so far? How can you prove what you have really achieved to a prospective employer? How will you show that you can perform a prospective job better than anyone else?

In conclusion, as we all know, experience that matches the role is always critical and this requires careful thought when applying for a new role (within the organization you work for or elsewhere). We also think there are some common PM skills attributes and also some appropriate certifications/credentials that are mentioned in job descriptions (recognising that different regional geographies and industries will ask for specific credentials that suit their needs). Regardless of your employment status, if you are a PM practitioner, there is a genuine benefit to be gained by continually improving both your experience and/or obtaining a new PM related credential or certification (ideally, with one new certification/year). Amongst other things, this will help maintain your competitiveness in the job market should you ever need or want to try something new.