

A series of short articles on

The Role of Academic Institutions in Educating and Training Project Managers¹

Master of Project Management (MPM) at Reykjavik University
Article 5

**By Helgi Thor Ingason
and
Haukur Ingi Jonasson**

In this article we will give the reader of the Project Management World Journal a brief introduction to the graduate level program in project management that we have been developing for the last decade. The programme is now hosted by the School of Science and Engineering at Reykjavik University. The programme started in 2005 and since 2007, more than 30 people have graduated annually with the MPM degree. The number of MPM graduates from the beginning is thus close to 250.

Strong emphasis is put on all competences of modern project management competence baselines such as the IPMA ICB, the APM and PMBOK. The program is characterized by a balance between technical, behavioural and contextual competences. It combines studying of recent textbooks, relevant scientific papers and original work by the students in their 4th and final semester. This paper exposes the basic principles behind the structure and content of the program.

The birth of project management as a field of specific academic field is often traced to the middle of the 20th century. Since antiquity engineers have had their ways of getting things done, however, in modern times managers and academics have increasingly recognized the need to develop more sophisticated structured methods for managing large and complex projects. The curriculum of the MPM program at Reykjavik University builds on on this legacy, but also aims to build in the substantial experience in management and project-related work can apply for the program. Its promise is to provide participants with an in-depth practical higher education grounded on a sound, cross-sectional basis of PPP management and leadership studies.

One of the key design criteria was the intertwining of technical-, behavioural- (both intrapersonal and interpersonal factors) and contextual elements. Students achieve knowledge by studying textbooks, standards and scientific articles. Even more importantly, they receive training and acquire skills in applying efficient methods in preparing, executing and completing different types of projects and programs and

¹This series of articles is by Professors Helgi Thor Ingason and Haukur Ingi Jonasson at Reykjavik University in Iceland. Active researchers and educators in the field of project management for many years, they are the authors of *Project Ethics* published by Gower (UK) in 2013. See their author profiles at the end of this article.

implementing project management as a management approach in any kind of organisations. The methods in question are both technical ones for strategy making, execution planning and control as well as methods for understanding the strengths and weaknesses of individuals and teams. Also, the program concentrates on the analysis of communication problems, and working with these issues to achieve maximum results in a demanding collaborative environment.

The main objective of the program is to provide our students with the knowledge, skills and competences to take on any managerial undertaking by using the PPP management methods. This is done by intertwining views, theories and methods from the humanities, social sciences, business administration and engineering sciences in highly practical way. The program is designed to educate and train students in applying technical methods PPP management to manage teams and organizations and clusters. Furthermore, it pursues to educate and train students in self-management, interpersonal relations, leadership, team work and organizational competences. This will strengthen the students in taking leading roles in whatever sector of society.

The MPM studies are practical 90 ETCS units, tailored to meet the ever-increasing demands of the community and the economy for project success and professional project managers. A strong emphasis is put on student participation. Knowledge and skills are taught with dynamic lectures, purposeful practical coursework and through teamwork on real-life assignments, often taken from the students own working environments. Courses are taught sequentially, one course at a time. The structure of the program is shown in the following Table; the course titles are descriptive of the content of the courses.

1st year	
Fall	Spring
Courses	Courses
Innovation and Strategy	Real Project: Project Execution
Project management: Theoretical Foundation and Project Planning	Project Teams and Group Dynamics
Project Leadership: Self, Growth and Development	Agile and Scrum
	Program and Portfolio Management
2nd year	
Fall	Spring
Courses	Courses
Consultancy, Change and Organizational Development	Research Paper Thesis
Project Negotiation, Conflict and Crisis	Advanced Project and Program Management
Project and Program Accounting, Feasibility and Finance	Elective Course
Project Driven Organization and Quality management	

The MPM programme opens with a course on innovation and strategy. The aim is to spark the innovative spirit of students, make them start to think strategically about their ambitions, and understand how innovation and strategy initiate projects, programmes and project portfolios. Then the world of professional management with a keen focus on getting things done with the tools of professional project management and leadership opens up. The focus is simultaneously on both on management theory, skills and competences and on the personal growth professional development of the students through them means of various insights from psychology, ethics, responsibility and understanding of sustainable development in the widest sense. Vast number of theories and their practical applications are introduced. At the end of the semester all students have been internationally verified as Certified Project Management Associates according to IPMA and they have been exposed to the fundamentals of PMBOK and APM standards and different approaches to professional project management.

The second semester opens with a course that continues, along with other courses, throughout the semester; in it our students design, plan, execute and evaluate a project that is supposed to benefit society. The undertaking is required to meet the highest professional standards. Along this, they get well acquainted with fundamentals of how to manage teams and group dynamics, and they apply this in practical exercises, laboratory training in inter-personal relations and interactions in their teams. Students also gain experience in managing professional teams through variety of methods (including Agile and Scrum), and professionally manage programmes and project portfolios in complex contexts.

In the third semester the focus shifts towards the organisational level and how organisations of all kinds can be managed and developed as reach strategic aims and business objectives. The curriculum, that covers project finance and financing, strategic negotiations, provides students with tools to build, increase and maintain value. High level managerial leadership, the role of CEOs and boards, project management maturity and project driven organisations are dealt with. The focus is on effective and efficient management with a keen eye on clarity in demands, quality assurance, cultural sensitivity, high-level of motivation and successful execution. Strategic and tactical ways to manage change, development, conflicts and crisis, also play a central role in this semester.

The fourth semester opens with a course in how to design, plan, execute, write and present research projects in management studies. The aim is both to provide students with research methods they can use both to pursue academic undertakings or to evaluated projects and programmes. Also, in the fourth semester there is a course on advanced project management that explores technical innovation, product development and high level of complexity. Each student then chooses one elective course; among the elective courses we have offered are PPP management in diverse cultural settings, PPP management in different sectors; and courses on crisis management and on managing EU projects and public administration.

In modern society, a crucial condition for organisational sustainability is the ability to adjust to ever changing environment. Prosperity depends on the competence to meet volatile expectations of demanding customers and it relies on the capability to arrange,

utilize, maintain and develop human resources in a chaotic environment; the ability to manage the need of professional employees to pursue their own interests and also enabling them to stay enact in terms of loyalty to organisations is crucial. Professionals need to be challenged, they need to have a sense of personal growth and professional development; they are specialists but at the same time they are both called upon to lead and be led by others. In this new world where the very existence of the organization is based on its ability to define common principles, specify its policy, aligning its human resources, in an ongoing dialogue between process and outcome; its mission and its goals. Last but not least, it is about the ability to respond and make things happen, as quickly, efficiently and effectively as possible that determines both the fate and fortune of the enterprise.

We have designed the MPM program at Reykjavik University around these themes. It is not about managing business as usual; it is about defining policies in principled fashion and get thing done through projects, programs and portfolios. The aim is to create a new generation of managers, who are not detached analysts but people who can deploy their talent, knowledge, skills and competence to whatever needs to be done in such a way as to do the right things in the right way. We have come a long way since the first students started the program in 2005. And we still have a long way to go. But our recent Academic Accreditation from APM with very positive feedback shows is an important milestone on the way, a step that proves that we are moving in the right direction.

About the Authors



Prof Helgi Thor Ingason

Reykjavik, Iceland



Helgi Thor Ingason (b. 1965) holds a PhD in process metallurgy from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), MSc in mechanical and industrial engineering from the University of Iceland and a Stanford Advanced Project Management Certification from Stanford University. He is an IPMA Certified Senior Project Manager (B level).

Dr. Ingason is an associate professor at Reykjavik University. He is the head of the MPM - Master of Project Management - program at the university. The research fields of Dr. Ingason range from quality- and project management to system dynamics and renewable energy, production, transport and utilization, changes in the energy infrastructure and energy carriers of the future.

Dr. Ingason has reported on his research at conferences and in several reviewed conference and journal papers. He is the co-author of 6 books in the Icelandic language on project management, strategic planning, product development and quality management. He is also a co-author (with Dr Haukur Ingi Jonasson) of the book *Project Ethics*, published by Gower in January 2013.

Dr. Ingason was interim CEO of Orkuveita Reykjavíkur (Reykjavik Energy) from 2010 to 2011. A co-founder of Nordica Consulting Group, Dr. Ingason is a management consultant and a recognized speaker. In his spare time he plays piano and accordion with Icelandic jazz and world music ensembles. More information on Dr. Ingason can be found on www.academia.edu. Information about the MPM program at the University of Reykjavik can be found at <http://en.ru.is/mpm/why-mpm/>. Dr. Ingason can be contacted at helgithor@ru.is.



Prof Haukur Ingi Jonasson

Reykjavik, Iceland



Haukur Ingi Jonasson (Cand. Theol., University of Iceland; STM, PhD, Union Theological seminary; clinical training in pastoral counseling, Lennox Hill Hospital; psychoanalytical training, Harlem Family Institute New York City) is an assistant professor and chairman of the Board for the MPM - Master of Project Management - program at Reykjavik University in Iceland.

He is also a psychoanalyst in private practice and a management consultant at Nordic Consulting Group ehf. As a consultant, his clients have included energy companies, banks, hospitals, the government and other public and private organizations. Dr. Jonasson is also a mountain climber and a member of the Reykjavik Mountaineering Air Ground Search and Rescue Squad. He is co-author with Helgi Thor Ingason of *Project Ethics*, published by Gower (UK) in 2013. Dr. Jonasson can be contacted at haukuringi@ru.is