

Are Certifications such as PMI'S PMP or OGC/APM's PRINCE2 Credentials becoming Defacto Licenses?

By Paul D. Giammalvo

For the past 6 months or so, I have been seeing a dramatic increase in the help wanted advertisements, both on line and in print, requiring a PMP or a PRINCE2 credential as a clear pre-requisite to applying for the job.

And my question is, by making a knowledge-based credential with no proven connection to producing more successful project managers resulting in a form of licensing? And is this good for the practice of project management?

Licensing is generally considered to be a classic form of protectionism. How? By limiting those who can practice, it provides the government or more accurately, those vested interests who lobby governments, a way to artificially reduce the number of practitioners, with the hopes and expectations that by limiting or controlling the numbers, those who are licensed can charge more money.

This is all done under the noble sounding auspices that the government is "protecting" the health and safety of the consuming public, by preventing incompetents, charlatans and frauds from practicing.

There is no shortage of credible research showing that in very few instances, does licensing result in any more protection than the "free hand of the marketplace" in weeding out incompetents, charlatans and frauds, and not only does licensing not protect the consuming public very effectively, it consistently results in higher prices, with little or no increase in benefits.

Now, given the PMP, PRINCE2 are NOT licenses, but voluntary credentials, is the proliferation of help wanted advertisements REQUIRING a PMP or PRINCE2, effectively resulting in the same effect?

This was a question posted on some of the more populous Linked In Groups pertaining to project management. (See below for URL's to all of them)

IF certifications such as PMI's PMP or OGC/APM's PRINCE2 are REQUIRED as a precondition to getting a job interview, isn't this a defacto license? And does this represent a restraint of free trade?

If yes, what can or should be done about it?

If no, why do you think this is a good thing?

From nearly 200 responses, I have selected some of the more interesting and provocative exchanges:

Michael Hartwell wrote

Program Manager at ANXeBusiness

Do you want a certified proctologist doing that colonoscopy? Or your brother in law that has decades of experience on the farm?

And I responded:

Dr. Paul D. Giammalvo, CDT, CCE, MScPM 

Sr. Technical Advisor at PTMC/APMX

Great line, Michael!!! I will surely use that one again!!!

Assuming you are are drawing the analogy between a board certified proctologist and someone holding their PMP/PRINCE2, I think you have stretched the analogy well beyond the breaking point.

The proctologist has completed what, 8 years of medical school and a two year residency, before he/she even qualified to become board certified. So if that is the kind of credentials you are advocating for project managers, then we are clearly on the same side.....

BUT, if you are trying to compare putting in 4,500 or 7,500 hours of UNVERIFIED work experience (PMI does not audit the quality of the work, only the hours worked, and then only 10% of applications) then takes 35 hours of training, that can be fulfilled by reading a book of questions and answers or listening to a podcast, then takes a 200 question, multiple choice exam, of which only 175 questions actually count, then passes with a score of only 62%, then I will trust my brother in law on the farm to do my next proctology exam, thank you.....

BR,

Dr. PDG, Jakarta

<http://www.getpmcertified.com>

Another interesting response came from the AIPM Linked In Group

David Hudson wrote in response to this question

Owner, Primal Solutions and Management Consulting Specialist

It's another good question Paul,

With some knowledge of the recruitment sector, the answer (certainly from an Australian context) is crystal clear. No, there is no restraint of trade in asking for qualifications as a pre-requisite for a role. But I still think organizations are on safer ground if they qualify the requirement with a caveat of "or commensurate qualifications/competence evidence)"

The term 'license' - one wonders whether the market sees it that way, though the Prince 2 banner is becoming strong and when used in some public sector settings I have less

confidence in the level of balance in the perception of the certification.

My own research (Gantthead, 2008) gave the following feedback to the question:

How reliable is certification as a job selection criterion?

The answers were:

- . Not at all - 8%*
- . It depends on the credibility of the qualification - 8%*
- . Caveat Emptor - 17%*
- . It is just a baseline for the initial interview screening - 62%*
- . Completely - 8%*

It seems many people share our concern that we not be railroaded by certifications, and also clear that most organizations do take a commonsense perspective.

*David Hudson, AFAIM, MAIPM, MPD
National Chair Standards, AIPM*

But perhaps my favorite response of all came from Nicholas Heyke, also from the AIPM Linked In Group.

Nicholas Heyke

SAP Project Manager at BOC Gases

Having also been a PM for a long time and PRINCEII - Practitioner and recently PMP and considering my Masters as well...THE ONLY reason to do any of these certifications, in my experience, is to get past the HR lady!

We all know that a good PM goes by instinct and knows how to run a project with or without methodology. The lingo changes, but the concepts are the same. A good PM is born and is unlikely to come out of study alone.

All the job adds now being posted use one or the other cert to cull the ridiculous number of applicants per job. In Sydney the recruiters are being bashed with over 400 applicants per job! There are simply not enough jobs to go 'round. The hiring companies have the same problem and are simply raising the bar to make their job easier. Its very easy for a simple HR lady to want a whole lot of certifications because it makes her job easier. The fact that good, experienced PM's don't make their way in front of the hiring manager is inconsequential as far as these control freaks are concerned.

These HR ladies are everywhere and are the gate keepers of the current job markets and use a simplistic way of culling the numbers to minimize their job load while maintaining control over the process...and the obvious one is certification.

As a consultant, I have personally worked in over 10 large companies and Government

agencies in the past 15years and NOT ONE of these agencies have used, or fully utilized a formal PM methodology.

At best they may have used some version of one or a home grown one or none at all, yet they ALL have insisted on formal certification. WHY? Because they perceive a higher skill level and career interest, and they have the dollars.

Do certifications make me a better PM? If I ever got a chance to fully implement one I'll let you know!

Nick H.

Bottom Line-

The ethical and moral dilemma I am grappling with (and would hope you are as well) is whether the tendency to make any single credential, especially only a knowledge based credential, with no proven link to producing "successful" project managers is "good" for the overall practice and image of project management?

Is this apparent trend contributing to producing "better" project managers, who can deliver projects on time, within budget, in substantial conformance to specifications, that actually serve the purpose for which they were undertaken in the first place, or is the only thing being done is to serve as an artificial restraint of trade, by screening out otherwise capable and competent project managers?

What I would ask this readership to think critically about is when all is said and done, should knowledge-based credentials (as opposed to competency based credentials) be used as a filter to weed out potential employees.....?

Which means that IF someone wants to create a filter, wouldn't it make more sense to use one based on COMPETENCY and not merely knowledge?

To put this in perspective, would you get on the next commercial jet knowing the pilot had never successfully taken off or landed a plane?

Or would you go in for open heart surgery not knowing if the cardiologist you selected ever had a patient who lived?

We need to look beyond the marketing hype at what the knowledge based credentials REALLY measure, and to be very candid, I don't believe very much. (And I am in the business of providing this kind of training!!!)

What do I recommend? Given there are many other credible knowledge and competency based credentials, including, but not limited to:

CMMA's Certified Construction Manager- <http://www.cmaanet.org/about-cmci>

AACE's highly regarded Certified Cost Engineer (CCE) credential-
<http://www.aacei.org/certification/CCC/welcome.shtml>

asapm's COMPETENCY based credentialing program-
http://www.pmcert.org/Prog_Overview.asp

AACE's Competency Based C3PM-
<http://www.aacei.org/certification/C3PM/welcome.shtml>

IPMA's Competency Based Credentials-
<http://www.ipma.ch/certification/pages/default.aspx>

GAPPS Competency Based Standards- <http://www.globalpmstandards.org/performance-based-standards/general/performance-based-competency-standards/>

Given this choice, why would any responsible HR or organizational decision maker want limit the potential candidate field by specifying ONLY one credential as a filter? If you really cared about delivering better projects in your organization, why not open the competition up to ALL credible, internationally recognized credentials and then see which one does or does not produce the best value in your organization?

How do this? By not specifying any SINGLE credential, but stating "PMP/PRINCE2 OR EQUAL" or "Must have Internationally recognized certification" in your job postings.

Below are the links to the full LinkedIn Discussions

- 1) Project Manager Networking Group
http://www.linkedin.com/groupAnswers?viewQuestionAndAnswers=&gid=37888&discussionID=2823253&split_page=1
- 2) Advanced Project Management Topics
http://www.linkedin.com/groupAnswers?viewQuestionAndAnswers=&gid=56874&discussionID=2823017&sik=1240813461915&trk=ug_qa_q&goback=.ana_56874_1240813461915_3_1
- 3) Australian Institute of Project Managers
http://www.linkedin.com/groupAnswers?viewQuestionAndAnswers=&gid=980377&discussionID=2823039&sik=1240813461916&trk=ug_qa_q&goback=.ana_980377_1240813461916_3_1
- 4) Global Project Managers Linked In Group
http://www.linkedin.com/groupAnswers?viewQuestionAndAnswers=&gid=2775&discussionID=2823102&sik=1240813461917&trk=ug_qa_q&goback=.ana_2775_1240813461917_3_1

- 5) Project Management Bloggers
http://www.linkedin.com/groupAnswers?viewQuestionAndAnswers=&gid=72053&discussionID=2823141&goback=.anh_72053

- 6) Project Managers Link
http://www.linkedin.com/groupAnswers?viewQuestionAndAnswers=&gid=35313&discussionID=2823220&sik=1240813461921&trk=ug_qa_q&goback=.ana_35313_1240813461921_3_1

- 7) Telecom Professionals
http://www.linkedin.com/groupAnswers?viewQuestionAndAnswers=&gid=23013&discussionID=2823371&sik=1240813461926&trk=ug_qa_q&goback=.ana_23013_1240813461926_3_1

About the Author



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For 25+ years, he has been providing Project Management training and consulting throughout South and Eastern Asia, the Middle East and Europe. He is also active in the Global Project Management Community, serving as an Advocate for and on behalf of the global practitioner. He does so by playing an active professional role in the Association for the Advancement of Cost Engineering International, (AACE); Construction Specifications Institute (CSI) and the Construction Management Association of America, (CMAA). He previously served on the Board of Directors of the American Society for the Advancement of Project Management ([asapm](http://www.asapm.org/)) <http://www.asapm.org/> and served previously as the Chair of the Certification Board of the Green Project Management organization. <http://www.greenprojectmanagement.org/> He is active as a regional leader and a compensated consultant to the Planning Planet's Guild of Project Controls. <http://www.planningplanet.com/guild>

He has spent 18 of the last 45 years working on large, highly complex international projects, including such prestigious projects as the Alyeska Pipeline and the Distant Early Warning Site (DEW Line) upgrades in Alaska. Most recently, he worked as a Senior Project Cost and Scheduling Consultant for Caltex Minas Field in Sumatra and Project Manager for the Taman Rasuna Apartment Complex for Bakrie Brothers in Jakarta. His current client list includes AT&T, Ericsson, Nokia, Lucent, General Motors, Siemens, Chevron, Conoco-Philips, BP, Dames and Moore, SNC Lavalin, Freeport McMoran, Petronas, Pertamina, UN Projects Office, World Bank Institute and many other Fortune 500 companies and NGO organizations.

Dr. Giammalvo holds an undergraduate degree in Construction Management, a Master of Science in Project Management through the George Washington University and a PhD in Project and Program Management through the Institute Superieur De Gestion Industrielle (ISGI) and Ecole Superieure De Commerce De Lille (ESC-Lille- now SKEMA School of Management) under the supervision of Dr. Christophe Bredillet, CCE, IPMA A Level. "Dr. PDG" can be contacted at pauldgphd@gmail.com.