

# **A Skilled Workforce can Deliver Successful Projects and Business Outcomes**

## **Interview with Sierra Hampton-Simmons<sup>1</sup>**

Vice President of Certification  
Project Management Institute (PMI)



### **Interviewed by Yasmina Khelifi**

International Correspondent, PM World Journal  
Paris, France

### **Introduction to the interviewee**

Sierra Hampton-Simmons is a leader in professional credentialing with a career spanning more than two decades. She began her career as an educator, becoming known for finding novel ways to validate skills beyond multiple-choice items. Her passion for commercial training and skill proliferation has followed her from the classroom to the board rooms of the largest professional credential brands worldwide.

Sierra currently serves as the Vice President of Certification at the [Project Management Institute](#) (PMI), where she oversees credentialing programs including, but not limited to, the PMP®, CAPM®, and PMI-ACP®. She can be contacted on LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/sierrah/>

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## Interview

**Q1:** First of all, thank you for accepting an interview request from PMWJ. What are your responsibilities as Vice President of Certification?

**Sierra Hampton-Simmons:** As PMI's Vice President of Certification, I lead the design, development, and management of PMI's certifications, including the [Project Management Professional \(PMP\)<sup>®</sup>](#), [Certified Associate in Project Management \(CAPM\)<sup>®</sup>](#), and [PMI Agile Certified Practitioner \(PMI-ACP\)<sup>®</sup>](#). I am also responsible for assessing product/market fit for our solutions, identifying the needs of the profession, and achieving differentiation within the PMI product portfolio.

Certifications are the cornerstone of PMI products, and we are committed to providing the highest standard of certification value, innovation, exam integrity, and operational excellence for aspiring and established project professionals worldwide.

**Q2:** Let us now deep dive on the new enhanced CAPM. Why is there a new CAPM?

**Hampton-Simmons:** As part of PMI's commitment to providing the highest standard of project management certifications, we periodically review and update our certifications to ensure they meet the needs of the profession, including for project professionals on the job and the organizations that hire them.

For the new CAPM exam, there was an opportunity to update the content to expand users' foundational knowledge of project management and their confidence through a sharper focus on principles, business analysis, and agile. In addition, the exam includes new features like animation-based scenarios, comic strips, and media-rich test questions, and we've integrated a 10-minute break into the exam process.

We've also updated how candidates prepare for the exam. We just launched [The Certified Associate in Project Management \(CAPM\)<sup>®</sup> Exam Prep course](#), the official PMI on-demand course to prepare for the new CAPM certification exam. There is also an updated Exam Content Outline, a Study Reference Guide, and the option to train with an Authorized Training Partner.

**Q3:** For whom is this new CAPM?

**Hampton-Simmons:** The CAPM is the certification many people use to build their project management careers. While most CAPM certification holders are early career project professionals who want to stand out, others work on project or non-project teams and want to become savvier about project management. We also have candidates transitioning into new jobs or industries who want to add project management to their skillset, as project management is consistently noted as an in-demand skill in the job market.

**Q4:** I'm going to ask you a provocative question: how is CAPM valued by employers in the USA and in the world? Do you have data?

**Hampton-Simmons:** Employers seek proof of competence in a candidate's skill set and an authentic passion for the role or industry they're applying for, making certifications a valuable reference point in the recruiting process. [Research](#) shows that 91% of hiring managers view certification as an important criterion for hiring. In addition, *Entrepreneur* named the CAPM as one of the most in-demand professional certifications.

Earning a certification like the CAPM shows that an individual has a demonstrated understanding of the fundamental knowledge, processes, and terminology needed for effective project management performance, even in lieu of professional job experience. It also signals to employers that a candidate is committed to continuous improvement and personal growth, which is necessary for advancement in a role, company, or career.

During the CAPM exam update, more than 2,000 certification holders, hiring managers, and educators provided feedback on expanding the topics covered in the exam to ensure the certification was considered valuable in the job market. CAPM credential holders told us they wanted the certification to be more of a stepping-stone to career advancement. Hiring managers said they wanted greater assurance that certification holders were qualified to lead projects or parts of projects – that they understood the vocabulary of project management and the business requirements that underpin projects.

The new exam and its expanded content better reflect the current needs of the profession and job market.

**Q5:** You passed the new CAPM. Why did you take it? And what are your takeaways?

**Hampton-Simmons:** In my role, I'm usually not eligible to take PMI certifications, given that I have a hand in developing the exams. However, the new CAPM exam was under development while I was on leave, so when the team needed volunteers to troubleshoot the new test's functionality, I immediately raised my hand. It was an opportunity to do more than a quality check; it would give me a bird's eye view into the real-world experience of taking an exam and earning a certification.

In terms of takeaways, a few things stand out.

I experienced significant personal growth preparing for the exam and completing the coursework. I also gained valuable knowledge that I realized is not only applicable to my professional life but my personal life as well.

After contemplating my options for where to sit for the exam, I decided to take the exam via online proctored testing so I could take part in the digital experience like many of our customers. The security measures for online proctored exams are intense, and I appreciate the care taken to ensure exam integrity and security.

I found the embedded comic strips in the exam stimulating. They tended to pop up just when I was tired of answering multiple-choice questions. More importantly, they illustrated real-world scenarios that practitioners might encounter on the job. So, they tested not only my technical knowledge but also my ability to use interpersonal skills, or as PMI calls them, power skills – to empathize with co-workers and to communicate effectively.

**Q6:** PMI is in contact with companies and the academic world. There are other project management certifications. What are the benefits of PMI certifications in the job market?

**Hampton-Simmons:** I think a few factors make PMI certifications attractive in the job market. PMI is the leading authority for project management and provides resources, tools, certifications, and community that is seen as the industry standard. PMI certifications are recognized and respected across geographies and industries, and this is part of why the PMP certification has so much demand among project professionals and organizations.

We are committed to ensuring that our certification holders' credentials remain up-to-date and valuable, and they are required to complete Professional Development Unit (PDU) training to maintain their certifications. This supports career-long learning and ensures certification holders have the knowledge they need to succeed. In addition, organizations know their project professionals have what it takes to lead successful projects today and in the future.

Another thing that positions PMI certifications well in the job market is the pathway our offerings provide to help individuals upskill as they progress through their careers. For example, CAPM certification holders are well-positioned to pursue the PMP certification, as earning the CAPM automatically meets the 35 hours of project management education and training required to apply for the PMP. Beyond the CAPM and PMP, we have specialized credentials like the PMI Construction Professional (PMI-CP)<sup>™</sup>, and we have acquired the PMO Global Alliance which offers the PMO Certified Practitioner (PMO-CP)<sup>®</sup> for those looking to lead PMOs in their organizations.

Finally, [research](#) shows that project professionals with the PMP have higher median salaries than those without the certification – 33% higher on average across 21 countries surveyed, so a PMI certification can also have a true monetary benefit.

**Q7:** Why has PMI created a certification in construction?

**Hampton-Simmons:** [PMI's Talent Gap](#) report found that in the manufacturing and construction industries alone, global job openings in project management-oriented employment will rise to 61 million by 2030. Understanding this demand, and the

challenges and opportunities facing construction professionals and organizations, PMI launched its first industry-specific certification tailored for construction professionals.

The [PMI Construction Professional \(PMI-CP\)<sup>™</sup>](#) certification empowers experienced project managers in the construction industry to understand the principles of effective communication among various stakeholders in large, complex construction projects, design and execute ambitious engineering construction jobs, and minimize risk and maximize profitability while leading their teams to the successful completion of their organizations' projects.

Eligible professionals need three years of on-the-job experience in construction projects, completion of four foundational eLearning courses, and passing the capstone exam.

**Q8: Are there any other certifications updates to come?**

**Hampton-Simmons:** While not a certification, we have some exciting new resources to help project managers understand and adopt AI to enable project success. PMI Infinity is a proprietary AI-powered assistant for project managers. As the project manager's on-the-job copilot, PMI Infinity uses trusted and vetted project management content shaped by our global community of professionals to provide guidance and actionable recommendations that can help significantly improve project outcomes.

We also recently launched PMI Infinity – PMP Exam Simulator, one of the first project management-related apps in the OpenAI GPT Store. This tool provides a mock practice exam with 175 questions, no time limit for answering, and a rationale for every answer.

More information on PMI's AI resources, content, and learning courses is available [here](#).

**Q9: Do you have a last message to PWJ readers, please?**

**Hampton-Simmons:** Whether you're looking to build on your current skill set or pursue an exciting new career, PMI resources and certifications, like the CAPM, help distinguish your skills and empower you to build the project management career of your dreams. Organizations increasingly recognize the value of having a skilled workforce to deliver successful projects and business outcomes and understand how project-based skills can transfer to different roles and industries, making certifications a valuable asset in today's job market.

## About the Interviewer



### **Yasmina Khelifi**

Paris, France



**Yasmina Khelifi**, PMP, PMI- ACP, PMI-PBA is an experienced project manager in the telecom industry. Along with her 20-year career at [Orange S.A.](#) (the large French multinational telecommunications corporation), she sharpened her global leadership skills, delivering projects with major manufacturers and SIM makers. Yasmina strives for building collaborative bridges between people to make international projects successful. She relies on three pillars: project management skills, the languages she speaks, and a passion for sharing knowledge.

She is a PMP certification holder since 2013, a PMI- ACP and PMI-PBA certification holder since 2020. She is an active volunteer member at PMI France and PMI UAE, and a member of PMI Germany Chapter. French-native, she can speak German, English, Spanish, Italian, Japanese and she is learning Arabic. Yasmina loves sharing her knowledge and experiences at work, in her volunteers' activities at PMI, and in [projectmanagement.com](#) as a regular blogger. She is also the host and co-founder of the podcast [Global Leaders Talk with Yasmina Khelifi](#) to help people in becoming better international leaders.

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