Worth your salt as a project manager?

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When hiring a project manager, what assurance can be given that he or she is competent to do the job? Much has been done recently to try and measure competence through the certification or registration of project managers. Terry Deacon PMP takes a look at the global status of certifying project managers.

PMP leads the pack

The first Project Management Professional (PMP) exam organised by the Project Management Institute was held in the USA in 1984. In South Africa the first exam was held in 1987. I was part of the South African pioneer group and my PMP certificate was number 137 in the world. By April 2001 the number of PMPs has soared to over 27 000 globally.

To sit the PMP computer-based exam you require at least three years experience in a project environment and a bachelor degree, or at least five years experience without a degree. The exam consists of 200 multiple-choice questions to be answered in four hours.

The PMP programme is typical of the saying "The only constant is change". As a presenter of PMP preparation courses (visit www.projectpro.co.za/training), I have to keep myself updated on a regular basis because the PMP programme has metamorphosised over the past two years and is still changing. The latest move is to incorporate the findings of the PMP Role Delineation Study published in 2000 (can be purchased through www.pmibookstore.org). It defines the tasks, knowledge and skills that a competent project manager should apply across the project process groups of Initiating, Planning, Executing, Controlling, Closing and Professional Responsibility. The latter group is new and was added to the PMP exam as from March 2002. Visit the PMI website for latest update www.pmi.org

The British Empire expands

The Association of Project Management (APM) based in the United Kingdom, has a Certified Project Manager (CPM) programme which has been running for many years. Relatively few PMs have been certified, however, because it is aimed at a high level of competence. The APM initially scoffed at the PMI's PMP saying it wasn't a true measure of competence. However the PMP's popularity forced them to introduce an Association of Project Management Professional (APMP) which is similar to the PMP. Now I hear the APMP is coming to South Africa under the auspices of the PMI South Africa. Visit their website (www.pmisa.org.za) and ProjectPro's for latest details.

Why does the APM SA not run the APMP you may ask? According to Lesley Rider, President of PMISA, the APM SA is not a true branch of APM UK. She estimates that the APMP will be up and running in South Africa in 2002. Details of the APMP programme can be obtained from www.apm.org.uk

The APMP qualification test is based on the APM's Body of Knowledge (BoK) which is recognised in Europe as the standard for competencies appropriate for project managers. Its structure is, however, quite different to the PMBOK. Through its work with the International Project Management Association (IPMA) the APM is working towards an internationally recognised Body of Knowledge that will be reflected in the

requirements for APMP. IPMA has proposed a Four-level Certification model starting at Project Management Fachman (a German certification) through to Certified Projects Director at the top of the pile (see www.ipma.ch for details).

There are two parts to the paper-based examination. The first paper, which lasts one hour, consists of approximately 100 questions, each with a multiple choice of answers. It requires the candidate to make over 300 decisions and is aimed at assessing an individual's depth of understanding of management subjects, as well as their approach to the many personal skills necessary for successful project management. The second paper, which takes three hours, consists of particular questions requiring written answers designed to demonstrate the candidate's competence with regard to important aspects of project management. The candidate must answer five questions from a choice of eight.

Another British initiative spearheaded by Nic Bennet in Durban, is the facility to become qualified in terms of the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) for Project Management at levels 4 and 5 or in Project Controls at level 3 and 4.

Get your Act together

In December 2000 the Project and Construction Management Professions Act was gazetted. It now requires construction project managers to become registered with the South African Council for the Project and Construction Management Professions (SACPCMP). The Council has powers to accredit educational institutions which offer project and construction management educational programmes. There will probably be some link with the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) with regard to the competency standards.

There are two categories for registration viz Professional and Candidate for each of the Construction Manager or Construction Project Manager registrations. Professionals have to demonstrate their competence as well as pass an examination, while Candidates have to pass an examination and present evidence of prior learning. Candidates may only perform work under the supervision of a Professional. Work may only be performed by registered persons and the definition of the various categories of work still has to be done. This could be quite a sensitive subject and ProjectPro will keep you informed. The Act may be accessed at website www.gov.za/acts/index.html

Presently the focus is on establishing the SACPCMP. The SACPCMP will report to the Council for the Built Environment, which had its own Act gazetted in December 2000.

The NQF initiative to establish unit standards and qualifications for project management in South Africa is also moving ahead. See separate article, *Getting to grips with project management unit standards*. Back to top

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