

Highly Sought-After PM Skills; Not Just for Project Managers

A recent Gartner survey shows project management skills at the top of the list of skills most wanted by CIOs today.* Recent CompTIA research supports this, finding that the demand for project management knowledge extends beyond IT workers. A poll of more than 400 employers across various industries revealed 59 percent require their staff to have a project management certification or preferentially hire candidates with a project management certification.

Thomas Vetterani, vice president of Program Management and Service Quality at CompuCom Systems, Inc. commented on the rise of project management as a highly sought-after skill set:

“It’s becoming more apparent to organizations today that internally and externally directed projects can be risk-oriented if not directed by the right personnel with the right skills and certifications. This has been a recognized concern for the past six or seven years, and it is incumbent upon organizations to engage resources with the appropriate certification levels to ensure the success of their projects. Otherwise they’re putting their budgets and, more importantly, their business at risk,” Vetterani said.

Many of the surveyed employers cited deficiencies in their staff’s project management skills such as not being able to avoid “scope creep” and seeing where their tasks “fit in” with the overall goals of the project. The additional project management skills would help with “close-outs,” keeping to a schedule, getting everyone “all on the same page,” and giving them the ability to see the big picture so that all members of the project team can “identify and explain the purpose and goals of the project, the steps required and milestones,” as well as create a “project progress review and communication structure.” An overwhelming 98 percent of respondents acknowledge their staff could use additional project management training regardless of whether they felt their staff had adequate project management skills already.

“Today, project management skills are an increasingly essential tool in the quiver of department and line managers across the enterprise, as all groups create and manage projects regardless of their foundation,” Vetterani said. “Having well trained and certified project managers is becoming the ‘norm’ in business, and people that possess these skills are highly sought out by enterprise leaders for their ability to get the job done right the first time.”

Employers whose responses were favorable to hiring project management-certified individuals cited reasons such as “ensures at least a fundamental basic knowledge” related to project management; certified employees become “fully functional” sooner; “helpful in making staff more marketable to clients”; candidates training is similar to other team members, “shortening the learning curve”; certification “shows a willingness to learn and demonstrate skills;” and lowers or eliminates training costs.

“Project management training and certification certainly provides individuals with the fundamental skills and discipline they need to be successful, as well as a common language to effectively communicate with other team members or stakeholders either within or outside the organization,” Vetterani said. “In addition, it serves as an external endorsement or validation of the skills, discipline and experience of the individual.”

Another expert, Lisa-Ann Barnes, president of Iree Tec, a project management consultancy company, emphasizes the important role certification plays in improving communication in an organization.

"When everyone speaks the same language around project management, you don't have to spend time and energy explaining how projects should be managed and what information is considered important," Barnes said. "Instead, you can focus on what's important, which is delivering the business value from the project."

Project Management Certifications

When implementing a project management certification and training program, there are things a company must consider. These considerations include the average level of project complexity within a company, the certification prerequisites, and the costs associated with certification such as implementation and costs of keeping a certification up to date. Knowing these answers will help determine which certification is best for each company.

Based on industry averages, projects can be categorized by amount of time and resources spent. On average, a low-intensity project is characterized by a team of one to two people and a schedule lasting anywhere from one to five months. Projects that are considered high intensity, involve an average of 20 or more team members with a minimum duration of nine months. They can also be higher risk and typically have very large budgets. Employees who spend most of their time on low intensity projects, or only do projects on an ad hoc basis may choose not to pursue certification, but would still benefit from basic project management training and certification. A higher-level certification such as PMP might be more appropriate for employees who spend most of their time on high intensity projects.

Most projects, however, can be defined as medium intensity; on average, they would consist of three to nine team members with durations of five to nine months. Entry-level project managers or anyone impacting a low-to-medium intensity project would benefit from having a project management certification. To validate foundational project management knowledge in a quick and cost effective way, an entry-level certification such as CompTIA Project+ is the solution.

CompTIA Project+ is a globally recognized credential that benefits anyone who contributes to any aspect of a project such as initiation, planning, execution, acceptance, support or closure. CompTIA Project+ provides skills that allow employees to contribute more effectively to the overall goals of their organizations. The accessibility of this

certification makes it widely appealing. There are no prerequisites or continuing education requirements, making it an immediate and cost-effective solution.

"CompTIA Project+ is appropriate for all the various types of project managers within an organization -- those who manage projects as part of their job or those who manage projects full time," Barnes said. "Project management skills are so critical to organizations today and CompTIA Project + ensures an individual has the core skills they need everyday -- communication, planning, vendor management, and team-building."

As companies realize the importance of employing qualified professionals to handle their projects, the demand for employees with project management skills across a variety of positions and industries will continue to rise. Project management training and certification significantly impact the way companies approach projects, and provide real benefits to individuals and employers. Entry-level certifications such as CompTIA Project+ allow companies to realize these benefits in an immediate and cost-effective way.

* Gartner EXP's 2006 IT Market Compensation Study

