

Is the PgMP® Credential Right For Me?

Gareth Byatt, Gary Hamilton, & Jeff Hodgkinson with Brian Grafsgaard

Gareth, Gary, Jeff, and Brian are PgMP (Program Management Professional)® credentialed through the Project Management Institute (PMI)®. (In fact, that's how we met, became good friends and collaborators on articles.) We know from personal experience what it takes to obtain. Additionally, in early 2010, Jeff and Brian did a study and presentation on the overall results and benefits of having the PgMP credential, based on a survey of 225 PgMPs, over half of the PgMPs credentialed at the time. Their benefits study was one of the focus topics at the 2010 PMI North America Congress in Washington, DC.

As we weigh the value of the credential, let's first consider the PgMP credential itself. Per PMI, the PgMP credential is intended to "recognize advanced experience, skill and performance in the oversight of multiple related projects and their resources, aligned with an organizational objective." We won't be going into the formal details and process steps to obtain the credential; that information is readily available through the PMI. However, the PgMP credential process can be broken down to three main areas or steps:

1. Pre-PgMP (includes the application and the preparation phase)
2. Intermediate phase (Audit and Exam)
3. MRA (Multi-rater assessment)

It is important to keep in mind that you must have four years of Program Management experience (not just managing related projects; the projects have to be organized as a program) and four years of Project Management experience. Then you must take a comprehensive exam and have at least 12 professional references attest that you are a competent program management practitioner in order to obtain the PgMP credential. Assuming that you have the relevant experience, one still must ask "Is the PgMP Credential Right for Me?"

Before deciding if the credential is right for you, let's first take a look at an average profile of those who have obtained the credential. If you scan through the email signatures of PgMPs, it is clear that most PgMPs are in senior positions, boasting titles such as 'Senior - -', 'Director of - -', and 'VP of --' with several who are successfully managing their own companies and/or consulting firms. Humbly, it's an impressive group with the typical PgMP having the following attributes:

- an average of fifteen (15) years of project management experience
- an average of nine (9) years of program management experience
- most likely has a Bachelor's degree and may have a Master's
- salary ranges from \$131,000 - \$140,000 USD

Given the above statistics, you will probably agree that such people are mature individuals who had achieved some level of 'success' as a program/project manager even before the PgMP credential was available. This was a necessary prerequisite to applying for the credential. Those that have obtained the PgMP also invested, on average:

- \$2500 USD for the application (the exam) and study materials
- ~140 hours of personal study and/or classes
- ~5 months (or longer) to complete the process

At the time of this writing, there are just over 500 PgMPs globally - and that's after the credential has been available to obtain for 3 years. At current rates, approximately a dozen people become new PgMPs per month versus 3,500 – 5,000 new PMPs per month. In studies and analysis of program and project management credentials and certifications, the PgMP is in the upper 25% quartile of difficulty to obtain. Again, the above information provides a baseline regarding expectations and history of the credential, with some basic statistics as to the credential and who obtains it. Now that you have that information, we'll focus on the key question: Is the PgMP right for you?

Referring to the survey and other comments from the PgMP community, no one to whom we have spoken has regretted obtaining the PgMP credential. Some have benefited materially in new jobs, promotions, or salary increases and, given the state of the global economy, felt they kept their jobs as a result of achieving the PgMP. In their responses, nearly everyone stated that it has helped their professional networking activities. Consequently, the realistic benefits may be hard to gauge, but what has been indicated is that all are glad to have obtained it and feel more confident, both personally and professionally, for having done so. Further, most felt that they were in a better position for future opportunities, should they decide to make a career move.

Are you still wondering, "Is the PgMP credential right for me"? The answer to this question also depends on your career objectives to ensure that the investment made in time, capital and effort will reap the anticipated benefits. If you expect to be working as a program management practitioner for 5 or more years, then it is likely to be a good investment. If you plan to consult, author, or teach at some future date, it will definitely help towards such a second career. Regardless of the commercial/career reasons, you may also want to use the personal challenge to test yourself.

In addition, you may question the demand or marketability of the PgMP. The PgMP credential is relatively new (it was released in October 2007) and just as the PMP or any credential or certification required, its job market value depends on the potential employer's job description. We have noticed, particularly in the U.S.A., (check www.indeed.com) that the employment postings that stated, 'PMP highly desired or required' for project manager positions are now include, 'PgMP highly desired or required' for their program management positions. Of these, a large number of companies working with the U.S. Government are requiring the PgMP due to the requirement for positions on national program progress board using 'stoplight' indicators to measure progress.

Are there circumstance under which the PgMP is 'not right' for someone? Yes. If you don't plan to become a program manager or to continue as a PM practitioner, it is unlikely to be worth the investment. If you do not have the relevant work experience or references for the MRA, then don't apply. As the application is timed, if you are not in the position to make a firm commitment in terms of time and money, it's best to postpone starting until you can. However, from our discussions and phone consultations with many people,

there have only been a few who found that the timing or circumstance was just not right. Unfortunately, we know several people who have started and failed to successfully complete the PgMP process. Of those with whom we spoke, an average of 10% of unsuccessful candidates were unsuccessful due to a lack of experience, 70% failed the exam (some after 3 attempts), and 20%, believe it or not, did not score appropriately on the MRA.

There are two old sayings, "Knowledge is Power", and "Knowledge is Freedom." In these competitive times any advantage helps, even if it is intrinsic in 'creating confidence' within the person. For us personally, and others who have provided feedback, the PgMP will provide benefits. The bottom line? If you meet the requirements, can dedicate the time and accommodate the expense, then 'Go for it!' If we can help with advice, our contact information is below and we welcome you to connect with us on [LinkedIn](#).