How the new Competence Framework from The Association for Project Management (APM) can deliver value to your organisation

5th February 2018
Rev 1.0

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1 Introduction

The APM’s new Competence Framework delivers a valuable tool for organisations that want to understand and analyse levels of project management competence across their organisation. The new Framework delivers a wide range of benefits from measuring employee competence against the national standard for project management to define the current levels of knowledge and application, against 14 new Role Profiles.

The new Competence Framework is a significant improvement from the first version. The reduction in the number of Competencies, from 47 to 27, provides a more manageable benchmark for best practice. Significantly, the introduction of Role Profiles with Rating Scales allows individuals to measure their progress in the current and aspirational roles using the same self-assessment form. The data collected from this self-assessment and validation process can be used for many purposes including:

- Individual Reports for each individual showing where they are currently (as a benchmark) against The Association for Project Management (APM)'s Competence Framework which consists of 27 Competencies with a knowledge and application grade for each

- A clear gap analysis for each individual against their current role and any aspirational role

- A series of recommendations for each individual detailing developmental needs (knowledge and/or application). This may be targeted by specific training interventions (including ‘byte size’ eLearning) or work-based developmental needs. This can be far more cost-effective than the traditional ‘sheep dip’ approach to learning programs.

- An assessment of each individual’s readiness for progression & appropriate development needs.

- An overall report showing the strengths and weaknesses of the group against the Framework

- Individual team reports showing strengths & weaknesses of teams against the Framework

The Association for Project Management (APM) Competence Framework tool provides the assessment mechanism and produces the data required for all of the above purposes. This tool provides a robust, holistic and clear set of standards and comprehensive assessment method for measuring personnel against the APM’s 27 individual competencies needed for effective project management and 14 defined role profiles. Each competence is measured against two domains – Knowledge of and Application of the competences. Each domain is measured using 1 – 5 rating, when 1 means aware of the competence and 5 means an Expert in the competence. The selection of the rating is based on the situation the candidate uses to assess their rating and whether it is non-complex, limited complexity or complex. APM identified 14 role profiles and the associated level of knowledge and application for each competence. The 14 role profiles are:

- 4 Project Managers roles (Entry, Intermediate, Advanced and Master)
- 3 Programme Managers roles (Intermediate Advanced and Master)
- 3 Portfolio Managers roles (Intermediate Advanced and Master)
- 4 Project Management Office roles (Administrator, Analyst, Officers and Specialist, and Manager)
Assessment against the full set of competences enables an identification of strength and of other areas potentially requiring further development, as well as allowing individuals to align their current scoring with a range of qualifications and certifications.

Significant benefits can be derived from the use of an approved competence framework, both for individuals and the organisation employing them. Specifically, from the perspective of the individual, the framework ensures a common understanding of the competences required of them; it enables an assessment against a framework aligned with an agreed international standard; helps to identify areas for development and judge readiness for attainment of professional qualifications. From the employer’s perspective, the framework enables a judgment to be made regarding the project management competence of employees at all levels, assessed against an internationally agreed framework; it also enables identification of strengths and weaknesses and corporate training and development needs.

20|20 has been engaged in Competency Framework Assessment and Reporting projects by many of its Clients in the Oil & Gas, Nuclear, Engineering & Construction, Utilities, Transport & Logistics and other sectors since the company was formed in 2003. Significant similar projects in the last few years have included Clients such as Centrica, Wood Group, Petrofac and Merlin Entertainment.

2 The Process

The competence assessment process is structured as follows:

- The candidate receives the assessment pack and assesses themselves using clear instructions (if desired, group briefings can be arranged, although these are not usually necessary)
- The assessment and a CV is then sent to the assessor who evaluates the candidate assessment vs a selected role profile
- The candidate’s own competence assessment is then compared by the assessor against the competence levels of the relevant APM’s role profile.
- Following the assessment, the candidate is interviewed to confirm their understanding of what the competence meant as well as understanding of definition of complexity
- During the interview, the supporting evidence is discussed and any changes to the assessment is noted by the candidate
- After the interview, the assessor updates their assessment and resubmits

Following the interview (which can be in person or by telephone and usually lasts between 30-60 minutes), the pre-and post-interview competence levels are consolidated into one form. The post interview competence levels are then compared against the selected role profile competence knowledge and application values, identifying any gaps. This leads to two evaluations:

1. Using the candidate’s revised assessment (after interview assessment), identify the gaps against the current role profile. This leads to what competences the candidate needs support to be close to the selected role profile
2. Selecting the next higher role profile, what competences need to be addressed.
With the results of the comparisons, then a short term (current role profile) and a long term (aspirational role profile) candidate’s development plan can be developed.

In the case where the candidate’s competence level meets the role profile competence requirements, then there is no short-term development needed. The focus is then on the long-term development plan and how to get the candidate to the higher role profile.

The gap in competences is presented based on the following:

Using the candidate’s revised assessment of the competence levels for Knowledge and Application (1 – 5), and comparing them against APM’s defined competence levels for the role, the gap is assessed in two levels:

- Top up Required – Application/Knowledge – This means there is a small gap between APM’s profile and the candidate’s assessment
- Gap identified – Application/Knowledge – This means there is a bigger gap between APM’s profile and the candidate’s assessment

3 Individual Evaluations

The purpose of the validation interviews was to ascertain a suitable level of confidence in the delegate scoring as well as confirming an understanding of what each competence means. The validation interviews focus the discussion around project management best practice and asking for examples to demonstrate understanding in both knowledge and application. This can result in scores increasing and/or decreasing across the individual scoring. It should also be noted that ratings for some individuals reflects evidence of work performed in previous positions or other organisations.

There is occasionally an expectation that the person’s scores will have a consistent rating across all topic areas, however variances do occur i.e. a person assessed at one role profile for many or most topics may have a higher knowledge or application than the profile they are matching. This greater depth of knowledge and application usually reflects an area of specialism they perform, or have performed, on behalf of the project.

Conversely an interviewee assessed mostly against a Project Manager – Master Profile, may be assessed at a lower role profile where they have knowledge of an area but only some application, often because the topic area is dealt with by a specialist.

The APM Competence Framework seeks to assess the levels of knowledge and application of individuals specifically regarding project management, to identify their own learning and development needs and reveal the team needs as a whole.
4 Group or Team Evaluations

Based on all the data collected it is straightforward to produce a report at team or overall group level showing where the team/group sits against the national standard. An example radar diagram is shown below:

Individual graphical reports are also provided for each Competency, showing Knowledge and Application Levels by person, versus the team average.

This data provides a benchmark for individuals and for organisational project management as a whole, against which targeted development plans can be created, saving significant costs against ‘sheep dip’ programs and miss-targeted training interventions.

Typically, the reports will detail:

- Specific Training Needs, or suitably to progress to credentials such as APMs Chartered Project Professional (ChPP)
- Any issues with internal processes and procedures
- A benchmark that the individual can use for personal development
• Specific common areas of weakness across the team or the organisation as a whole

5 Other Benefits

Organisations may wish to undertake an internal mapping exercise of current roles descriptions against the APM role profiles. If this is required is can be done in parallel with the competency assessment exercise as the data collected is the same. We would be happy to assist with this process if required.

The whole process of successfully delivering projects to the stated objectives and success criteria is always dependent on the knowledge and application of the team(s), but also relies on the organisation’s project governance model and standards.

There may also be some merit in assessing the radar diagram provided to see if there are areas of improvement which could be identified within an organisation’s processes and procedures too, following this competency assessment exercise.

6 Next Steps

To find out more about how the new Competence Framework can help your organisation please get in touch. We can provide an example of a Full Report and the extensive information it provides, and meet to discuss specific ways this new tool can be implemented within your own organisation, including a wide range of different types of individual, team and full organisational reports that can be generated.